

ON THE EVE OF A FOOD RIOT: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POLITICAL
DETERMINANTS OF WIDESPREAD PROTEST IN CENTRAL AMERICA DURING THE
2007-08 GLOBAL FOOD PRICE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I develop a framework for the systematic investigation of the political determinants of widespread protest that occurred during the 2007-08 global food price crisis. Broadly engaging Acemoglu and Robinson's (2001, 2006) theory of the democratic window of opportunity for mobilization engendered by transitory economic crises, I consider the role that both individual and structural factors play in promoting collective action for political change during such events. Fifteen hypotheses are offered that are grounded in theory on food riots, political culture, and political opportunity structures. Ultimately, this thesis takes the form of a proposal for future research on the impact of citizen political views and changing political opportunity structures in facilitating widespread social unrest during transitory economic shocks.

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BACKGROUND: ECONOMIC CRISES AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Recent studies suggest that transitory economic shocks can impact political institutions and prospects for democracy, particularly in developing countries. For instance, Bruckner and Ciccone (2008) find that rainfall shocks in Sub-Saharan Africa lead to significant democratic change in political institutions within the region. Particularly, they claim that substantial effects include a “tightening of executive constraints, greater political competition, and a more open and competitive executive recruitment” (2008: 16). Additionally, Arezki and Bruckner (2011) demonstrate a significant effect of food price shocks on political change, albeit in a deleterious direction. Specifically, they find that spikes in international food prices increase the occurrence of civil strife and put at stake the political stability of the world’s poorest countries (2011: 12). Perhaps more significantly, they show that food price shocks increase the risk of intra-state conflicts and civil war (2011: 4).

Acemoglu and Robinson (2001, 2006) have sought to formally theorize on the conditions that give rise to political transitions that occur as a result of transitory economic shocks. Namely, they point to a democratic window of opportunity created during such crises in which the cost for citizens to contest power is low and potential returns to public mobilization high. As Acemoglu and Robinson offer, “The incentives to engage in or avoid fiscal redistribution...are a key factor” in creating the opportunity for mobilization, and thus in shaping the

occurrence of political transitions during economic crises (2001: 939). During such events, the public is incentivized to mobilize to demand economic concessions because the cost of mobilization may be lower than the cost of bearing the burden of an unfavorable fiscal adjustment (Drazen and Gilli 1993). Further, the cost to authorities to offer economic concessions to mobilized groups during economic crises may be lower than the cost of an economically paralyzed public, stagnated economy, or than the resources required for quelling social unrest. Thus, economic crises can impact political change.

Acemoglu and Robinson's theory is underscored by a wealth of literature that demonstrates that economic crises have often precipitated wide-scale mobilizations and major political transformations, such as in the French Revolution (see Markoff 1996; Sewell 2011; Bouton 1993). Other scholars show that numerous democratic transitions in Latin America, for example, occurred during economic crises (see Haggard and Kaufman 1995). Additionally, a number of economic studies show that, in particular, economic shocks are a common precursor for mobilization. For instance, Hidalgo et al (2010) emphasize the mobilizing effect caused by adverse rainfall conditions that engender land invasions in Brazil. Dube and Vargas (2006) show that in Colombia sharp declines in coffee prices increase workers' propensity to join armed groups (cited in Hidalgo et al 2010).

Furthermore, Angrist and Kugler (2008) find that in the same country increases in the price of coca draw more people to the illegal drug trade (cited in Hidalgo et al 2010). These studies corroborate Acemoglu and Robinson's proposition by underscoring the idea that economic factors impact the opportunity cost for

mobilization, such that relative costs are low and potential returns to collective action high during economic crises.

Outside of the economic literature, social movement theory has long noted the impact that changes in the structure of political institutions has on facilitating contentious politics. In his seminal work on the Civil Rights Movement, for example, McAdam (1982) demonstrates that movement participants capitalized on changes in the US political economy to forge their campaign. These changes, he offers, facilitated the emergence of “political opportunity structures” such that movement participants felt that the threat of repression of mobilization was low, and potential returns to their demands for racial justice high.

Furthermore, history has shown that it is often the result of harvest-induced crises that facilitate the emergence of collective opportunities for political change. No event other than the French Revolution points to this reality more clearly, as Markoff (1996) and Bouton (1993) demonstrate that insurrectionary actions resulting from food price increases ultimately paved the way for a democratic revolution in eighteenth century France. This reality is not lost in the contemporary era, moreover, as in their examination of the effects of international food price indices between 1970 and 2007, Arezki and Bruckner (2011) find that for low income countries¹ dramatic food price increases lead to a significant increase in the incidence of anti-government demonstrations, riots, and civil conflict, and to a significant deterioration in the functioning of democratic institutions (2011: 1).

¹ The World Bank identifies low income countries as those countries with a mean per capita GDP of \$1999 or less

The spike in international food prices during 2007- 08 and the ensuing social unrest that occurred worldwide in its wake underscores the immediate relevancy of economic crises and political change. As average prices of the world's most basic staples – rice, wheat, maize and soybeans – doubled during 2007-08, food riots broke out in over twenty countries, many of which had violent and enduring consequences. For instance, riots led to the death of almost 100 people in Cameroon, a general labor strike in Burkina Faso, and to the toppling of the government in Haiti (Berazneva and Lee 2011). Thus, transitory economic crises, and particularly those caused by food price shocks, are salient for processes of political change even today.

Yet, dramatic increases in food prices do not inevitably lead to social unrest and prospects for political change in countries the world over. As Fraser and Rimas remind us, “There are many more examples of people accepting volatile prices than rioting over them” (2011). Given this notion, we are led to question what factors actually motivate citizens to act during the political window of opportunity engendered by economic, and particularly, food price crises. Again, Fraser and Rimas advance our inquiry when they claim that often in explaining food riots, “A key psychological element -- a sense of injustice that arises between seeing food prices rise and pouring a Molotov cocktail -- is missing” (2011).

Indeed, as the following pages will show, studies of past food riots reveal that a sense of injustice is key in motivating citizens to action during food price crises. But, for who does this sense of injustice lie? This is a question that forms the

heart of this thesis. More specifically, the aim of this essay is to offer a framework for analysis of the political factors that lead citizens to mobilize during economic, and particularly food price induced, crises. While this thesis broadly engages Acemoglu and Robinson's (2006) theory of the democratic window of opportunity for mobilization created by economic shocks, it uniquely does so via the proposal of the systematic investigation of citizen political views and changing political opportunity structures that impact the likelihood of occurrence of contentious public politics during such crises.

THE PROPOSAL

Establishing a starting point for the study of democratic change from any angle is not an easy task, as there exists a number of conflicting ideas about the nature of democracy. Difficulty arises not only from an analyst's perspective in spelling out indicators for its identification and measurement, but also from an actor's standpoint in laying out parameters for its promotion and contestation (see Markoff 2011). While a discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is nonetheless important to establish a reference for the context in which the concept of democracy will be engaged in the following pages. Therefore, because this study seeks to broadly engage Acemoglu and Robinson's democratic window of opportunity thesis, it seems that employing the authors' basic idea of democracy provides a useful point of reference:

Democracy is thought of as a situation of political equality and characterized by its relatively more pro-majority policies. Often pro-majority policies coincide with pro-poor policies, especially a greater tendency to redistribute income away from the rich toward the poor. In contrast, nondemocracy gives a greater say to an elite and generally opts for policies that are less majoritarian than in a democracy. (2006: 19)

Given this idea of democracy, the political window of opportunity facilitated by economic crises is understood as one engendered by a distributional conflict of interest between the more asset wealthy elite and more asset poor majority. During economic crises, a war of attrition arises between these groups, such that each

evaluates the costs of bearing the burden of redistribution that is necessary for restabilization of the economy (Alesina and Drazen 1991). Social unrest occurs when at least part of the majority concludes that the costs to conceding to bear the burden of distribution is greater than mobilizing to demand a resolution that is more in line with their interests. Further, while citizens mobilize on such occasions to demand immediate economic concessions, they also often call for broader democratic reforms to advance their general interests and to ensure the endurance of policy changes (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001). Further, in yet more repressive contexts, citizens may also be confronted with the reality that they need to advocate for even the right to make claims, in addition to the economic concessions they seek (Economy 2004). Thus, economic crises can have implications for democracy and broad political change.

This explanation leads to yet another question – do the interests of the groups that mobilize during crises represent the interests of the majority? This is a question that also informs this thesis. More specifically, what do contentious politics that occur during economic crises tell us about more general citizen orientations toward and aspirations for democracy and political change? If we follow Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2001) theory that during economic crises, social pressure matters for political transitions, then indeed citizen views and their propensity for action on a broad scale during such events matter, too.

Few studies, however, systematically investigate citizen political orientations and propensity for action during economic crises. One probable reason

for this case is the challenge of finding appropriate data for such inquiries. Access to data that measures citizen views and propensity for action during such events is a rare occasion. Yet, we are in a rare position to have that opportunity. Perhaps more significantly, we are in a rare position to conduct an analysis of a comparative nature of citizen political views and propensity for action in countries where social unrest occurred during an economic crisis. This rare opportunity is afforded by the collection of data in Central America on the eve of riots that occurred in the region during the 2008 global food price crisis.

The data collected in this region was part of the 2008 wave of Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) surveys. These surveys, also called the AmericasBarometer, are geared to gather data on various aspects of citizen political views and behaviors throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The surveys, supported in part by leading international institutions such as the US Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program, are conducted bi-annually according to rigorous scientific standards, and thus capture a representative sample of citizen views and orientations across the region. The 2008 wave of surveys in Central America was conducted in March – at the height of the international food price crisis, and on the eve of the wave of social unrest that swept the region throughout the following months (Gutierrez 2008; LA Times 2008; LAPOP 2008). This rare intersection of events engenders the unique opportunity for a systematic investigation of citizen political views and propensity for action during the crisis, particularly as these orientations relate to the so-called democratic window of opportunity for

mobilization. Furthermore, this opportunity not only enables a comparative analysis between countries where protest occurred, but also includes the opportunity to compare findings with countries where unrest *did not* occur, as citizens in Costa Rica and Panama remained quiet amidst the turmoil in the region.

Cautiously speaking, however, there are limitations to the proposed investigation offered in this thesis. The most glaring limitation is that the data will not allow for the identification at the micro-level of political views of those that *actually* participated in the 2008 Central American protests. Thus, I do not claim that the analysis will help to shed any light on political orientations at the *individual* level that lead one to protest during transitory economic crises. Rather, the goal of this study is to offer insight into citizen political views at the *aggregate* national level, and examine whether the overall national political culture sheds any light on the likelihood for the occurrence of conflict within a country during an economic, and particularly food price, crisis. A second limitation of the proposed study is that it is confined to the region of Central America. Thus, it may be foolhardy to claim that the results of this study can be generalized beyond the countries of Central America.²

Ultimately, it is my hope that the results of the study will contribute to several fields of interest. First, it is my goal to contribute to the literature on the democratic window of opportunity thesis, demonstrating that economic crises can

² This essay does not include the entire region of Latin America and the Caribbean, as LAPOP surveys were conducted in some countries *after* the occurrence of social unrest, thus minimizing the ability to capture data on citizen views during the emergence of the democratic window of opportunity

engender the emergence of political opportunity structures for mobilization oriented towards political change. Second, I aim to shed new light on the study of political culture and its implications for contentious collective action, showing that protest is more likely to occur in democratic polities where citizen hopes for democracy are high, and their satisfaction with how democracy actually works in their country low. Finally, I intend to contribute to the discussion on food insecurity and the political nature of food riots in developing countries. Ultimately, however, this thesis serves as the preliminary step toward outlining my future dissertation research project.

The development of this thesis leads to a number of questions that are necessary to analyze. The questions are drawn from the intersection of three bodies of work most relevant to the concerns of this study: food riot, political culture, and collective action studies. In the food riot literature, I focus mainly on analyses that address the political determinants of both historical and contemporary food riots. For studies on political culture, I ground my review in literature that analyzes political culture in contemporary democracies and its implications for contentious political activity. Finally, in the collective action literature, I draw from analyses that highlight political opportunity structures that facilitate mobilization. Moreover, when possible, I hone in on analyses that focus on the Latin American region.

It is important, however, to establish that this paper does not include an exhaustive review of the aforementioned fields of literature, but rather serves as a

preliminary roadmap and direction of inquiry for the design of a later and more comprehensive review and analysis. Until then, however, I turn to a preliminary overview of the literature that informs the framework of this thesis.

FOOD RIOTS: CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

Analysts have long noted the political roots of food riots. Most research of this nature focuses on riots that occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not only because they were the most common form of popular protest during that time, but also because food riots triggered one of the greatest political transformations in the history of democracy – the French Revolution (Bouton 1993; Markoff 1996). As Charles Tilly argues, food riots of this era were epiphenomenal to food and economic hardship. In reality, food riots reflected much deeper political concerns. These concerns were largely associated with the struggles of state building occurring during that time (1975: 392).

The emergence of capitalism during this era impacted centuries old social and economic structures common to feudal society. These shifts largely manifested in the grain trade, as monarchies withdrew their long-standing support for subsistence regulation in favor of laissez-faire economics. The paternalistic nature of feudal structures had engendered the belief amongst people that food was an entitlement for everyone, regardless of whether one could afford it or not, and, further, that the government had a duty to ensure this right (Bouton 1993). Given these ideas, Bouton claims:

The wave of food riots that occurred during the late seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century was, we have learned, no simple visceral or ‘spasmodic’ reaction to hunger...we cannot accept uncritically the simple equation of hunger equals riot. Of course, subsistence riots correlate with

short-term price rises...Not all price rises, however, nor even the most dramatic price rises, were accompanied by rioting...rioters were responding to the larger structural and political changes at work within their communities. (1993: 15)

The political undertone of the riots was reflected through the way rioters commonly demanded that food be sold at some popularly held sense of equitable price, rather than at a price set by the market. Food in the public's eyes was not a commodity to be sold for profit, but rather a divine right entitled to all people. Tilly furthers this sentiment in claiming that riots "occurred not so much where men were hungry as where they believed that others were unjustly depriving them of food to which they had a moral and political right" (1975: 389).

Furthermore, not only had traditional grain regulations mitigated wild price fluctuations, but they also "indicated political commitment and sensitivity to local welfare" on behalf of the authorities (Bouton 1993: 11). Thus, when grain prices rose in a newly freed market, the subsistence question became a political, and largely national, phenomenon for which the people viewed the government responsible. Ultimately, it was these processes that solidified food riots of the classical era in a critique of national policy and as the basis for transformative political change (Bouton 1993: 255).

Moreover, William Sewell (2011) underscores the idea that harvest induced crises incited major political transitions of that era, such as the French Revolution and the revolutionary activity that occurred throughout Europe during 1848 (2011:

4-5). Yet, while Sewell points to the continuing significance of *economic* crises for political change in the contemporary era, he relegates politically relevant *harvest* crises to a particular historical juncture in the development of capitalism. Markoff (2011), on the other hand, while supporting Sewell's attention to the enduring political resonance of economic crises, adds that recent events such as spikes in international food prices and the potential impacts of climate change indicate that politically resonant harvest crises are probably "coming back with a bang."

Walton and Seddon (1994) help to advance our understanding of the decline of the food riot as a popular political strategy. They explain that as the nineteenth century progressed, food riots as a primary form of protest tended to occur alongside demonstrations related to labor issues. As unions and more centrally organized social movements became more prominent, the food riot as a political strategy diminished (Walton and Seddon 1994: 35). Furthermore, food in the nineteenth century became a less salient issue, as improvements in the production and distribution of food lowered prices and lessened the threat of famine; as state expansion minimized state-society paternalistic arrangements; and as state centralization and industrialization shifted the target of popular grievances to national labor struggles (Walton and Seddon 1994: 37).

More broadly speaking, prior to industrialization in Europe, the functioning of the entire economy hinged on the production of food. If food was scarce or prices high, there was limited ability for people to purchase other goods and services, governments to collect taxes, and merchants and states to pay employees or

creditors. However, as the industrialization of European economies progressed throughout the nineteenth century, the capitalist cycles of expansion and contraction hinged less on the ebb and flow of food prices, and more on the demand for industrial goods.³ Thus, given these far-reaching processes, it seemed that the food riot's place was in the dustbin of history (Hobsbawm 1959).

Despite declarations that the food riot was a thing of the past, events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries lay this claim to rest. To begin with, during the mid-1970s through the early 1990s, a wave of riots spanned the developing world (Walton and Seddon 1994: 39-40). Walton and Seddon claim that these riots are reminiscent of classical food riots in the way that the protests were triggered by food price increases and by the elimination of state protective measures for consumer goods and services (1994: 50). They also offer that the resurgence of this manner of protest is a result of the style of developmental policy adopted by developing countries during the second half of the twentieth century. As developing states embraced an industrial and export-based policy focus, the urban bias of these efforts engendered a populist coalition between the state and urban classes, such that the state provided public assistance in exchange for political loyalty. The resurgence of food riots indicates that this social pact collapsed as the debt crisis unfolded and urban masses took to the streets demanding the state uphold its end of the bargain (Walton and Seddon 1994: 47).

Advancing this explanation, Walton and Ragin (1990) provide empirical

³ Thank you to John Markoff for clarifying this idea

evidence that shows that the occurrence and severity of protests during this period were associated with hyperurbanization and levels of external debt. As Walton and Seddon emphasize, “the mechanism linking overurbanization and protest is a well-developed organizational infrastructure capable of mobilizing political action” (1994: 45). These factors were particularly relevant in Latin America, as over the twenty odd year period of concern, the region experienced the highest rate of popular unrest compared to other regions of the world, and contributed two-thirds of the worldwide total of protest events (Walton and Shefner 1994: 106). Drawing on this data, Walton and Shefner argue that the “results suggest that international interventions in Latin American societies in the form of austerity programs combine with domestic structures that make vulnerable large numbers of people who are already organized in urban communities” (1994: 118).

Yet, the authors also point to the prospects for democratic change that these conditions created. They claim that instead of triggering enduring political instability throughout the region, the debt crisis and ensuing protests invigorated civil society networks in Latin America that were poised to push for democratic change (Walton and Shefner: 1994: 131). Walton and Seddon extend this idea:

Urban political movements have begun to press a new set of expectations in which popular sovereignty is a condition of austerity. If everyone is expected to sacrifice in the interests of economic reform, then everyone should have a voice in deciding how sacrifice is meted out and what reforms are adopted...In many instances, movements for multiparty democracy follow directly in the

wake of structural adjustment programs and food riots as an effort to channel protest mobilization into longer term remedial directions. (1994: 337)

Arezki and Brückner (2011), however, paint a different picture of contemporary food riots with evidence that demonstrates a deleterious effect on democracy in low-income countries as a result of food price shocks. Utilizing panel data of over 120 different countries across the 1970 - 2007 time period, the authors find that increases in international food prices lead to a significant deterioration in the functioning of democratic institutions and to an increase in political instability in low-income countries. Furthermore, they show that increases in international food prices have significant macroeconomic effects, such that they were associated with an increase in the gap between the rich and poor. Thus, these results show that democratic change that occurs as a result of economic shocks does not always follow a progressive trajectory.

On another note, in their analysis of riots in North Africa and the Middle East during the twenty-first century, Lagi et al (2011) present evidence that identifies a food price threshold above which riots occurred in the region. They maintain their results indicate that, “widespread unrest does not arise from long-standing political failings of the system, but rather from its sudden perceived failure to provide essential security to the population” (2011: 2). Yet, showing a significant temporal correlation between food price spikes and mobilization, the authors also claim that food price spikes triggered the enduring mobilization of the Arab Spring (2011: 4). Indeed, a conclusion that indicates the deeper political nature of food riots.

Additionally, Berezneva and Lee (2011) demonstrate that higher levels of human poverty and fewer political freedoms were associated with the likelihood of protest across countries in Africa during the 2007-08 food price crisis. They offer that a country's level of political freedoms signals the degree of democracy within that country, thereby implying that, "As personal freedoms increase, fewer people desire revolutionary change" (2011: 22). Furthermore, the authors claim that a common complaint amongst the protestors in Africa during the food price crisis was dissatisfaction with government policies and corruption. Thus, Berezneva and Lee suggest that the roots of the protests stem from pressures for democratization in African countries (2011: 23).

In sum, we can conclude from a preliminary review of the food riot literature that food price spikes play a key role in facilitating contentious political activity and also impact the prospects for democratic change. While the evidence is mixed regarding whether the outcomes of food-price induced protest lead to progressive or deleterious democratic change, we can nonetheless infer that, often, food riots are a manifestation of citizen aspirations for deep political change.

Yet, there exists little systematic research on the scope of citizen views and hopes for change as they manifest during such events. Further, there exists little systematic research on the association of those views as they relate to the propensity for mobilization to occur during economic, and particularly food price, crises. Given this state of the literature, these inquiries form the heart of this thesis, and a plan to shed light on some answers is spelled out below. But, first, I turn to a

review of the political culture literature that helps to sharpen my direction for research.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

There exists a wealth of sociological research concerned with processes of political change, and particularly the ways in which cultural orientations can facilitate or retard democratic transitions. Thus, insights from this literature can help to outline a path of inquiry for the investigation of citizen political views and the impact that these views can have on facilitating political change. While research on this subject is extensive, and the factors germane to political transition processes complex, I narrow the following preliminary review to literature that focuses on analyses of contemporary civil society in Latin America, and on the most recent comprehensive analysis of political culture in contemporary democracies (see Norris 2011).

To begin with, many analysts point to the changing nature of contemporary civil society in Latin America. Particularly, Vanden (2008) points to a “political sea change” in the region that is manifest in the ascendancy of new, progressive political parties and in civil society networks oriented toward the elimination of corrupt government and to the advancement of democratization processes. These changes, he claims, have created the political space necessary for mass public mobilization and for the growth of social movements poised to push for democratic change (2008: 42). Alvarez et al (1998) further that the creation of this political space in the region is a result of the shrinking role of the state in societal affairs. This process, they argue, prioritizes civil society as the central domain for the

exercise of democratic citizenship, and ultimately serves to politicize citizens on a deeper level through the way it democratizes the actions of daily life.

Moreover, Escobar and Alvarez (1992) claim that the rise of social movements in the region reflects a deepening of democratic citizenship, and signifies the creation of more politically empowered citizens. These conditions are critical, they maintain, for extending and deepening democratization processes within the region. Yet, other analysts claim that caution must be heeded in attaching democratizing resonance to the emerging culture of social movements and active civil society networks in the region. For instance, Hellman (2008) argues that contemporary popular movements in Mexico have not brought about significant openings within the country's political system. She furthers that, generally speaking, "the development of popular movements represents a less dramatic and significant departure from clientelism than other analysts have appreciated" (2008: 65). Additionally, Auyero (2007) underscores the central role that patronage political networks play in facilitating social conflict and political change within the region. He maintains that while the clandestine nature of these networks leaves them hidden to inquiry, that the enduring political significance of these associations cannot be ignored.

While the rise of social movements and active civil society can indeed problematize citizen struggles for democracy in the region, Norris' (2011) also adds that popular demands for democracy must be prudently examined. She claims that, "public expressions of support for democratic principles, and evaluations of the

democratic performance of government in their own country, should be carefully interpreted, as people do endorse democracy for different reasons” (2011: 167). She argues that careful analysis of those views is required to engender a deeper understanding of citizen orientations germane to the complex processes of political change and democratization that occur in different regions of the world.

Drawing from the results of her comprehensive analysis of citizen views on democracy across the world, she reveals that there exists a diversity of orientations regarding the ways in which people understand, evaluate, and aspire for democratic principles in their own country. First, she offers that a procedural understanding of democratic processes is more common across the world than an intrinsic understanding of democracy. These results indicate that most people commonly understand democracy to be related to good governance principles, such as effective administration of material benefits through improved standards of living and public services, and through the maintenance of law and public safety. This understanding is more common than one based on intrinsic democratic processes such as the existence of political competition and popular participation. Regarding Latin America, Norris (2011) also notes that indeed citizens more commonly associate democracy with instrumental notions of governance, such as fighting crime and redistributing wealth, rather than on intrinsic ideas of political processes described above (e.g. see Moreno 2002).

In a similar vein, Norris (2011) presents evidence that demonstrates people’s *satisfaction* with the democratic performance of their government also

largely reflects an emphasis on good quality governance measures. Both of these findings are particularly important to the study proposed here, as the economic effect of sharp increases in food prices may indeed impact people's perceptions of the workings of and satisfaction with democracy in their country during such events. As food prices rise, people may associate these trends with a deterioration of the democratic performance of their governments, rather than solely via the natural ebbs and flow of the market. Furthermore, Norris adds that good governance carries significant weight for prospects of political change in Latin America as "the rise of corrupt leadership, election fraud, bribery, and clientelism has also been regarded as deeply detrimental to the consolidation of democracy and to economic development" in the region (Norris 2011: 175). Indeed, an idea underscored in Hellman (2008) and Auyero's (2007) analyses.

Scholars have long been grappling with trying to explain the emergence of and differences in democratic values. Norris (2011) points to two main theoretical genres that dominate contemporary discussions of this matter – modernization and social capital theories. Modernization theorists posit that processes of societal and human development encourage the growth of "post-materialist" and "self-expression" values, as well as the tendency for citizens to engage in more direct and unconventional forms of political activism. This theoretical orientation reflects what collective action scholars point to in explaining the emergence of "new" social movements that are oriented toward more values than grievance based claims.

Surprisingly, however, Norris (2011) finds that modernization theory furnishes only *part* of the explanation of the emergence of intrinsically oriented

democratic values amongst citizens, such that educational level and associational activism help to predict these understandings, while age and aggregate levels of human development do not (2011: 121). Norris adds, however, that modernization theories do seem to provide an explanation for more long-term glacial shifts in democratic values, than the dynamic ebb and flow of political attitudes in shorter-term trajectories (Norris 2011: 136). World culture theorists add to this idea, claiming that a globalized culture exists that encompasses and promotes people's association with values of individual rights, political participation and democracy. Thus, to the extent that this cultural framework operates at the global level, the emergence worldwide of social movements that are oriented toward democratic change and articulated in local settings should be a common phenomenon (Boli and Thomas 1997: 173). These conclusions are particularly relevant to the consideration of changes in, or the endurance of, certain political attitudes that occur during transitory economic crises. Speaking to this idea, Norris argues that a more nuanced analysis of political values must include a consideration of both the effect of macro-level factors such as development and world culture, as well as more complex micro-level factors such as associational activism (2011: 123). This is a suggestion this proposal seeks to heed.

Social capital theories attempt to address some of the more complex micro-level factors that contribute to the emergence of and change in democratic values. Particularly, these theories emphasize the role that dense community networks play in fostering interpersonal trust and civic engagement, two factors believed to give rise to a culture in which people are more likely to form coalitions and push for

political change. Furthermore, coalitional activity is reinforcing for the development of democratic values, as engaging in such activity is believed to facilitate the emergence of self-expression values, social trust, and associational activism, all orientations germane to democratic values (Norris 2011).

Testing the social capital thesis, Norris demonstrates that the results confirm the importance of social capital for the emergence of democratic values. She shows that “generalized social trust and associational activism were both positively linked with stronger democratic aspirations and also with greater democratic satisfaction” (Norris 2011: 137). Thus, these results provide empirical support for the ideas discussed above that social movement activity in Latin America both problematizes and facilitates the emergence of democratic values in citizens throughout the region. However, as Norris notes, more careful analysis is required to engender a deeper understanding of these orientations as they relate to the complex processes of political change that occur in different regions around the world.

Yet, what do different democratic orientations imply for the occurrence of contentious political activity? Norris (2011) emphasizes that political disaffection is a widely held assumption to explain citizen engagement in public forms of protest in democratic polities. However, she claims that the data show that the answer to this question may not be so simple:

The actual evidence linking democratic orientations with patterns of political activism is far from straightforward; disenchantment with the performance of democracy may depress conventional forms of participation, but alternatively

it may also mobilize people, for example to support reform movements.

(2011: 17)

Speaking to a more regionally nuanced analysis of this phenomenon, she offers:

In Latin America, for example, Booth and Seligson (2009) report that citizens who are unhappy with their government's performance do not drop out of politics or resort to protest politics. Rather, disaffected citizens in Latin America participate at high rates in conventional and alternative political arenas. (2011: 17)

These conclusions thus corroborate the need to dig beneath the surface of social movements and popular forms of protest to gain a deeper and more inclusive understanding of citizen views on democracy and orientations toward political change.

Some generalizations can be made, however, regarding the occurrence of contentious politics in contemporary democracies. For instance, Norris (2011) shows that gender, income and education level, and knowledge about democracy are associated with a greater propensity to engage in protest activism. At the macro-level, she demonstrates that in countries with a long history of democracy "where there are well-established traditional rights and freedoms to assemble and demonstrate peacefully," the occurrence of protest politics is also more likely (2011: 224). Norris also shows that citizens with higher aspirations for democracy and those that were more dissatisfied with the way democracy worked in their country were more likely to engage in contentious politics (2011: 224-5). Further,

as people get involved in contentious politics and organized movements, they also learn more about and become committed to democracy and democratic procedures (Smith 2007). Thus, the results indicate that on an aggregate level, contentious political activity is more likely to occur in democratic polities where citizen hopes for democracy are high, and their satisfaction with how democracy actually works in their country low.

Surveying the results presented above, we can conclude that citizen political views matter for prospects for democracy, and for the likelihood of occurrence of contentious activity oriented towards facilitating political change. Yet, in addition to these orientations, structural factors for the emergence of public protest must also be considered. It is to a review of the literature that speaks to this issue that I turn to next.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

While ideological orientations are key in explaining the emergence of public protest, structural factors that help to engender opportunities for collective action are also important. Insights from both the social movement and economic literature can help to shed light on some of these structural factors, particularly as they relate to the democratic window of opportunity for collective action that emerges during transitory economic crises.

The most parallel theory in the social movement literature to Acemoglu and Robinson's (2006) concept of the democratic window of opportunity is the theoretical framework of political opportunity structures. The political opportunity orientation underscores the "importance of the broader political system in structuring the opportunities for collective action" such that "changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system" give rise, or constraint, to the emergence of contentious collective action (McAdam et al 1996: 2-3). Important to this theoretical orientation is both the organization of longer-term structures as well as more immediate shifts in the political system that create a perception amongst citizens that the costs to mobilization are low, and returns potentially high.

One of the primary long-term structures believed to facilitate social movement activity is the relative level of openness of a political system. Open polities are those in which "there are well-established traditional rights and freedoms to assemble and demonstrate peacefully" (Norris 2011: 224). While more

open polities coincide with older democracies, younger democracies with a legacy of successful social movement activity can also be fertile ground for contentious politics (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Stahler-Sholk et al 2008).

Theorists also underscore broader societal trends that can lead to the emergence of social movement activity. For example, in his seminal study of the Civil Rights Movement, McAdam (1982) shows how “changes in demography, repression, migration, and political economy contributed to a climate in which African Americans *could* organize collective action, and claims about racial justice *would* be more readily received by at least some governmental institutions” (Meyer and Minkoff 2004:1459). Furthermore, in his study of the French Revolution, Markoff (1996) argues that broader structural changes not only generated more public acceptance of the central state, but also that the Estates General elections created the opportunity for a peasant-legislator coalition. This coalition facilitated radical antiseigneurialism and alliances that supported new institution building, ultimately paving the way for a democratic revolution. Moreover, political opportunity structures can be multiple and contextual (Kutz-Flamembaum 2012). For example, drawing on her analysis of Machsom Watch, an Israeli Women’s peace organization, Kutz-Flamenbaum argues that political opportunity structures are “bound by cultural norms that create distinct sets of opportunities and constraints for different groups of people” (2012: 293). Given this notion, political opportunity structures can take on different forms for different people, ultimately shaping in a diverse manner the way people act upon perceived openings or constraints in the political system.

On another level, political opportunity structures can be facilitated by more immediate, rather than long-term, changes. In a fascinating analysis of food riots that swept through Argentina in 2001, Javier Auyero (2007) locates the emergence of opportunities for action in routine patronage politics whose clandestine networks were activated by political brokers. Auyero demonstrates that the opportunity to riot emerged via the spreading of “rumors” by political brokers amongst neighbors, friends and family who instructed one another to meet at a certain place and time, and to loot one store and not another. He also shows that political brokers then capitalized on a window of opportunity created by the riots to incite massive political change, notably the end of the presidency of Fernando De La Rúa. Finally, this analysis also demonstrates that both organic and synthetic forces can engender the emergence of short-term political opportunity structures.

Transitory economic crises are the forces of concern of this thesis that can engender the emergence political opportunity structures. An obvious case to highlight is the US economic crisis of 1929 that led to “a more pro-active management of the economy by the state and the extension of various social policies embodied in the New Deal” (Utting et al 2012: 10). More recently, Walton and Seddon (1994) illustrate that the global debt crisis of the early 1970s led to both an international wave of “austerity” protests, and to the widespread implementation of structural adjustment policies in many countries around the world. An important component of their analysis is the significance they attach to structures that operate at the global level, and to the reach that changes in these structures can have worldwide. They point out that the global economy in

particular has become much more integrated since the 1970s, and thus vulnerable to shocks not limited to a single place. Thus, economic crises, and the political opportunity structures they can engender for mobilization, are a phenomenon relevant for political change worldwide.

Yet, how do economic crises create structural changes that facilitate opportunities for collective action? It is helpful here to repeat the idea that economic crises create a distributional conflict of interest between the more asset wealthy elite and more asset poor majority (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). The emergence of a conflict of interest during a crisis indicates that prior to the crisis, a society had settled into a Pareto-inferior equilibrium, meaning that the economic arrangements of that society were not welfare maximizing (Drazen and Grilli 1993). Drazen and Grilli claim that breaking such an un-optimal arrangement and putting a society on a welfare-maximizing path is often only possible as a result of the distress caused by an economic crisis. This is because “the extreme welfare loss that each agent suffers in a crisis dwarfs the loss he may associate with an unfavorable distribution of the burden of a major policy change” (1993: 598).

According to Alesina and Drazen (1991), this distress manifests during economic crises as a “war of attrition.” The burden of economic stabilization engenders this war such that:

When socioeconomic groups perceive the possibility of shifting this burden elsewhere, each group may attempt to wait the other out. This war of attrition ends, and a stabilization is enacted, when certain groups ‘concede’

and allow their political opponents to decide on the allocation of the burden of fiscal adjustment. Concession may occur via legislative agreement, electoral outcomes, or ceding power of decree to policymakers. (Alesina and Drazen 1991: 1171)

Drazen and Grilli (1993) further that economic crises are often the only way to tip the favor to the majority during a war of attrition. They explain that, “The welfare losses associated with economic distortions and crises enable societies to enact measures that would be impossible to enact in less distortionary circumstances” (1993: 598). During such circumstances, distributional concessions are often less costly for authorities than an economically paralyzed populace and stagnated economy. Additionally, such measures are often less costly for elites than engaging in repressive tactics to quell coinciding periods of social unrest.

At the same time, the cost of public mobilization during economic crises is often lower for citizens than passively waiting the authorities out, as an acquiescent majority may be left to bear the burden of fiscal adjustment enacted for stabilization. Thus, Drazen and Gilli conclude that, “distortions and crises may raise welfare if they are the only way to induce necessary policy changes” (1993: 598). This welfare maximizing potential of economic crises speaks to Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2006) democratic window of opportunity thesis. As groups evaluate their position in the war of attrition, citizens often recognize during such events that political opportunity structures have emerged that may lower the cost and increase the returns to mobilization for democratic change.

Yet, while a crisis serves as the mechanism to facilitate a war of attrition, what are the formal structures in which changes occur that give rise to the democratic window of opportunity? The wide range of structures identified in the literature as those that engender political opportunities for mobilization makes providing a straightforward answer to this question difficult. Yet, as McAdam (1996) offers, a number of authors have sought to distinguish some relevant dimensions of the institutional or legal structures of a given political system that are essential to the notion of political opportunity structures. He claims that in analyzing these different dimensions, a fair amount of overlap exists in the literature that enables the establishment of a general typology of political opportunity structures. Drawing on these dimensions, McAdam (1996) identifies the four following elements as the primary structures:

1. The relative open or closure of the institutionalized political system
2. The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity
3. The presence or absence of elite allies
4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression (1996: 27).

This typology of political opportunity structures helps to advance our understanding of the emergence of the democratic window of opportunity created by economic crises. Particularly, it can be said that economic crises serve to open up a political system to changes not previously considered urgent, necessary, or possible to enact. Economic crises also serve to undermine the stability, and/or

existence of elite alliances, as various agents seek to maximize their position in the war of attrition, and thus may defect from previous coalitions. Finally, elite recourse to concessionary measures is often less costly than repressive tactics, as the scale of social conflict often increases during such crises, thereby increasing the cost of repression. Briefly stated, this explanation of McAdam's (1996) typology of political opportunity structures serves to operationalize an analysis of Acemoglu and Robinson's (2001, 2006) concept of the democratic window of opportunity as it is created during economic crises.

However, while the emergence of political opportunity structures may help to explain public mobilization that occurs during economic crises, many analysts argue that this theoretical orientation can be a "catch-all" that serves to neglect other important factors for collective action (Gamson and Meyer 1996). McAdam et al (1996) argue that in addition to political opportunity structures, it is also important to consider the impact of mobilizing structures and framing processes on prospects for mobilization. Mobilizing structures are the informal and formal networks that serve as building blocks for facilitating collective action. For instance, Tilly (1975) has underscored the role that various settings like occupation and neighborhood play in activating and spreading opportunities for contentious political activity. Additionally, McAdam (1982) demonstrates the impact of local black institutions such as churches and colleges in facilitating the American civil rights movement. Furthermore, Auyero (2007) points to local patronage networks that served in spreading rumors to incite the 2001 Argentine food riots. Thus, while political opportunity structures may be necessary for inciting popular political

mobilization, those structures may not be sufficient for activating networks for collection action. Mobilizing structures serve to mind this gap.

Still, other analysts seek to demonstrate that ideas create the impetus for contentious behavior just as significantly as structural conditions. This orientation highlights the importance of framing processes in the emergence of contentious politics. Framing processes are “the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation” (McAdam et al 1996: 5). Frames are “often markers of public opinion and are reflected in contemporary discourse” (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2012: 296). Key to framing processes is the presence of actors that are engaged in a deliberate effort to shape people’s understandings of issues and political developments. This idea underscores the role that organizations and institutions play in facilitating framing processes amongst associated members and networks, thus engendering even greater opportunities for mobilization. Actors within organizations often interpret and disseminate frames, serving as the bridge between ideas and action (McCarthy, Smith and Zald 1996).

Framing processes underscore the role that cultural elements play in inciting mobilization such that collective action is facilitated by shared understandings that legitimate, motivate and direct behavior. Indeed, this study engages the notion of framing processes as it relates to the emergence of collection action for democratic change during the 2008 food crisis in Central America. The role of framing processes can help explain how the shared understandings amongst citizens of their aspirations for and evaluations of democracy in their country

engendered collective action during the 2007-08 food price crisis. Furthermore, framing processes can also help to illustrate the development of a shared understanding amongst citizens that a democratic window of opportunity for mobilization emerged during the event.

Generally speaking, the application of the political opportunity structure concept from the social movement literature helps to advance the democratic window of opportunity thesis in the economic literature. However, as I have aimed to demonstrate in a review of the literature above, neither a purely ideological or structural approach to analysis can explain the emergence of public mobilization for political change that occurred in during the 2007-08 global food price crisis. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to offer a blueprint for future analysis on the matter that seeks to investigate both the impact of citizen political views and changing political opportunity structures in facilitating widespread social unrest during the crisis. Now I turn to a discussion of the proposed methodology, hypotheses and data that will be engaged to facilitate the investigation proposed in this thesis.

METHODOLOGY, HYPOTHESES AND DATA

Methodology

The theoretical groundwork offered above points to a number of questions that are necessary to analyze for a systematic investigation of the emergence of public mobilization for political change that occurred in during the 2007-08 global food price crisis. These questions are spelled out below. For the analysis, survey data will be used from the 2004, 2006, and 2008 wave of the Latin American Public Opinion Project administered in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. As of December 2012, all data will be available for public use free of charge. Additionally, various macro-level variables will be included in the analysis. A description of these variables is included below.

Because the data employed in the study engages both macro- and micro-level variables, the optimal method for analysis is multilevel regression models (see Norris 2011). Traditionally, most analyses of the sort proposed here employ Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models. However, it is now widely understood that OLS models can produce misleading results, resulting in exaggerated effects of macro-level variables (Norris 2011: 12). Moreover, the small sample size of countries ($n = 6$) in the study mitigates the ability to utilize regression analysis for comparative analyses between countries at the aggregate level. Thus, regression analysis will only be employed for analyses that utilize LAPOP survey data for each country. Additional tests such as analysis of variance

(ANOVA) and descriptive statistics will be used for the comparison of country differences at the aggregate level.

Hypotheses and data

The following section includes fifteen hypotheses that are drawn from a review of the literature above. Several of the hypotheses below suggest analysis at the level of individuals – these hypotheses will be labeled with an “I” indicating individual level analysis. Others suggest analysis at the level of cross-national aggregate comparisons – these hypotheses will be labeled with a “C” indicating country level analysis. The remaining hypotheses suggest analysis at both the individual and country level – these will be labeled with an “IC.” Finally, following each hypothesis is the identification of the variables and data that will be used to test the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1

Analyses of contemporary food riots link higher levels of human poverty with the likelihood of riots (Berezneva and Lee 2011). Furthermore, levels of inequality also play a role in the occurrence of food riots that occur during economic crises (Arezki and Bruckner 2011). Thus, these conclusions lead to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with higher levels of poverty and inequality than in countries with low levels of poverty and inequality.*

To test this hypothesis, the following macro-level indicators of poverty will be used:

- Human Poverty Index (Human Development Report 2008)
- Gini coefficients, a statistical measurement of the distribution of wealth across a country (World Bank)

Hypotheses 2-5

Also critical to the analysis are citizen perceptions of the state of their own economic welfare, as well as perceptions of their country's economic welfare during the crisis. As Lagi et al offer, "widespread unrest does not arise from long-standing political failings of the system, but rather from its sudden perceived failure to provide essential security to the population" (2011: 2). In the same vein, social movement theorists note the mobilizing impact that perceptions of "suddenly imposed grievances" have on mobilization (Laraña et al 1994). Thus, it is important to test for changes in citizen perceptions of their own, as well as their country's economic welfare during the crisis. The hypotheses to test these propositions include a comparative analysis that not only measures aggregate levels of citizen perceptions of economic welfare *between* countries on the eve of the riots, but also *within* country via the use of a time series analysis. These hypotheses include:

Hypothesis 2 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where people report high levels of individual economic insecurity than in countries where people report low levels of individual economic insecurity.*

Hypothesis 3 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with large changes in perceptions of individual economic insecurity than in countries with small changes in perceptions of individual economic insecurity.*

- LAPOP 2004, 2006, 2008 Survey Question IDIO1: *How would you describe your overall economic situation? Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad?*
- LAPOP 2004, 2006, 2008 Survey Question IDIO2: *Do you think that your economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago?*

Hypothesis 4 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens report high aggregate levels of national economic insecurity than in countries where citizens report low levels of national economic insecurity.*

Hypothesis 5 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with large changes in citizen perceptions of national economic insecurity than in countries with small changes in citizen perceptions of national economic insecurity.*

- LAPOP 2004, 2006, 2008 Survey Question SOCT1: *How would you describe the country's economic situation? Would you say that it is very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad?*
- LAPOP 2004, 2006, 2008 Survey Question IDIO2: *Do you think that the country's economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago?*

Hypothesis 6

Drawing on a number of studies discussed above that food riots are a manifestation of citizen dissatisfaction with political issues deeper than economic

security, it is necessary to comparatively analyze citizen satisfaction with their governments. As a starting point, Norris (2011) finds that in contemporary democracies, citizen satisfaction with the performance of their government largely reflects an emphasis on good quality governance procedures. These procedures are related to the perceived effectiveness of delivering material benefits through improved standards of living and public services, and through fighting corruption and crime. Based on these insights, we are lead to the sixth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens are not satisfied with the instrumental performance of their government than in countries where people are satisfied with the instrumental performance of their government.*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question N1: *To what extent would you say the current administration fights poverty?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question N3: *To what extent would you say the current administration combats government corruption?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question N11: *To what extent would you say the current administration improves citizen security?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question N12: *To what extent would you say the current administration combats unemployment?*

Hypothesis 7

On a similar note, Norris (2011) offers that studies indicate that the existence of corruption is a widespread concern amongst citizens of Latin America.

Hellman (2008) and Auyero (2007) also support these conclusions. Thus, a seventh hypothesis can be drawn:

Hypothesis 7 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens believe that a high level that corruption exists within their government than in countries where citizens believe a low level of corruption exists.*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question EPP2: *To what extent does corruption exist within your country's political parties? Report on a scale from 1-7.*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question EXC7: *Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption amongst public officials is: very common, common, uncommon, very uncommon?*

Hypothesis 8

On another level, the democratic window of opportunity thesis is based on the idea that citizens are dissatisfied with the workings of democracy in their country, regardless of whether they understand these workings to be based on instrumental or more intrinsic factors. Moreover, Norris (2011) presents evidence to show that those more dissatisfied with the way that democracy worked in their country were more willing to engage in protest. Thus, an eighth hypothesis arises:

Hypothesis 8 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens are dissatisfied with the democratic performance of their governments than citizens in countries where citizens are satisfied with the democratic performance of their governments.*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question PN4: *In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the form of democracy in your country?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question PN5: *In your opinion, is your country very democratic, somewhat democratic, not very democratic, not at all democratic?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question N3: *To what extent would you say the current administration promotes and protects democratic principles?*

Hypothesis 9

Also inherent to the democratic window of opportunity thesis is the assumption that citizens who capitalize on the democratic window of opportunity for mobilization during economic crises hold aspirations for democracy in their respective country. Norris (2011) furthers this idea when she presents evidence to show that democratic aspirations play a significant role in the occurrence of protest activism. Thus, this leads to the ninth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 9 (IC): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens express high levels of democratic aspirations than in countries where citizens express low levels of democratic aspirations.*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question ING4: *Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question DEM2: *With which one of the following statements do you agree with most? For people like me it doesn't matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic; Democracy is preferable to any other form of government; Under some circumstances an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one.*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Question DEM11: *Do you think that our country needs a government with an iron-fist, or that problems can be resolved with everyone's participation?*

Norris explains, however that levels of democratic aspiration may be impacted by factors such as age, educational levels, levels social trust and associational activism, aggregate levels of human development, quality of governance, and type of regime (2011). Thus, these factors will be controlled for in the model.

Hypothesis 10

Norris (2011) also provides evidence that demonstrates that those with democratic aspirations were significantly more likely to protest. These results provide resonance for the facilitating role that framing processes can play for mobilization during the democratic window of opportunity. Thus, a tenth hypothesis emerges:

Hypothesis 10 (I): *Citizens who express high levels of democratic aspiration are more willing to engage in protest than citizens who express low levels of democratic aspirations.*

- Composite measurement of democratic aspirations (see survey questions included in Hypothesis 9)
- LAPOP 2008 Survey PROT1: *Have you ever participated in a public demonstration or protest?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey PROT2: *And now thinking about the last twelve months, have you participated in a demonstration or protest march? Have you done it sometimes, almost never, or never?*

Hypothesis 11

As discussed above, citizen views and orientations only furnish part of the explanation of the occurrence of contentious political activity; structural theories of mobilization must also be taken into consideration. Walton and Ragin (1990) demonstrate that the occurrence of riots during the late twentieth century were associated with higher levels of urbanization, thereby indicating a “well-developed organizational infrastructure capable of mobilizing political action” (Walton and Seddon 1994: 45). Thus, an eleventh hypothesis arises:

Hypotheses 11 (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with high levels of urbanization than in countries with low levels of urbanization.*

- Coefficients calculated by regressing urbanization levels on GNP per capita will serve as an indicator of hyperurbanization (Walton and Ragin 1990)

Hypothesis 12

Furthermore, McAdam et al (1996) calls attention to the role that mobilizing

structures play in facilitating collective action. Thus, a twelfth hypothesis can be drawn:

Hypothesis 12 (I): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where a large number of citizens are engaged in formal organizations than in countries where few citizens are engaged in formal organizations.*

- LAPOP 2008 Survey Questions CP5: *In the last twelve months have you tried to help solve a problem in your community or in your neighborhood?*
- LAPOP 2008 Survey Questions CP6-20: *I am going to read a list of groups and organizations. Please tell me if you attend their meetings at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, or never.*

Levels of urbanization will be controlled for in this model.

Hypothesis 13-15

The democratic window of opportunity thesis warrants a consideration of the emergence of political opportunities during the crisis. The phenomena relevant to this consideration include the structures offered in McAdam's (1996) typology above, namely the relative open or closure of the institutionalized political system; the stability or instability of the broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; the presence or absence of elite allies; and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (1996: 27). Proxy variables can be used to operationalize the measurement of these structures. These proxies are identified below.

Hypothesis 13

The relative openness of a system can be measured by Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" assessment. This annual publication offers a global comparative evaluation of political rights and civil liberties based on a set of standardized scores. Walton and Ragin (1990) support that the level of formal civil and political rights determines the level of openness of a polity. Political freedoms proved a significant variable in Berezneva and Lee's (2011) study as they demonstrate a higher likelihood of protest occurrence during the 2007-08 crisis across African countries with fewer political freedoms. Thus, a thirteenth hypothesis can be tested:

Hypotheses 13 (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries where citizens have low levels of political freedoms than in countries where citizens have high levels of political freedoms.*

Hypothesis 14

Furthermore, the level of external debt held by a country can help to explain the stability of elite alignments of a polity. This proxy proved important in Walton and Ragin's (1990) analysis of riots that occurred in developing countries during the late twentieth century. The authors claim that the level of external debt service affects the fiscal viability and legitimacy of the state, thus making it more susceptible to "disintegration" and instability, and ultimately challenge during crises such as economic shocks. Taking a country's debt service-to-exports ratio

captures this variable, as the primary source of debt repayment is through exports (Walton and Ragin 1990).

Additionally, according to some theoretical orientations of world systems theory, this proxy also helps to explain a state's capacity for repression. It is believed that countries with high levels of debt are aggressively developmental, and thus may be more authoritarian. The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Database can also be used to measure the capacity or propensity for state repression. The CIRI database affords an estimation of the effects on human rights that occur as a result of institutional and public policy changes. While it may seem counterintuitive that states with a greater capacity for repression are associated with a greater likelihood of protest occurrence during 2008, Walton and Ragin (1990) offer that a state's repressive capacity is compromised during international crises such that heightened international awareness of regressive domestic actions are more costly during these events. Given these assumptions, hypothesis fourteen includes:

Hypothesis 14.a. (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with high levels of external debt than in countries with low levels of external debt.*

Hypothesis 14.b. (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with low levels of human rights than in countries with high levels of human rights.*

Hypothesis 15

Finally, given the historical presence and impact of patronage political networks in Latin America, the extent of elite allies can be estimated via Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index and the Global Corruption Barometer. Through a variety of ways, these tools capture the level of corruption that exists within a country's public and private sector, thus helping to shed light on the presence of elite allies. Thus, hypothesis fifteen is as follows:

Hypothesis 15 (C): *Food riots are more prevalent in countries with high levels of political corruption than in countries with low levels of political corruption.*

Overall, the inclusion of all fifteen hypotheses offers the opportunity for a systematic and comprehensive analysis that includes both individual and structural level factors to explain the political determinants of the food riots in Central America during the 2008 food price crisis.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I developed a framework for the systematic investigation of the political determinants of widespread protest that occurred during the 2007-08 global food price crisis. Broadly engaging Acemoglu and Robinson's (2001, 2006) theory of the democratic window of opportunity for mobilization engendered by transitory economic crises, I consider the role that both individual and structural factors play in promoting collective action for political change that occurs during such events. Fifteen hypotheses were offered that are grounded in theory on food riots, political culture, and political opportunity structures.

It is my hope that the results of the proposed study will contribute to several fields of interest. First, it is my goal to contribute to the literature on the democratic window of opportunity thesis, demonstrating that economic crises can engender the emergence of political opportunity structures for mobilization oriented towards political change. Second, I aim to shed new light on the study of political culture and its implications for contentious collective action, showing that protest is more likely to occur in democratic polities where citizen hopes for democracy are high, and their satisfaction with how democracy actually works in their country low. Finally, I intend to contribute to the discussion on food insecurity and the political nature of food riots in developing countries where levels of food insecurity is high. Ultimately, this thesis takes the form of a proposal for future research on the impact of citizen political views and changing political opportunity structures in facilitating widespread social unrest during transitory economic shocks.

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