Almeida, Paul D. 2015. "Democratization and the Revitalization of Popular Movements in Central America." Pp. 166-185 in B. Klandermans and C. van Stralen, eds., *Social Movements in Times of Democratic Transition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

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Democratization and the Revitalization of Popular Movements in Central America

PAUL ALMEIDA

Democratization largely occurred in Central America at the end of the twentieth century. The region also experienced two waves of antineoliberal protest during this democratic transition. Beginning in the late 1990s, the region's fifty million inhabitants experienced an upsurge in popular movement activity against economic policies directly related to economic globalization. Examples of this wave of contention include the campaigns against new sales taxes and free trade in Guatemala; mobilizations against privatization and free trade in Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador; struggles against the pension system and labor reforms in Panama; and major protests against consumer price hikes in Nicaragua. More than any other social grievance or issue, economic liberalization measures motivated the largest mass mobilizations in the region over the past two decades (Almeida 2014). These struggles are characterized by a more open political context in which traditional social sectors enter coalitions with emerging and novel social organizations with new collective identities (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994).[1] This chapter examines the conditions associated with this more recent rise in antiglobalization protest in the region and its timing and compares these trends to first-wave antineoliberal protest in the 1980s and early 1990s. Particular attention is given to the processes of democratization and organizational formation and the threats associated with economic globalization that eventuate in a revitalized social movement sector during periods of political transition.

Central American Democratization

Samuel Huntington (1991) marks the beginning of global democratization as the mid-1970s as does John Markoff (1996). With the notable exception of Costa

Rica, democracy arrived relatively late to Central America. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua did not begin to democratize until the 1980s. Panama underwent a democratic transition in the 1990s, and civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua did not end until the early to mid-1990s (Sojo 1999). Hence, until the 1990s, in all countries on the isthmus except Costa Rica, social struggles either focused directly on the authoritarian nature of the state or were hindered in civil society organizing.

In El Salvador, until 1991 left-of-center political parties participated in elections on a very limited basis (Artiga-González 2004). Full legalization of a broader array of political parties was not achieved until the 1994 elections (Wood 2005). In this period of democratic transition and post-civil-war reconstruction, many of the social movement campaigns in El Salvador concentrated on issues left over from the civil war, such as land titles, human rights, and compensation for former soldiers and paramilitary participants (Almeida 2008b). A parallel process took place in Guatemala (Brett 2008), where post-civil-war presidential and parliamentary elections did not take place until late 1999. Honduras began a slow process of democratization in the mid-1980s. Nicaragua maintained a socialist government in the 1980s but imposed certain democratic curtailments (e.g., curfews in conflict zones) while fighting a counterinsurgent war sponsored by the Reagan administration in the United States. Nicaragua did not reach a definitive peace and multiparty elections until 1990. Panama held its first postauthoritarian presidential elections in 1994.

Democratization is characterized by consecutive multiparty elections in which the state allows a wide spectrum of political forces to participate and compete (Diamond 1999). A consolidated democracy also tolerates the formation and expansion of associations in civil society (Foweraker and Landman 1997). Some perspectives expect democratization to increase social movement mobilization since there are fewer constraints and obstacles to mobilize (Tilly 2004). Such formulations suggest that state repression lessens in that the government is more accountable for overly coercive behavior and officeholders can be replaced in elections. Civil society actors also have greater success expectations (Klandermans 1997) in that state institutions are *relatively* more open and willing to at least listen to popular grievances. Such signaling by the state provides incentives to campaign organizers to invest precious resources and time in nonviolent collective action. The emergence and legalization of oppositional political parties during a democratic transition also increases the ability of activists to organize on a national level and support new constituencies, which may include social movements.

Other perspectives predict a reduction in social movement mobilization in the streets because more institutionalized actors, such as political parties and state agencies, take over in democratic contexts (Hipsher 1998), reducing the need for mass collective action that deploys nonroutine strategies. There does seem to be some evidence for this demobilization trend in the early days of Latin American democratization and in Central America in particular. Indeed, James Dunkerley's (1994) seminal synthesis of the entire region characterizes

the political climate of the early 1990s as a "pacification" of mass opposition by domestic and international elites. However, once a democratic transition combines with the economic threats of globalization, a new upsurge in collective action becomes a heightened possibility (Almeida 2010a). I explore this issue in more detail below. Especially noteworthy is the growth and revitalization of civic organizations with the advent of democratization.

Organizational Formation and Expansion

Democratization allows a greater variety of organizations to form for several reasons. The state permits the existence of more organizations in civil society under democratization, often by providing legal recognition or nonprofit status (in the case of nongovernmental organizations). Older civic organizations left over from the authoritarian period find they have more freedom to organize. These include key social sectors such as labor unions, the educational sector (including teachers, students, and employees in high schools and universities), and rural groups such as agricultural cooperatives. At the same time, these traditional sectors that expanded during state-led development need to adapt their strategies of collective action and organizing in the new context of democratization (Almeida and Johnston 2006). Such recalibrations probably cause a lag effect in the pace of civic organizations employing novel strategies while they learn the new political environment.

New social actors emerged as global democracy advanced, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are diverse in their memberships, identities, and missions. My emphasis here is on NGOs that at times join with the social movement sector, although their daily concerns may not involve manifest social movement struggles. NGOs advocate for women, the environment, community health, human rights, ethnic minority rights, community development, and many other interests. NGOs have facilitated many campaigns against globalization in Central America, and the NGO sector in the region experienced massive growth into the 1990s (Bradshaw and Schafer 2000).

New social movements also mushroomed in recent decades. These newer movements in Central America include environmental struggles, battles for the recognition of gay rights, and a vibrant and autonomous women's movement. Though at times these newer social movements may receive financial and technical support from NGOs, they are distinguishable from nonprofit organizations by their goals and forms of mobilization. New social movement perspectives emphasize the uniqueness of collective struggles, as well as identity and cultural issues, and go beyond the state-power and economic exclusion themes of classic social movements (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). An interesting process in Central America involves the large coalitions that have formed in antineoliberal policy campaigns that include new social movements.

Political parties have also served as mobilizing organizations in the movements against globalization throughout Latin America (Van Cott 2005). In

nondemocratic contexts, oppositional political parties are often underground (Schock 2005). Once liberalization begins, especially in a democratic transition, oppositional political parties may play crucial roles in the social movement sector (Keck 1992). In the era of globalization, the traditional structures used to coordinate social movements, such as labor unions and agricultural cooperatives and associations, have greatly weakened. Political parties organized on a national scale or across several regions provide the only organizational structures available in many communities (Almeida 2010b). Opposition parties need to build their electoral base in new democracies as well. Taking up social movement demands against unpopular policies offers one major avenue for an oppositional political party to build up its base of support (Stearns and Almeida 2004). This worked especially well in Ecuador and Bolivia in the late 1990s and early 2000s when unpopular neoliberal policies such as privatization and subsidy cuts were taken up by leftist and indigenous political parties to expand their base (Assies and Salman 2003; Yashar 2005).

In summary, new alliances emerged between traditional social movements, NGOs, new social movements, and political parties in the 1990s. These groupings provide the baseline organizational infrastructure in Central America in the period of globalization. Nonetheless, there is substantial variation between countries in the importance of each of these mobilizing collectivities. The variations affect the level of mass mobilization against the tide of the economic threats of neoliberalism.

Economic Threats of Globalization

One school of globalization theory finds heightened levels of social anomie and individualism with the spread of a consumer society model in Latin America (see Arce and Bellinger 2007 for a critique of this literature). As elsewhere in the more developed part of the global periphery, Central America has experienced a rapid spread of mall culture and the idolization of mass consumption lifestyles in major urban centers as a by-product of cultural globalization (Robinson 2008). Such perspectives predict that social solidarity and collective action campaigns will be more difficult to mount in an expanding culture of consumerist individualism (Crook el al. 1992). However, political-cultural frameworks of this particular variety fail to explain the upswing in mass mobilization in the region with the *deepening* of globalization over the past fifteen years.

Economic globalization entered Central America via the debt crisis of the early 1980s. Central American states made agreements with international financial institutions that required restructuring their national economies into a more outward orientation (see Figure 7.1). Each structural adjustment agreement between a Central American government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank represents a shift in economic policy away from state-led development toward more free market reforms (Walton and Ragin 1990). The first-generation structural adjustment reforms in the 1980s included

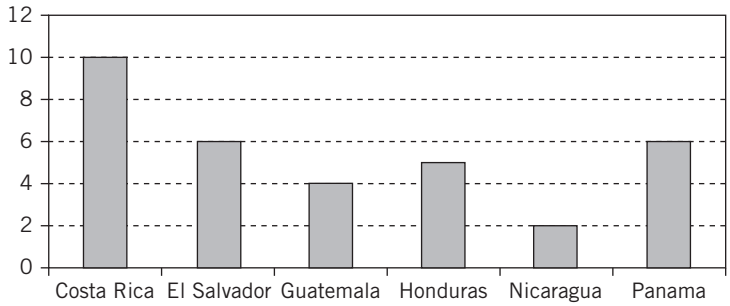

Figure 7.1 Number of International Monetary Fund structural adjustment agreements in Central America, 1981–1994. *(Source: Compiled from Green 2003)*

new sales taxes, currency devaluations, a reduction on import tariffs, wage freezes, and subsidy cuts on basic mass consumption items (cooking oil, electricity, transportation) and agricultural inputs (Green 2003).

In the mid-1980s, these first-phase economic changes at times resulted in protests, riots, and mass marches. However, the campaigns were usually not sustained for more than a month—the lack of democracy in most of the region and other issues predominated. These first-wave protests were often led by relatively narrow coalitions of students and urban workers. The debt crisis lingered into the 1990s. The external debt of each Central American country increased dramatically between 1980 and the early 1990s. Between 1980 and 1995, Costa Rica's external debt grew from $2.7 billion to $3.8 billion. In this same period, the external debt of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama more than doubled (Almeida 2007: 126). The international financial institutions, along with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), formulated a new round of structural adjustment programs that relied heavily on the privatization of public infrastructure, utilities, and services (Chong and López de Silanes 2005). By the mid-1990s, all Central American republics were pressured to reform their national pension programs and privatize key components of their infrastructure, including power distribution, telecommunications, national postal service, water administration, social security and health care systems, and ports (Almeida 2014).

In the 1990s, the overwhelming majority of political elites governing in the region ideologically subscribed to market liberalization (Robinson 2003) and obliged the international financial institutions by attempting to push the reforms rapidly through their respective national legislatures (Haglund 2010). These second-generation reforms emerged in a context of greater democracy and much more societal experience with neoliberal measures, resulting in the largest sustained outbursts of mass mobilization in decades by the late 1990s and early 2000s. Figure 7.2 compares two phases of structural adjustment (1980–1995) and (1996–2004) with respect to major mass mobilizations countering economic reforms in Central American countries.

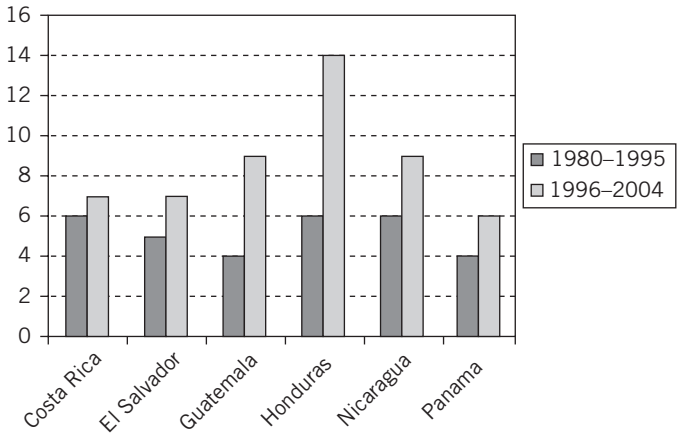

Figure 7.2 Number of Antiglobalization protests of ten thousand or more people in Central America. *(Source: Almeida 2007; Walton 1987; data from various sources in LexisNexis Academic Universe, "World News" section, 1980–2004)*

First-Wave Campaigns against Economic Liberalization, 1980–1995

In the 1980s, a wide variety of political environments existed in Central America. The Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments engaged in counterinsurgency operations, and the Nicaraguan government attempted to consolidate its popular revolution while a counterrevolutionary army infiltrated its borders (Horton 1998). General Manuel Noriega governed Panama as a quasi-corporatist military regime, and Honduras was slowly transitioning to civilian rule after decades of military control. In this same period, Costa Rica expanded the scope of its long-enduring democracy by legalizing leftist political parties in the mid-1970s (Salom 1987). Hence, when Central American governments enacted the first stabilization policies in the early to mid-1980s, the popular reactions were relatively weak. Only in democratic Costa Rica were there sustained campaigns to resist agricultural adjustments (Edelman 1999) and an IMF program to raise electricity rates (Alvarenga 2005). In El Salvador, activists organized mass marches against a currency devaluation in 1986, and in Guatemala and Panama, short-term movements arose against price increases (Walton 1987) and labor flexibility laws (Almeida 2014). However, it was not until the late 1990s that massive sustained antiglobalization campaigns emerged in the region more frequently, demonstrating a revitalization of the region's social movement sector.

In the late 1990s, several campaigns surfaced against globalization. Many of these campaigns were unsuccessful in stopping the impending neoliberal measures, but they often led to stronger mobilizations in future rounds of collective action against similar neoliberal policies in the early 2000s (Almeida

2008a) that resulted in reactivation of social movements across the isthmus. Democratization, the expansion of civic organizations, and economic threats were key ingredients in each of the campaigns. Below, I sketch major first-wave antiglobalization campaigns (1980–1995) in each Central American country.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica was the first country to enter a serious debt crisis in the early 1980s and the first to manifest signs of popular movement activity related to globalization processes (Rovira Mas 1987). The early resistance had two distinct centers of struggle: the small-farmer sector and the urban sector. The peasant struggle waged pitched battles over declining agricultural credit, and the urban struggle focused on consumer prices that rose after a loss of state subsidies.

The peasant struggle began in the early 1980s with the formation of two new agricultural associations: Unión Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores Agropecuarios (UPANACIONAL; National Union of Small and Medium Agricultural Producers) and Unión de Pequeños Agricultores de la Región Atlántica (UPAGRA; Atlantic Region Union of Small Farmers). Thousands of small farmers in the central valley of Costa Rica formed UPANACIONAL in 1981 (Edelman 1999). In December 1981, UPANACIONAL coordinated roadblocks with five thousand small farmers on eight highways to demand price controls on agricultural inputs (Edelman 1999: 94). UPANACIONAL and UPAGRA engaged in several skirmishes throughout the 1980s for access to low-priced agricultural inputs and the avoidance of cheap agricultural imports. In addition, after the country signed its first full-fledged structural adjustment program in 1985, peasant associations held mass marches in the capital in 1986 and 1987 against further removal of subsidies in the agricultural sector. In June 1988, several agricultural associations simultaneously blocked roads to protest the government's neoliberal agricultural policies when low-interest credit dried up for future planting seasons (Edelman 1999: 94).

In the urban sector, price-increase protests against electricity peaked in 1983. They were led by a coalition of neighborhood associations, the Communist Party (Vanguardia Popular), and labor unions (Alvarenga 2005). The next major struggles over globalization did not take place until 1995, against pension system reform affecting public sector educators.[2] The IMF and World Bank pressured the Costa Rican state to raise the retirement age of educators to reduce its domestic fiscal deficit. Teachers formed a coalition with public sector workers to attempt to defeat the new pension law and other planned privatizations and layoffs in the public sector (Almeida 2008a). The movement peaked in July and August 1995, convoking two massive street marches with tens of thousands of participants, but in the end failed to reverse the reforms (Almeida and Walker 2007).

El Salvador

El Salvador's early resistance to economic liberalization occurred in 1985 when mass demonstrations broke out between May and July against continuing government austerity. In February 1986 more mass demonstrations took place, sponsored by the newly formed Unidad Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (UNTS; National Unity of Salvadoran Workers), against President José Napoleón Duarte's *paquete* (austerity package) that devalued the Salvadoran national currency (the colón). These mass actions were the largest since the massive state repression of the early 1980s (Almeida 2008b). In 1995, President Calderon Sol of the neoliberal ARENA party initiated a state modernization program that included privatization of telecommunications, pensions, and electricity and mass layoffs in the public sector. These economic measures were met with popular resistance and strikes in each of the affected sectors, but the campaigns failed to create a unified opposition. As a result of the lack of unity and labor union support from the public, the government pushed through all its privatization programs.

Guatemala and Honduras

Guatemala was also rocked by first-generation economic liberalization reforms in September 1985. Rioting and looting took place in the capital while teachers and public sector employees engaged in strikes and job actions against an IMF austerity program that encouraged budget cuts and new taxes. In these events, up to ten people were killed and one thousand arrested. In the end the government decided to roll back bus fare increases, control prices of basic foods, and give government sector workers a slight raise (Walton 1987).

In Honduras major popular protest occurred in 1990 under newly elected President Callejas against his Law of Economic Reorganization—referred to on the streets as the *paquetazo* (massive austerity package or measure). The organizational basis of the mobilizations occurred in 1989 with the formation of the Platform of Struggle to Democratize Honduras (Plataforma de Lucha para la Democratización de Honduras)—the broadest coalition of oppositional groups to form in Honduras in decades (Posas 2003). Several mass demonstrations and strikes took place against the economic reforms in 1990 and 1991, including strikes by banana plantation workers, health sector workers, and other public sector labor unions such as postal workers, energy sector workers, and public works employees (Sosa 2010). The 1990 and 1991 mobilizations against free market reforms represented some of the first large-scale protests against privatization in the region, including the selling off of state lands and the reversal of agrarian reform. By 1993, Eugenio Sosa (2010) contends, President Callejas successfully demobilized the popular movement via a mix of state modernization, co-optation, and repression.

Nicaragua

During most of the 1980s, the Sandinista ruling party maintained close connections to state unions and civil society associations. In the late 1980s, the Sandinista government implemented several austerity measures because of growing indebtedness and a trade embargo instituted by the Reagan-Bush administrations. The first signs of mass resistance to austerity measures erupted immediately after the Sandinista party relinquished executive power in the presidential elections of February 1990. A new labor organization was created to resist the austerity measures implemented by the recently elected Chamorro administration—the Frente Nacional de Trabajadores (FNT; National Workers' Front). The FNT was largely composed of state sector unions and small farmers affiliated with the Sandinista party.

Between 1990 and 1992, the FNT launched several campaigns to resist the austerity measures of Chamorro, who was facing a $10 billion foreign debt, the largest in Central America. Most of the campaigns focused on preventing mass layoffs in the government sphere, the closing of state institutions, and salary freezes. Many of the campaigns reached several cities and were marred by violence from both police and, less frequently, the protesters. The other major campaign of the early to mid-1990s occurred in the university community over cuts to the postsecondary-education budget (Almeida and Walker 2007). These protests erupted between 1992 and 1996 and involved thousands of university students and employees (Palazio Galo, n.d.). In addition, two major teacher strikes led by the Asociación Nacional de Educadores de Nicaragua (ANDEN; National Association of Nicaraguan Educators) took place in 1994 and 1995 over government austerity programs that froze public educator wages.

Panama

Panama also experienced austerity protests in 1983 and 1985. In these years the IMF and World Bank demanded that the Panamanian government freeze wages in the public sector and cut subsidies to basic industries. A general strike broke out in Panama City and Colón in October 1983 (Walton 1987). A massive campaign against an austerity package (Law 46) was launched in late 1984 by a coalition of professional associations (teachers and doctors) and university students called the Coordinadora Cívica Nacional (COCINA; National Civil Coordinator). A general strike and mass mobilizations of up to tens of thousands of demonstrators took place in November and December 1984, resulting in the Barletta government's cancellation of the austerity measures (Beluche 1994). Mass demonstrations and strikes also exploded in September 1985. A final first-generation antiausterity campaign occurred in Panama in 1995 against newly imposed labor flexibility laws, which weakened labor union rights. Led by the militant construction workers' union Sindicato Único Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de la Construcción y Similares (SUNTRACS; National Union of

Construction Workers and Related Industries), forty-nine labor unions held a monthlong strike in August 1995 striving to turn back the new labor measures. This was a particularly violent conflict between the government and labor organizations in which three hundred protest participants were arrested and four labor unionists were killed.

In sum, the participants in the first-generation campaigns against economic liberalization in Central America failed to sustain mobilizations and hold together broad coalitions. Governments in the region were just commencing democratization processes, especially after 1990 (with the exception of Costa Rica). The lack of democratization greatly hampered the formation of organizations and coalitions that could freely exercise rights of association and public assembly. Each affected social sector struggled against the relatively new threats of economic adjustment in largely independent ways. A long-term collective consciousness based on experiences of several rounds of economic reforms had yet to congeal with the subaltern classes. These conditions slowly changed by the late 1990s.

Second-Wave Popular Movements against Globalization, 1996–2011

As Central America remained in a debt crisis with governments that subscribed to a neoliberal ideology in the 1990s, a new generation of economic reforms slowly worked its way through the legislative pipeline. The second-generation reforms were characterized by privatization of basic services, infrastructure, and utilities (Edwards 1995; Kaufman and Nelson 2004). In the mid-2000s, Central American governments added free trade agreements to the list of neoliberal reforms. Unlike the 1980s, when much of the region was still embroiled in violent civil conflicts and authoritarian regimes, these second-generation reforms occurred in a climate of greater democratization. This particular combination of second-generation economic reform and greater civil society space for mobilizing proved especially volatile. The protests of the campaigns enumerated below had more diversity in participants, a greater number of them, and wider geographical reach, and were longer sustained than the first wave of protests in the 1980s and early 1990s. And at times they were more successful—a clear sign of revitalization of the social movement sector throughout the region.

Costa Rica

Costa Rican civic organizations initiated a major campaign against the privatization of telecommunications and electricity at the beginning of 2000. The government was planning to permit private sector participation in electrical power generation and distribution and in telecommunication services with the Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE), a state monopoly. The ICE provides

relatively inexpensive and accessible service to much of the national population (Haglund 2010). When plans for partial privatization worked their way through the Costa Rican legislature, a coalition materialized of state sector workers (especially in the ICE), university and high school students, a small leftist political party, environmentalists, community groups, and progressive elements of the Catholic Church. The coalition began holding small rallies and leafleting in January and February 2000. As the parliament neared voting on the privatization in mid-March, the movement stepped up its activities with mass marches and protests outside the legislative assembly. When the parliament approved the measure in the first round of voting, the coalition ratcheted up the pressure with a campaign of mass civil disobedience, which included labor strikes, hunger strikes, over one hundred roadblocks throughout the national territory, and the beginning phases of a general strike, until the government backed down and canceled the privatization plans in early April—resulting in a positive outcome for the movement (Almeida 2008a).

The next major round of antiglobalization protest emerged between 2004 and 2007 against the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).[3] The coalition that prevented privatization of the ICE expanded to include more sectors from civil society. After several national days of protests and public sector strikes against CAFTA between 2004 and 2006, the anti-CAFTA coalition coordinated a massive street march of some 150,000 people on February 26, 2007 (probably the largest demonstration in modern Costa Rican history). The historic march forced the government to put CAFTA to a popular referendum in October 2007. With this, the social movement had converted to an electoral strategy. A second mass rally of 150,000 people on September 30, 2007, marked the end of the campaign. Although the mass mobilizations revitalized the Costa Rican social movement sector, the anti-CAFTA forces suffered a defeat on the measure in October 2007, when a slight majority of Costa Ricans voted in favor of the treaty in the referendum. Nonetheless, by 2014 many of the anti-CAFTA forces regrouped and put their energies and resources into the electoral process, electing several antineoliberal activists to parliament in the Frente Amplio Party.

El Salvador

The early campaigns against state modernization in the mid-1990s had failed, and Salvadoran civil society became increasingly displeased with the rising cost of living after electricity and telecommunications privatization. In 1999, the Salvadoran government targeted the public health care system for partial privatization. Public sector unions in health care, including labor associations and unions of medical doctors, organized a multisectoral campaign of resistance. The protest coalition included a wide variety of NGOs, state sector unions, and students. Marches were held in several cities between November 1999 and March 2000, and medical staff physicians held work stoppages throughout the

national hospital system. The movement succeeded in temporarily halting the privatization through an accord reached with the government in March 2000.

In 2002, the Salvadoran government once again pursued privatization of the Instituto Salvadoreño del Seguro Social (ISSS; Salvadoran Social Security Institute). The coalition of opposition rematerialized and fought a ten-month-long battle against the outsourcing of medical care and coverage. This round of collective action involved national days of protest using highway blockades and several mass street marches known as *marchas blancas* (white marches) because protesters dressed in white to display their solidarity with the health care profession. Some of the *marchas blancas* reached up to 150,000 participants, making them the largest street marches since 1980. The movement achieved its main goal of preventing privatization and signed an accord with the central government in June 2003. Smaller and less efficacious protest campaigns were organized against CAFTA between 2004 and 2007 and water privatization between 2006 and 2008. As in Costa Rica, but with even more success, the antineoliberal coalition in El Salvador turned to an electoral strategy and elected the socialist Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN; Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) in 2009 and again in 2014.

Guatemala

Major campaigns against second-generation structural adjustment reforms in Guatemala, against a new sales tax hike backed by the International Monetary Fund, broke out in 2001. Between April and August 2001, mass marches were held in several cities against the new neoliberal measure. Despite mass public opposition, the government passed the sales tax law in August 2001. The Guatemalan government moved once again in 2004 to raise the sales tax. This time a coalition of labor unions, students, NGOs, and indigenous peasants formed and successfully resisted the measure by holding a short general strike and setting roadblocks in June. This same coalition resurrected itself in early 2005 to resist CAFTA. It was the second-largest sustained mobilization against CAFTA in Central America (after Costa Rica's). Throughout March 2005, students, indigenous organizations, and labor unions held several mass marches and blockaded the nation's major highways as the Guatemalan legislature debated and subsequently approved CAFTA.

Since 2005, dozens of local struggles have broken out in indigenous communities over the expansion of mining operations and the cultivation of biofuels—Guatemalan resources to be exported to global markets. Between 2005 and 2009, local grassroots movements (largely rural indigenous Mayan communities) convoked dozens of popular consultations, a type of referendum, in municipalities throughout the departments of San Marcos, Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Sololá over the incursion of open-pit mining operations in their respective regions. In each community where a consultation took place, an overwhelming majority rejected the mining plans (Véliz 2009). Local conflicts with

multinational enterprises over natural resources appear to be growing in the second decade of the twenty-first century throughout the Central American isthmus.

Honduras

In the late 1990s in Honduras, a new oppositional organization formed called el Bloque Popular (the People's Bloc). The Bloque Popular is composed of university students, public sector labor unions, school teacher associations, and peasant leagues. The group engaged in several campaigns against privatization in the late 1990s and early 2000s, resulting in much more antiglobalization activity than in the 1980s. A second, broader coalition with links to the Bloque Popular formed in 2003—the Coordinadora Nacional de Resistencia Popular (CNRP; National Coordinator of Popular Resistance). The CNRP organized several mass actions between 2003 and 2006, including a colossal demonstration through the streets of Tegucigalpa in August 2003 against water privatization (an IMF-backed measure), wage freezes, and the weakening of collective labor contracts (Posas 2003).

In the second wave of protests, the Bloque Popular also tried to prevent CAFTA's ratification by the Honduran Congress by coordinating a national day of protest in February 2005. However, the Honduran legislature ratified the treaty. These same groups coalesced to oppose the June 2009 military coup in Honduras—the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP; National Front of Popular Resistance). The FNRP mobilized several mass campaigns against the coup between June 2009 and July 2011. In June 2011, with the return of ousted president Manuel Zelaya, the FNRP converted to a political party, Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE). LIBRE competed in the 2013 presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections and achieved impressive results. LIBRE became the second-largest political party in Honduras, displacing Latin America's oldest elite two-party system (Almeida 2014). Hence, a massive nationally organized socialist oppositional party was built from mobilizing in the streets against neoliberalism over the previous decade.

Nicaragua

A new civil society umbrella organization, the Coordinadora Civil (Civil Coordinator), was born in Nicaragua after the social catastrophe wrought by Hurricane Mitch in late 1998. In its first years of existence the Coordinadora focused on disaster relief issues. Eventually the NGOs constituting the Coordinadora took on consumer rights issues and free trade. Two other major civil society federations emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s—the Red Nacional de Defensa de los Consumidores (RNDC; National Network in Defense of Consumers) and the Unión Nacional de Asociaciones de Consumidores y

Usarios (UNACU; National Union of Consumer Associations). Both federations were made up of community and municipal consumer associations from throughout the nation. Along with the Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense (MCN; Nicaraguan Community Movement), these consumer protection groups fought several campaigns over power and water privatization and rapidly rising transportation fares and utility bills with a mixture of success and failure (Serra 2006). Finally, health care workers protested throughout the 2000s against IMF cuts in public health spending.

Panama

After a successful mass mobilization against water privatization in late 1998, two major campaigns in Panama in the 2000s against economic restructuring centered on the Panamanian Caja de Seguro Social (CSS; Panamanian Institute of Social Security Insurance), the country's national health care and pension system. In 2003, the CSS came under the threat of privatization. In September and October 2003, CSS employees, other public sector unions (including teachers), students, and construction workers launched two general strikes to protest the attempted privatization. The strikes slowed the outsourcing of government pension services and public health care. Another CSS conflict erupted in 2005 when the government approved a new law that raised the retirement age. Between April and July 2005, several mass marches took place, some reaching up to one hundred thousand participants. Students and labor unions also protested with roadblocks throughout the nation. In the end, the government of president Martin Torrijos partially conceded to the movement's demands and watered down the aggressive pension reforms.

The oppositional coalition in both phases of the conflict (2003 and 2005) maintained a delicate unity under the Frente Nacional en Defensa de Seguro Social (FRENADESSO; National Front for the Defense of Social Security) coordinating committee. FRENADESSO has now converted into an oppositional political party—the Frente Amplio por la Democracia (FAD; Broad Front for Democracy). Another major national mobilization took place in July 2010 over a new labor flexibilization law that eroded collective labor contracts for unionized workers. Mobilizations of labor on banana plantations in the Boca de Toros region and urban workers resulted in several injuries and deaths of rural indigenous unionists by state police and security forces suppressing the revolt. The antiprivatization struggles continued in Panama in the 2010s with a major uprising in the *corregimientos* of Colón Province after the neoliberal administration of Ricardo Martinelli gained passage of a law allowing the sell-off of public lands in the Panama Canal Zone in October 2012. The popular uprising garnered participation from labor unions, students, and indigenous groups around the country and forced the national parliament to overturn the privatization legislation.

Comparing the Two Protest Waves

Figure 7.2 shows that antineoliberal protest intensified markedly in the second protest wave during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The first wave is analyzed over a sixteen-year period, and the second wave includes only nine years of data analysis, from 1996 to 2004. During the early period of globalization and first-generation structural adjustment measures from 1980 to 1995, there were a reported thirty-one antiausterity protests in the region, each of over ten thousand participants. The more democratic countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua) tended to have slightly more massive antineoliberal protests in the first wave than the countries directly or nominally controlled by their respective militaries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Panama). In the second wave of antiglobalization protest in the late 1990s and early 2000s, fifty-two major antineoliberal events with more than ten thousand people occurred. As documented above, at least another dozen major demonstrations against privatization, free trade, and labor flexibilization have taken place between 2005 and 2012 in the region. The combination of intensified globalization (as shown by market liberalization and the selling off of public infrastructure to transnational firms) and expanded democratization appears to be associated with the current upswing in mass mobilization in Central America.

Activists in the largest campaigns pieced together coalitions of NGOs, new social movements, students, public and urban labor unions, and oppositional political parties. Indigenous rural workers and peasants participated in major mobilizations in Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. Many of these groups are beneficiaries of the democratization process because liberalizing states grant NGOs legal status (*personería jurídica*) to operate in their territorial boundaries. Legally sanctioned oppositional political parties also have motivations to mobilize constituents on the streets over unpopular economic policies to remain competitive in future electoral rounds. NGOs and new social movements coordinated critical activities in the campaigns against free trade in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. In the early 2000s, left-of-center political parties (even small ones that receive less than 10 percent of the national vote), boosted mass mobilizations against economic liberalization in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Almeida 2012, 2014).

Although scholars characterize Central America as a homogeneous world region in terms of similar political and cultural histories (Goodwin 2001), important differences exist among countries in terms of the social groups and sectors recruited and mobilized in recent campaigns against economic liberalization. These differences are largely explained by the social and economic composition of each nation.

In Guatemala, with a near majority Mayan population, in crucial antineoliberal campaigns urban groups of public sector workers and students reached out and formed coalitions with the rural indigenous population (such as in the anti-CAFTA mobilizations). El Salvador and Nicaragua experienced

large-scale revolutionary mobilization in the past with mass support and party recruitment. The revolutionary political parties surviving into the neoliberal era (i.e., the FMLN and Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [FSLN; Sandinista National Liberation Front]) have used their organizational structures and membership lists to mobilize civil society against unwanted economic reforms in a more forceful fashion than other nations in the region. In Panama, the construction workers' labor union (SUNTRACS) has been prominent in the social movement sector for two decades and continues to thrive, now with over fifty thousand members in Panama's unparalleled construction of towers and skyscrapers. In the remainder of Central America, private sector unionization continues on an accelerated decline.

In short, the social sectors recruited and mobilized for antiglobalization campaigns vary by the unique cultural, political, and economic history of each country. Democratization processes facilitate the organizational formation and revitalization among particular social groupings on the basis of these distinctive national histories. Democratic practices of universal suffrage, freedom of association, and freedom of public assembly also lead to more reformist strategies of collective action (Marks, Mbaye, and Kim 2009). In countries with long-term democratic practices, such as Costa Rica, associations and civic organizations already in place (e.g., student federations, public sector labor associations, and community councils), often find themselves at the forefront of battles over free market measures. Hence, even though the entire region has witnessed massive campaigns against neoliberal reforms organized by NGOs, labor unions, new social movements, and oppositional political parties with a variety of outcomes, significant differences remain among the countries in terms of the specific social sectors and groups mobilized.

Conclusion: Democratization and Social Movement Revitalization

Two major phases of economic globalization have passed through Central America, one in the 1980s and early 1990s and the second in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The first phase of structural adjustment occurred during a period of violent conflict in the region with largely nondemocratic governments or regimes just beginning to transition to democracy (with the exception of Costa Rica). The individual protest campaigns in the 1980s and early 1990s were not as sustained as the individual campaigns in the 2000s and occurred with less frequency, leading some scholars to view the region's social opposition as disengaged or pacified by the early 1990s (Dunkerley 1994). Many of the largest second-wave austerity protests (after 1996) involved privatization and free trade agreements in the context of democratization. Civil society groups had more freedom to organize and more experience with neoliberal reforms when launching sustained campaigns of resistance. In most campaigns in the second wave,

the coalition coordinating the actions evolved from the unification of already-existing civic associations, NGOs, and new social movement organizations.

In terms of magnitude, in nearly every country on the isthmus, the size of the demonstrations in the wave of opposition to economic liberalization in the late 1990s and 2000s was the largest or close to the largest in the respective nations' histories, at times mobilizing 3 to 4 percent of the entire population in a single rally (e.g., the anti-CAFTA demonstrations in Costa Rica, the pension system reform protests in Panama, and the campaigns against health care privatization in El Salvador). The evidence suggests that democratization does not simply institutionalize earlier social struggles but provides an organizational basis in civil society to launch even larger campaigns of collective opposition when faced with new economic threats and the shrinking of an already-feeble welfare state. Even though a majority of the campaigns did not achieve their main goal of turning back the neoliberal reform measures, they tended to be more successful and effective than mobilizations in the 1980s and early 1990s over similar economic issues. The magnitude and relative success of more recent mobilizations indicate a revitalization of the social movement sector in Central America.

NOTES

Acknowledgments: Early versions of this chapter were presented to audiences at the International Workshop on Social Movements in Transition, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, November 2008; the XII Central American Sociology conference in San José, Costa Rica, August 2010; and the II National Meeting of the Honduran Sociological Association, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, May 2011. The U.S. Fulbright Program provided funding for field research for the project ("Civil Society, Globalization and Democratization in Central America," Award #8566, Council for the International Exchange of Scholars).

1. Contested local elections in Nicaragua in 2008, the difficulty of registering oppositional parties in Panama in 2009, and the military coup in Honduras in 2009 may be signs of the end of this democratic transition in Central America.

2. Smaller strikes against austerity measures and privatization were held by power and electricity workers, public universities, teachers, and National Insurance employees between 1998 and 1994.

3. In Spanish, CAFTA is referred to as the Tratado de Libre Comercio (TLC).

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