

WHEN GRIEVANCES MATTER: PUBLIC SERVICE EVALUATIONS AND PROTEST IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

The contentious politics literature has long been divided on the extent to which grievances –or “dissatisfaction caused by deprivation” (Dalton et al., 2009)– drive citizen participation in protests. Do grievances motivate citizens to take to the streets? To shed light on how grievances affect protest, we focus on citizen evaluations of public service provision in Latin America. Scant research has examined the effect of poor public service delivery on contentious participation in emerging democracies. We highlight two mechanisms associated with public service evaluations that facilitate mobilization: 1) firsthand experience with poor governance and 2) clear attribution of responsibility for poor service provision. To test our argument, we utilize data from the 2012 and 2014 AmericasBarometer national surveys of Brazil, and then generalize to Latin America in multilevel models of protest drawing from 18 countries. The results are consistent: where firsthand experience with state incompetence fuels declining system support and specific attribution of blame for underperformance, as in the case of public service evaluations in Latin America, grievances fuel participation in protest.

Keywords: protest, public services, grievances, contentious politics, social movements

Introduction

As rates of protest participation have risen across the world (e.g., Dalton et al., 2009; Beaulieu, 2014; Moseley, 2018),

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the contentious politics literature has grappled with the relative importance of grievances in mobilizing collective actors. On the one hand, many accounts of protest events emphasize the economic motivations of claimants –e.g., youth unemployment in the Arab Spring (Campante and Chor, 2012) or state retrenchment in Latin America (Silva, 2009) during the neoliberal era. Yet, at the same time, empirical studies have found little evidence of grievance-motivated contention, highlighting instead the role of political opportunities and organizational resources as the key determinants of successful mobilization (e.g., Dalton et al., 2009; Machado et al., 2011; Arce, 2014; Boulding, 2014). Moreover, several studies have even attributed swelling rates of contention to economic *progress* (e.g., Moseley, 2018; Murillo and Mangonnet, 2016), thus offering accounts that are diametrically opposed to grievance-based interpretations of protest.

Against the backdrop of these apparent contradictions in the existing literature, we ask the following questions: To what extent do grievances motivate citizens to take to the streets? Further, do evaluations of public service delivery, in particular, help explain the recent explosion of mass protests across Latin America? Relatively little research has examined the role of poor public service delivery in spurring contentious participation.³ In focusing on public service protests in Latin America, we highlight two characteristics of this particular grievance that we argue facilitate mobilization: 1) firsthand experience with poor governance, which undermines faith in the political system, and 2) clear attribution of responsibility for poor service provision, which supplies citizens with targets for protest. Throughout much of Latin America, economic progress under recent center-left governments has resulted in expanded access to public services, yet in many cases their quality remains lackluster

³ One partial exception would be work on the case of South Africa (e.g., De Juan and Wegner, 2017).

(e.g., Levy and Schady, 2013). We argue that citizens connect public service quality to elected officials' performance and, through their firsthand experience with those services, are more motivated to seek redress than they would be if not due to that direct experience.

To test our argument, we utilize data from the 2012 and 2014 AmericasBarometer surveys, conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (Lapop). The AmericasBarometer surveys include not only a special battery of questions to gauge satisfaction with the quality of public health services, roads, and schools, but also contain an item on participation in recent protest demonstrations. We begin with a case study of Brazil, where protests erupting in 2013 have inspired numerous grievance-based explanations. In the analysis of survey data from Brazil, we find support for our central expectation that public services evaluations are strongly related to protest participation. Then, we generalize our argument to 18 Latin American democracies. Finally, we offer a test of the mechanisms we argue connect public service grievances and protest—namely, the role firsthand experience with poor governance plays in fueling declining trust in the political system and increased attribution of responsibility for poor governance. The results are consistent: in the case of public service evaluations, where individuals can credibly assess blame for poor governance based on firsthand experience, grievances can fuel citizen participation in protest.

Grievances and Protest: The Existing Literature

As long as protest has existed, so too have scholars endeavored to understand why some individuals go to great lengths to give voice to their claims, while others choose to abstain. Yet the study of protest behavior became modernized and scientific following World War II (Wilkinson, 2009). One of the most important modern breakthroughs in explaining protest behavior emerged in the 1960s and

stressed the importance of solving collective action problems. While previous scholarly work had mostly assumed that shared interest was enough to gather motivated actors together, Olson (1965) countered that individuals often have an incentive to free ride on the efforts of others because they can enjoy the benefits of coordinated action without contributing. In the absence of selective incentives, it is challenging to mobilize a group of individuals not just because of the costs of group formation, but the desire to free ride.

Eventually, two schools emerged that attempted to solve the collective action problem, forming a modern theoretical dichotomy in the protest literature: 1) grievance-based theories and 2) structural theories. The relationship between grievances, defined here as "dissatisfaction caused by deprivation" (Dalton et al., 2009; 6) and protest was most famously advanced by Ted Gurr in his classic work *Why Men Rebel* (1970). Gurr argues that in contexts characterized by high levels of poverty and low standards of living, protest and other forms of contentious activity are more likely (Gurr, 1970). Leaning on research from psychology, he claims that where the gap between citizens' expectations and the reality of their circumstances becomes too wide (i.e., "relative deprivation"), they lash out via more contentious modes of political behavior.

For much of the 1970s, grievance-based approaches predominated (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2013). The logic makes intuitive sense: individuals living in conditions that fail to meet their expectations should be more likely to engage in contentious behavior because they are frustrated with their current situation. Yet soon after the emergence of grievance-based arguments, a competing narrative emerged. Structural theories, in contrast to Gurr's argument, note that protests require individuals to have the necessary organizational resources and political know-how to mobilize contention, and these skills are often most highly developed in the affluent (Dalton et al., 2009). Re-

source mobilization theory thus implies that in many cases where grievances are present protests fail to materialize, and, on the other side of the coin, relatively minor grievances can balloon into massive protest movements when harnessed by skilled “political entrepreneurs” (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). According to this perspective, the presence of educated citizens and motivated elites who are sympathetic to a specific cause is more important for the success of a movement than poor living conditions. To support this claim, McAdam (1982) famously noted that African-American protests during the Civil Rights Movement only started to gain momentum after sympathetic Northern elites and black activists, fueled by an emerging African-American middle class and the growth of historically black universities, joined forces in the 1960s. In their cross-national study of the determinants of protest using data from the World Values Survey, Dalton et al. (2009) conclude, “without the resources and skills to become politically engaged... grievances are typically not translated into political action” (22).

The shift from grievance-based arguments to those focused on resources is also reflected in the literature on Latin America. While in the past scholars have argued that poverty and joblessness, particularly following the implementation of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s (Walton and Ragan, 1990; Silva, 2009), were a driving force in mobilizing protestors, much has changed in the region. In the past decade, Latin America has witnessed a rise in living standards with an increasing number of individuals joining the middle class. Moreover, in the 2000s many Latin American nations elected leftist and center-left politicians to the presidency in a wave known as the “pink tide” (Graham and Smith, 2012). Promising to direct more funding towards public goods provision, these leaders increasingly invested in programs such as health care and education, incorporating previous political “outsiders” in unprecedented ways (Garay, 2016). Yet, even in this era of relative economic

prosperity and democratic stability, protest rates *have actually risen* across the region (Mangonnet and Murillo, 2016; Moseley, 2018), presenting an important challenge to grievance-based theory.

At the same time, anecdotal evidence suggests it might be time to revisit the grievance thesis in Latin America. Recent upheaval in Brazil has widely been attributed to rampant corruption, high crime rates, and a sagging economy. The same goes for Venezuela, where a severe economic recession, triggered in the eyes of many by irresponsible fiscal policies and declining oil prices, has coincided with unprecedented rates of street-based participation. In Chile, a country characterized by relatively low rates of contention since democratization, student-led protests for educational reform have grabbed headlines since 2011. In short, journalistic accounts of recent protests across Latin America suggest some role for grievances –however, the question remains of just *how much* grievances matter, and under what conditions they propel citizens to the streets.

How Public Service Evaluations Fuel Protest Participation

Despite an extensive literature documenting the relatively weak relationship between grievances and collective action, we argue that perceptions of public service quality motivate protestors. This is based on two primary mechanisms: 1) poor public service provision offers citizens firsthand *experience* with poor governance, which erodes support for the political system, and 2) provides them with ammunition to blame high profile policymakers for substandard service quality. We address each step of this process in turn.

Declining System Support through Firsthand Experience with Poor Governance

Scholars in political science and sociology have long puzzled over the correlation between personal experience with

grievances and protest participation. Most theoretical work has revolved around individuals' ability to connect their own personal circumstances to larger societal problems. Studies have found that where individuals have personal experience with motivating claims, they are more motivated to take to the streets, so long as they connect those personal experiences to larger group concerns (e.g., Crosby, 1976) –a scenario that Foster and Matheson (1999) dub “double relative deprivation,” in that it affects both personal and group interests. For certain grievances, like discrimination, the linkage between personal experience and wider systemic injustices is not always apparent (Crosby et al., 1986). However, in the case of public service grievances, firsthand experience with poor governance provides clear evidence that highlights the state's general inability to satisfy its basic obligations to citizens.

Where personal grievances are clearly connected to poor governance, they can affect larger perceptions of the political system, and drive participation in politics. For example, Seligson (2006) argues and finds that *experience* with corruption has a stronger impact on regime legitimacy than perceptions of corruption. In her article on crime victimization and political participation, Bateson (2012) finds a nearly universal positive effect for experience with crime on the likelihood that individuals take part in elections, local community activities, and protest –in many cases, victims “seek assistance from elected officials or lobby for policy changes that are narrowly related to the crimes they have suffered” (571). Gingerich (2009) finds that experience with corruption pushes individuals to protest, implying a proactive response fueled by firsthand knowledge of public officials' involvement in political graft. Finally, in their study of South Africa, De Juan and Wegner (2017) uncover evidence that perceptions of public service quality are tightly correlated with general trust in government, and thus fuel protest. Given the tight correlation between support for the political system and protest participation (Moseley, 2018), we

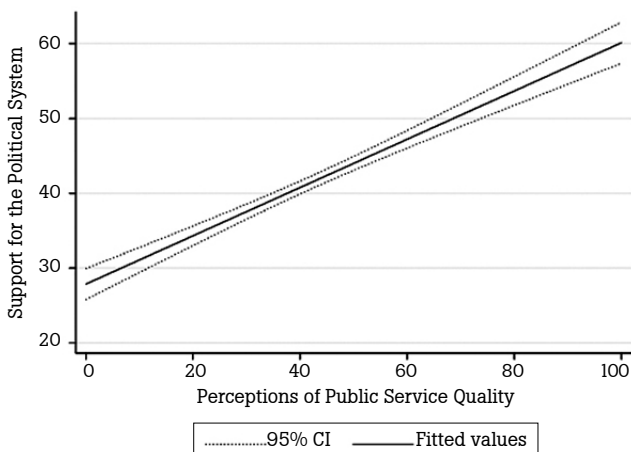
view the potential role that public service grievances play in diminishing such support as critical to understanding the connection between public service evaluations and protest behavior.

We argue that firsthand knowledge of poor governance can erode faith in core political institutions, and also provide the psychological jolt necessary to spur contention. That is, where mere perceptions of government performance can seem distant, actually suffering the consequences of such inadequacies carries a stronger impact on the likelihood that aggrieved individuals will take action against the government. In some ways, this argument seems at odds with findings from the economic voting literature, which has generally uncovered a powerful association between vote choice and sociotropic evaluations of the country's economy than pocketbook considerations (e. g., Markus, 1988) –in other words, a stronger effect for perceptions than firsthand experience. The difference, in our view, is that overcoming the significant costs associated with protesting requires extra motivation on the part of citizens, making it a fundamentally distinct act from voting. Where individuals have firsthand knowledge of the state's incompetence in providing quality healthcare services, schools, and roads, we argue they will be more positively inclined to take direct action against the government, overcoming traditional barriers to protest.

In the case of public service provision, a child's bad experience with resources at a local school or treatment at the public health clinic should thus carry more weight for a parent's decision to protest than reading about such inadequacies in the paper. The more tangible the grievance, the more likely we argue it produces a meaningful behavioral response. Yet as others have noted (Foster and Matheson, 1995; Walker and Mann, 1987), not all personal grievances translate into political action –in our view, that direct connection only heightens the probability that individuals will take action. One of the principal contributions of this study,

then, is to highlight the role that firsthand knowledge of poor service quality can have in diminishing support for the political system at large, and fueling potential anti-government action.

Figure 1.
Predicted Effects of Public Service Evaluations
on System Support



In terms of observable implications, we should therefore find that public service evaluations are positively associated with support for the political system. This expectation is borne out in Figure 1.⁴ Building on previous research (Moseley, 2018), we know that low levels of support for the political system are associated with an increased willingness to confront public officials for their ineffectiveness. Therefore, the declines in system support associated with negative evaluations of public service quality serve as a key mecha-

⁴ Figures 1 and 2 are graphs of linear predictions from estimated OLS regression models of system support and approval of anti-government protests on public service evaluations. "System support" comes from Booth and Seligson's (2009) measure of support for key regime institutions. See Appendix for question wording.

nism in explaining the relationship between public service grievances and protest. In our view, not all grievances are experienced in tangible ways by a broad enough swath of citizens to motivate protest. For example, mere *perceptions* of insecurity or poor economic conditions –widely considered to have motivated recent mobilization in Brazil (Simões, 2013)–without direct experience with those grievances might not create a strong enough trigger to actually incite action against the government. Our intention in this paper, then, is not only to demonstrate that public service evaluations are correlated with protest participation, but that one key mechanism by which this relationship exists lies in the effect of experience with poor governance on support for the political system.

The Downside of Credit-Claiming: Blaming Politicians for Poor Public Services

There is bountiful evidence that firsthand experience with poor governance can provide the additional motivation individuals need to translate grievances into action. Yet that increased “protest potential” requires a target for collective action. In the case of public service grievances, we argue the chain of responsibility is readily apparent to aggrieved citizens.

To this point, much of the literature on blame attribution has focused on performance voting, proposing conditions under which voters will punish politicians for poor economic performance, in particular. A number of studies have brought empirical evidence to bear on the question of blame attribution in different institutional contexts. Powell and Whitton (1993) were the first to argue that economic voting is contingent on the degree to which “clarity of responsibility” for past economic performance is readily accessible to voters. Anderson (1995) finds that economic voting is suppressed in countries led by coalition governments, as citizens find it more difficult to assign responsibility for economic underperformance to one specific party. In their comprehensive

treatment of the relationship between institutional settings and economic voting, Duch and Stevenson (2008) discover that where there is a high degree of state control over economic policy, voters are more likely to punish incumbents for perceived mismanagement (see also Carlin and Singh, 2015). Likewise, scholars have found that in federal systems, voters face a more difficult task in terms of blame attribution, balancing the relative culpability of provincial and national-level politicians (Atkeson and Partin, 1995).

Yet in the contentious politics literature, clarity of responsibility had not been thoroughly examined until Javeline's (2003) study of protest behavior in Russia in the late 1990s. By this point, grievance-based arguments had lost much of their cachet, and were often considered secondary to structural arguments. For Javeline, specificity in terms of blame attribution "reduces the costs of information, organization, and opportunity" (109), and thus makes the mobilization of contention more feasible. In her analysis of the wage arrears crisis in Russia, individuals who were able to make specific attributions of blame were five times more likely to protest than those who offered nebulous critiques. Further, she finds that political entrepreneurs can most efficiently mobilize individuals who offer non-specific critiques of public figures, given the already-high likelihood that citizens who offer specific attribution of blame will protest. Thus, "some grievances may compel the use of more resources than others to inform or convince members about blame successfully" (Javeline, 2003; 119).

There is some reason to believe that grievances have played a role in the normalization of protest in the region (Moseley, 2018), in part fueled by increasing clarity of responsibility. While in the recent past scholars have argued that poverty and joblessness, particularly following the implementation of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s (Silva, 2009), were a driving force in mobilizing protestors, much has changed in the region. Latin America has witnessed recently a rise in living standards with increasing numbers

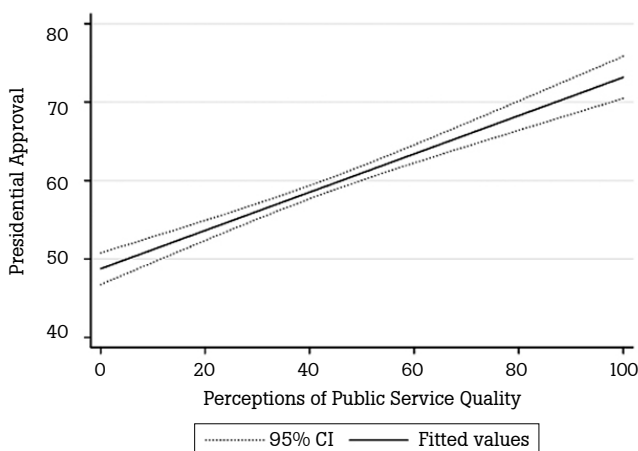
of individuals leaving lower socioeconomic brackets and joining the middle class, which has been fueled in part by an extension of the welfare state (Garay, 2016). One of the most important innovations has been the conditional cash transfer program, which presidents across the region have utilized not only to alleviate extreme poverty, but to boost their support at election time (Layton et al., 2017).

Indeed, many Latin American politicians have attempted to bolster public service provision in an explicit effort to woo voters. During the 1990s, Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso launched a new program, *Cartão Cidadão*, designed to facilitate transferring social welfare benefits. This card was introduced months before an election, and represented an attempt to claim credit for transfers (Garay, 2016). His successor, Lula da Silva, launched the famous *Bolsa Família* program in 2004, and reaped the electoral rewards when he was reelected in 2006. In Argentina, Néstor Kirchner launched policies negotiated with social movement leaders in direct response to their demands for improved pensions and health care services (Garay, 2007). The Argentine government also enacted universal child allowances during a time in which poverty rates happened to be lower than in previous years, with at least the partial objective of taking credit for benefits that would placate social movements and stop protests (Garay, 2016). In all of these cases, politicians endeavored to highlight their role in providing citizens with new and/or improved public services.

In direct contrast to Gurr's argument regarding poverty and contentious behavior, the significant gains made by large swaths of the population have not mitigated, but rather coincided with an *increase* in the number of those who have opted to take to the streets in places such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile (Moseley, 2018; Mangonnet and Murillo, 2016). In our view, this can be traced in part to the extension of the Latin American safety net, which in turn made more salient the connection between politicians (es-

pecially presidents) and public services. When many services were provided by the private sector, or presidents neglected to draw the connection between policy inputs and outputs, citizens found it more difficult to apportion blame for perceived underperformance. But now, those connections have been made clearer.

Figure 2.
Predicted Effects of Public Service Evaluations
on Presidential Approval



If public service grievances highlight issues related to poor governance, and citizens blame prominent politicians for said underperformance, then this could be a second pathway through which public service evaluations affect protest participation. Indeed, there appears to be a strong correlation between perceptions of public service quality and presidential approval (Figure 2), lending some credence to the notion that citizens blame prominent politicians for perceived state incompetence. The implication here is that grievances associated with a clear chain of responsibility—e.g., the quality of public services or corruption (see Tavits, 2007)—should be characterized by stronger predictive

power in explaining protest participation than grievances that are less easily traced to their origins –e.g., pocketbook economic evaluations (see Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981; also, Gomez and Wilson, 2001). We should also expect that the former class of grievances should be more strongly correlated with evaluations of politicians than the latter group.⁵ The extent to which public service grievances reflect poorly on elected officials, then, would seem to be an important mechanism by which evaluations of service quality translated into higher rates of protest participation.

A Grievance-Based Theory of Public Service Protests

Since Gurr (1970), much of the theory-building within the protest literature has shifted away from grievance-based arguments, focusing instead on access to organizational tools. There is no doubt that resources such as education, income, and social capital matter a great deal in determining who engages in protest. However, the shift away from grievance-based arguments has potentially obfuscated the importance of key variables. We argue that certain grievances have actually played an important role in mobilizing Latin American demonstrators in the 2010s. Specifically, the connection between the state's inability to provide satisfactory public services, such as health care, transportation, and education, and contentious behavior among citizens, is one that we seek to explore further here.

We argue that in the case of public service evaluations, the conditions are ripe for translating grievances into action. Evaluations of public services are particularly apt motivators of protest due to the combination of direct experience with poor governance, and the increasingly clear connec-

⁵ This probably depends on other factors, including the salience of the issue at that moment in time (Epstein and Segal, 2000), or individuals' awareness about politics (Zaller, 1992; Gomez and Wilson, 2001). In the case of grievances related to public service provision, we would thus expect such evaluations to be strongly correlated with presidential approval, and even more so among the politically interested during times of heightened grievance salience.

tion between politicians and service quality. The vast majority of Latin Americans believe that the state should take an active role in the educational and health sectors to reduce inequality (Lapop, 2012–2014), which places most Latin American countries far above countries like the U.S. and even Canada in terms of preferences for state intervention. With an increasing number of Latin American countries offering near-universal health coverage (World Bank, 2013) and access to public education (World Bank, 2017), not to mention citizens' automatic interaction with roads and other aspects of state infrastructure, the majority of Latin Americans have direct experience with these shortcomings in terms of public service delivery.

While Latin Americans have borne witness to increased access to public services like healthcare and education, the quality of those services has often lagged behind expectations. Due in part to a lack of tax revenue vis-à-vis OECD countries (Zovatto, 2015; Melguizo, 2017), Latin American countries often struggle to adequately fund education, healthcare, and infrastructure. As of 2011, millions of Latin American children were still not enrolled in school, and a preponderance of primary and secondary public schools are chronically underfunded (Unesco, 2013). Over half of citizens in most Latin American countries offer negative evaluations of the services available in their countries (Lapop, 2012–2014). Bribery at the point of delivery has also proven to be an intractable problem in many Latin American countries, with as many as one-third of those who accessed public services reporting paying a bribe to do so (Lapop, 2012–2014; Transparency International, 2017). Given the importance of public services in reducing inequality and fighting poverty, the current shortcomings of the public sector in Latin America could undermine future social and economic progress (Oxfam, 2017). Further, local observers have pointed to poor public service provision as a key motivator in recent episodes of contention from transportation in Brazil (Alves, 2013) to education in Chile (Long, 2011).

The general expectation, then, is that when individuals believe the state offers high quality public services, they should be less likely to engage in contentious behavior on average. When a government is perceived as ineffective in its duties, contentious behavior is more likely to occur. On the issue of public service delivery, citizens can apportion blame and have firsthand knowledge of state incompetence. Particularly within the context of Latin America, politicians have endeavored to connect their fate to expanded state services. Further, virtually all Latin American citizens have direct experience with some facet of public service provision, unlike perceptions of crime, corruption, or national economic performance, with which many citizens have not interacted firsthand. We argue this firsthand knowledge can erode support for political system, and provide citizens with targets for their frustration.

One key implication of our argument, then, is that public service evaluations should not be the only grievances associated with protest participation. Experience with corruption, for example, would seem to combine a relatively direct chain of responsibility with firsthand experience with poor governance (see Gingerich, 2009). The same could be true of crime victimization. Yet many of the individual and country level measures used to capture grievances in previous studies, like sociotropic and personal economic considerations or GDP growth (see Dalton et al., 2009), seem to require a more difficult calculus on the part of prospective protestors to attribute blame, or might be too distant to depress support for key regime institutions, and thus motivate participation. Our expectation is that public service evaluations will be more powerfully associated with protest participation due to the reasons outlined above.

To our knowledge, no study has yet explored how public service evaluations are associated with protest participation in Latin America, or across countries. However, a recent article on South Africa finds a positive and significant relationship between access to basic public services (e.g.,

water, electricity, and plumbing) and the incidence of violent and non-violent protests (De Juan and Wegner, 2017). The authors identify the phenomenon connecting the two as “horizontal inequality,” a form of relative deprivation in which individuals compare public service inadequacies in their own neighborhoods with more effective delivery in neighboring areas. In the case of public services like health, education, and transit infrastructure, it is unclear that relative deprivation would be the mechanism at work. Evaluations of these public services are unrelated to social class, leading us to believe that the role poor perceived delivery plays in mobilizing protestors has more to do with the signals it sends to citizens regarding state incompetence and responsibility than its effect on aggrieved individuals’ objective well-being vis-à-vis other citizens. In our view, negative public service evaluations represent a grievance that lowers barriers to participate in protests –we intend to provide an empirical test of that perspective in the following section.

Data and Measurement

To test our argument, we utilize data from the 2012 and 2014 AmericasBarometer national surveys of Brazil, and then generalize those results to AmericasBarometer data from 18 Latin American countries. The AmericasBarometer surveys are conducted biennially by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (Lapop), housed at Vanderbilt University. Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer has measured democratic attitudes and behaviors using national probability samples of voting-age adults in countries throughout the Western Hemisphere.⁶

We choose the Brazilian case for a number of reasons. First, recent protests in Brazil have inspired numer-

⁶ For more information on the Lapop, its sources of funding, and the sampling methodology and question wording employed, please visit www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/. See Appendix for descriptive statistics.

ous grievance-based explanations, ranging from corruption (Rose-Ackerman, 2017) to economic recession (Carvalho, 2017) to poor public service provision (Watts, 2013). Brazil thus offers an excellent test case to adjudicate between rival grievance-based explanations. Second, Brazil went from being a relatively low protest country in 2012 to a highly contentious case in 2014 (Moseley and Layton, 2014). Drawing on two national surveys carried out in two very distinct contexts thus helps us generalize to other Latin American countries. Finally, as the region's largest democracy and economy, and currently at a crossroads following Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and the rise of far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro, we argue the Brazilian case is particularly vital to understanding the contentious consequences of grievances in Latin America.

Our dependent variable is whether or not individuals report participating in a street march or demonstration during the prior 12 months. This provides a relatively straightforward measure of the common street-based activism that has been on the rise in Latin America in recent years (Moseley, 2018). Our key independent variable is an index drawn from three specific survey items. In 2012, the AmericasBarometer began to include three specific questions aimed to gauge citizen evaluations of the quality of public services in their community. These included questions about the quality of roads, the quality of public education, and the quality of public health services. We combine responses to these three questions in a single index we call the *Public Services Index*, but also run a regional model that includes each variable separately that we include in the Appendix Table A4.

In addition to measuring perceptions of public services, we include several variables to estimate the effects of a variety of potential protest-motivating grievances. These include corruption and crime victimization, perceptions of the government's effort to combat corruption, perception of crime in one's neighborhood, and sociotropic and pock-

etbook economic evaluations (all are scaled 0–100). In the regional analysis, in which we utilize multilevel modeling techniques, we also include second level economic variables like inequality (GINI), economic growth, and unemployment, given the potential relevance of these trends in motivating protest behavior. Each logistic regression model also includes controls for skin color, sex, age, wealth, level of education, civic activism, and the size of city where the individual lives. Altogether, these variables form a comprehensive list of reasons why individuals might take to the streets.

In the second section of the analysis, we also report results from a Sobel-Goodman mediation test, which is designed to offer evidence for the mechanisms we argue connect public service grievances and protest participation. We use the AmericasBarometer measure for system support, which we believe will capture the extent to which experience with poor governance causes citizens to lose faith in key regime institutions, including trust in congress, the courts, and pride in the system (Booth and Seligson, 2009; see Appendix). To measure whether public service grievances translate into more negative evaluations of incumbent politicians, as predicted by our theory, we use a simple measure of presidential approval. Our expectation is that while the relationship between public service evaluations and protest is significant, part of that effect flows through the two mechanisms we describe above.

We therefore adopt a two-stage approach to testing our hypotheses. First, we evaluate which grievances are most strongly associated with protest in the Brazilian case, utilizing logistic regression analysis of complex survey data. We then provide a general sense of the relationship between public service evaluations and protest participation across Latin America, estimating regional models of protest which include fixed effects for country and survey year, and second level variables for inequality (GINI), economic

growth, and unemployment.⁷ Then, we test for the mechanisms we argue make public service grievances a potent source of protest activity –declining support for the political system and more negative evaluations of incumbent presidents. These complementary approaches allow us to both offer a generalizable account of the relationship between public service grievances and protest, while also increasing internal validity by focusing on a country where we have a clear understanding of the nature of contention at that moment and highlighting the mechanisms through which service evaluations and protest are related.

Results

In Table 1, we present results of two estimated logistic regression models of protest participation in Brazil, pooling data from the 2012 and 2014 country surveys while including a dummy for survey year. Model 1 includes only control variables, whereas Model 2 includes a set of relevant grievances. Both models reveal a significant negative relationship between public service evaluations and reported protest participation. In Model 2, only two grievances are significantly related to protest –public service evaluations and crime victimization. All other grievances are uncorrelated with protest participation, though corruption victimization nears statistical significance ($p < .12$). Further, it appears that wealth actually has a positive and statistically significant effect on protest participation, along with community activism and education. These results thus produce little evidence for a theory of relative deprivation, given that protestors seem to come from more privileged backgrounds in the case of Brazil.

⁷ We supplement standard logistic regression models of participation with an instrumental variables approach, which helps account for issues related to endogeneity, and present those findings in the Appendix Table A2.

Table 1.
Estimated Logistic Regression Models of Protest in Brazil

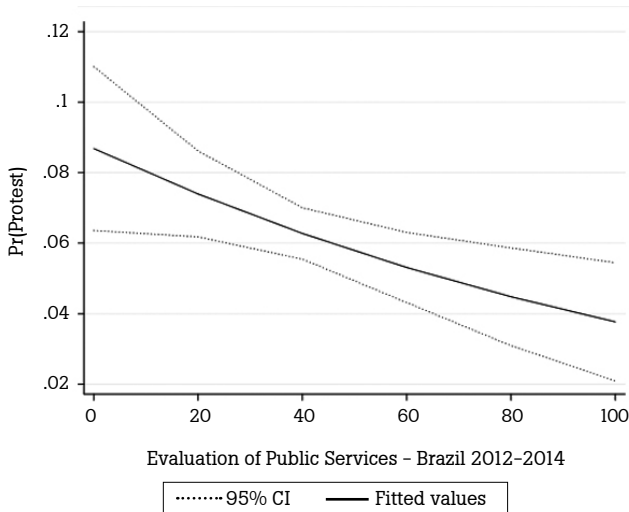
Variables	DV: Protest Participation (0 or 1)	
	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Perception of Public Service Quality</i>	-0.012*** (0.004)	-0.009** (0.005)
Skin Color	-0.009 (0.038)	-0.008 (0.039)
Female	-0.192 (0.160)	-0.130 (0.164)
Age	-0.031*** (0.007)	-0.031*** (0.007)
Wealth Quintile	0.132** (0.065)	0.127* (0.066)
Education	0.131*** (0.026)	0.128*** (0.027)
Community Activism	0.018*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.004)
Urban	-0.491 (0.360)	-0.433 (0.365)
Size of Place	-0.045 (0.082)	-0.015 (0.085)
Corruption Victim		0.003 (0.002)
Crime Victim		0.005*** (0.002)
Perception of Crime		0.000 (0.003)
Perception of Efforts to Combat Corruption		-0.001 (0.003)
Sociotropic Economic Evaluation		-0.000 (0.002)
Pocketbook Economic Evaluation		0.001 (0.002)
2014	0.574*** (0.165)	0.605*** (0.177)
Constant	-2.696*** (0.653)	-3.206*** (0.703)
Observations	2,974	2,853

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

On substantive effects, again it appears that public service evaluations outpace other grievances in terms of protest potential—a decrease from the most positive opinion of public service quality to the lowest evaluation more than doubles the likelihood that individuals have participated in a street march or demonstration during the previous year (Figure 3). These effects fail to achieve the substantive importance of education or community participation, which can increase the odds of participation by as much as 500 percent, and thus offer support for the resource mobilization framework. Still, the observed effects for public service evaluations register as consequential in terms of understanding recent protests in Brazil.

Figure 3.
Predicted Probabilities of Protest Participation in Brazil
(2012-2014)



Put simply, a less focused investigation of how grievances are correlated with protest in Brazil might lead to the conclusion that they do not particularly matter in understanding contentious behavior. Sociotropic and pocketbook

evaluations fail to exert significant effects on the probability that individuals protest, nor do protestors seem to come from marginalized populations. However, when individuals have firsthand experience with state incompetence and can reasonably attribute blame –as we argue is the case with public service evaluations– it is clear that grievances are correlated with mobilization.

Table 2 reports results from two logistic regression models of protest participation across 18 countries in Latin America. Model 3 includes only control variables at the individual and country levels, while Model 4 includes the full battery of grievances from Model 2, along with second-level economic variables that could reveal evidence of protest spiking during hard economic times. Results from both models lend strong support to the notion that public service evaluations are associated with the decision to protest.

Table 2.
Estimated Logistic Regression Models of Protest
in Latin America

Variables	DV: Protest Participation (0 or 1)	
	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Perception of Public Service Quality</i>	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)
Skin Color	0.036*** (0.010)	0.035*** (0.010)
Female	-0.344*** (0.032)	-0.288*** (0.034)
Age	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)
Wealth Quintile	0.024* (0.013)	0.014 (0.013)
Education	0.055*** (0.004)	0.050*** (0.005)
Community Activism	0.016*** (0.001)	0.014*** (0.001)
Urban	-0.003 (0.060)	0.033 (0.062)
Size of Place	-0.062***	-0.034*

	(0.017)	(0.018)
Corruption Victim		0.005***
		(0.000)
Crime Victim		0.005***
		(0.000)
Perception of Crime		-0.000
		(0.001)
Perception of Efforts to Combat Corruption		0.000
		(0.001)
Sociotropic Economic Evaluation		0.000
		(0.001)
Pocketbook Economic Evaluation		-0.001
		(0.001)
2014	-0.033	-0.033
	(0.077)	(0.074)
GINI	3.638	4.194
	(7.841)	(7.590)
GDP Growth	-0.044*	-0.044**
	(0.023)	(0.022)
Unemployment	-0.099	-0.103
	(0.100)	(0.097)
Constant	-4.147	-5.014
	(3.871)	(3.746)
Observations	56,354	53,364
Number of Country Years	36	36

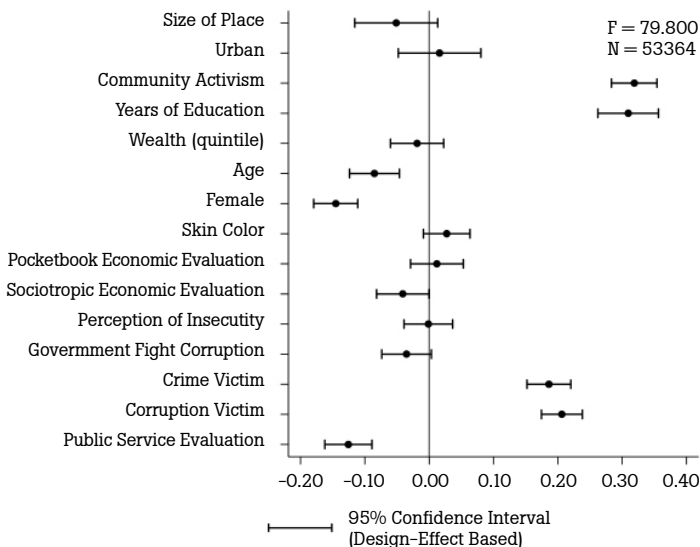
Standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

According to the results of the two models, public service evaluations have a significant negative impact on the likelihood that individuals take part in protests. In other words, an increase in the perceived quality of roads, schools, and public health services decreases the probability that one will take to the streets. Other grievances are also significant predictors of protest –namely, corruption and crime victimization. On the other hand, perceptions of crime, corruption, and the current economic situation (either personal or sociotropic) fail to achieve statistical significance.

Figure 3 plots standardized coefficients to better compare the relative import of each variable in Model 4. Clearly, having direct experience with crime or corruption is significantly associated with protest participation, in keeping with findings from Gingerich (2009). Among all of the variables in the model, public service evaluations seem to have one of the strongest *negative* effects on protest behavior. To put this in perspective, moving from the most negative to most positive evaluations of public services decreases the probability of protesting by nearly 70 percent. Finally, it should be noted that education and community activism continue to exert the strongest effects on protest participation, in keeping with the resource mobilization approach to understanding contention and recent findings from the protest literature (Figure 3).

Figure 4.
Predictors of Protest Participation in Latin America
(Standardized coefficients)



Source: AmericasBarometer by Lapop.

We fail to uncover much support for the notion that country-level grievances exert significant influence on individual level protest behavior, yet we must caution that this analysis draws on only 18 country cases over two rounds of the AmericasBarometer. There is some initial evidence that economic downturns have a slight impact on the likelihood that individuals will protest (a 5% decrease in growth rate results in a .02 shift in the probability of protesting), yet we find little effect for either inequality or unemployment. A country-level analysis of the effect of economic factors on rates of activism would therefore find little evidence for grievance-based protest in Latin America. Yet we find compelling evidence that grievances can correlate with protest participation, as is the case with perceptions of public service quality. In the following section, we seek to shed light on the mechanisms by which public service grievances translate into protest participation.

Testing for Causal Mechanisms using Sobel-Goodman Mediation Tests

Our argument rests on the notion that public service grievances activate protestors through firsthand experience with poor governance, which makes citizens more critical of the political system, and supplies them with targets for claim making. In this section, we carry out a Sobel-Goodman mediation test to evaluate the extent to which 1) system support and 2) presidential approval serve as mediators in the relationship between public service grievances and protest participation.

The Sobel-Goodman approach tests whether a mediator carries at least part of the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable of interest (Sobel, 1982). It constitutes an effective way of testing for the presence of an important causal mechanism –in this case, we aim to ascertain if the effect of public service evaluations flows to the probability of protesting through declining system support, and more negative evaluations of incumbent politicians.

Our argument is that firsthand experience with poor governance via substandard public service delivery decreases support for key regime institutions and elevates blame directed at incumbent politicians (in this case, the president).⁸ While we have already reported graphs indicating the strong relationship between public service evaluations and both system support and presidential approval, this statistical approach represents a more direct test of the notion that these two variables serve as important mechanisms connecting public service grievances and protest participation.

Table 3.
Results of Sobel-Goodman Mediation Tests

	Brazil		Latin America	
	<i>System Support</i>	<i>Presidential Approval</i>	<i>System Support</i>	<i>Presidential Approval</i>
Sobel-Goodman Test Coeff.	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.009** (0.005)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.002)
Proportion of Total Effect Mediated	0.08	0.15	0.16	0.16

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table 3 reports results from the Sobel-Goodman mediation tests, which control for the same battery of individual level variables included in the models presented in Tables 1 and 2. They indicate that, except in the case of system support in Brazil, our expectations are borne out –individuals' firsthand experience with poor governance translates into an increased likelihood of protesting through declining system support (in Latin America) and more negative evaluations of the incumbent president (Brazil and Latin America). Significant results indicate an important reduction in the

⁸ We lack a measure across Latin American countries that asks respondents to rate any other single elected official other than the president, but given what we know about recent credit-claiming for service improvement by presidents, it seems like the most appropriate test of our argument.

effect of public service evaluations on protest when the mediator is included in the model –in other words, in the models of protest in Latin America, more than 0.30 of the total effect exerted by perceptions of public service quality on the likelihood of protest is the result of their impact on system support and presidential approval, which in turn makes individuals more likely to protest. The absence of a mediation effect for system support in Brazil indicates that public service evaluations affect protest through other pathways, and runs counter to results from South Africa (De Juan and Wegner, 2017).

Overall, the results provide support for the two mechanisms we identify in our argument as connectors between public service grievances and protest participation. While public service evaluations clearly exert an independent effect on the likelihood that individuals protest, they also depress system support and presidential approval, which in turn are positively associated with the probability of protesting. Public service evaluations thus represent a grievance that enables citizens to connect their own personal experiences with poor governance, and then provides individuals with a target for their discontent. When grievances are characterized by these important protest-producing factors, they can indeed matter in understanding recent protest participation in Latin America.

Conclusion

The increasing salience of protest in many parts of Latin America in the 2010s calls for scholarly attention to the sources and consequences of popular contention. While previous work has demonstrated the importance of individual-level variables like community activism and education as predictors of protest, this paper has sought to shed light on the importance of grievances –in particular, dissatisfaction with the quality of public services–in mobilizing citizens. We find that while the organizational resources

stressed in the extant literature very clearly matter for understanding protest participation, grievances too can push citizens to the streets under certain conditions.

The importance of public service evaluations as a predictor of protest in Latin America is indicative of a number of phenomena, chief of which is the importance of individuals increasingly making connections between their own living conditions and government performance. Where citizens perceive blame for poor public services and have direct knowledge of poor governance, they are more prone to seeking redress through contentious modes of behavior. Latin Americans are widely supportive of democratic governance and a more interventionist state, and where the state fails to deliver on those expectations, citizens across the region have shown a willingness to hold public officials accountable through non-institutional methods.

Recent work has indicated that the surge in protest participation across Latin America is not a sign of creeping extremism, but rather a conventional response to poor government performance amid high levels of citizen engagement in politics (Moseley, 2018). The findings presented here complement that perspective, as we shed light on one particularly important sphere in which Latin American regime performance leaves much to be desired, and has thus played an important part in sparking contentious participation. While not all grievances translate into action, claims regarding public service provision satisfy the key criteria that seem to make protest more likely. In this new era of democratic governance and citizen engagement in politics in Latin America, policymakers can no longer expect citizen complacency with respect to poor governance.

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Appendix

**Table A1.
Question Wording and Descriptive Statistics
(Regional Statistics)**

Variable	Question Wording or Explanation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
<i>Dependent Variables</i>						
Protest Participation	"In the last 12 months, have you participated in a demonstration or protest march?" 0-No, 100-Yes	57,829	8.06	27.22	0	100
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Public Service Evaluations	A weighted index of three questions asking respondents about the quality of roads, schools, and health services. 0-Lowest, 100-Highest.	58,102	51.02	19.10	0	100
System Support	A weighted index of five questions that measure support for the existing system. The five ask respondents "To what extent do you think the courts of justice guarantee a fair trial?," "To what extent do you respect the political institutions of (country)?," "To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the political system of (country)?," "To what extent do you feel proud of living under the political system of (country)?," and "To what extent do you think that one should support the political system of (country)?" 0-Lowest, 100-Highest	57,166	51.80	23.56	0	100
Presidential Approval	"Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President NAME CURRENT PRESIDENT?" 0-Lowest, 100-Highest.	57,413	56.81	24.37	0	100
Satisfaction with Health Services	"And thinking about this city/area where you live, are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the condition of public health services?" Originally 1-Very Satisfied, 4-Very Dissatisfied. Very Satisfied Converted to 100 point index, 0-Lowest, 100 Highest.	55,870	47.99	25.62	0	100
Corruption Victim	Dummy variable asking individuals if they were victims of corruption. 0-No, 100-Yes.	58,174	20.51	40.38	0	100

Crime Victim	"Has any other person living in your household been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, has any other person living in your household been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?" 0-No, 100-Yes.	58,088	32.17	46.71	0	100
Perception of Crime	"Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe?" Originally 1-Very Safe, 4-Very Unsafe. Converted to 100 point index, 0-Lowest, 100 Highest.	57,942	43.52	29.95	0	100
Government Efforts to Fight Crime	"To what extent would you say the current administration combats (fights) government corruption?" Originally 1-Not at All, 7-A Lot. Converted to 100 point index, 0-Lowest, 100 Highest.	56,382	42.42	30.30	0	100
Sociotropic Economic Situation	"Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?" 0-Worse, 50-Same, 100-Better.	57,452	38.14	36.00	0	100
Pocketbook Economic Situation	"Do you think that your economic situation is better than, the same as, or worse than it was 12 months ago?" 0-Worse, 50-Same, 100-Better.	57,809	45.33	35.04	0	100
Skin Color	"[When the interview is complete, WITHOUT asking, please use the color chart and circle the number that most closely corresponds to the color of the face of the respondent]" 1-Lightest, 11-Darkest	58,072	4.49	1.69	1	11
Female	Sex of individual. 1 if male, 2 if female.	58,230	1.51	0.50	1	2
Age	Age of individual. Theoretically can be anywhere between 0 into the 100s.	57,958	40.33	16.10	16	99
Wealth Quintile	A weighted index that measures wealth based on the possession of certain household goods such as televisions, refrigerators, conventional and cellular telephones, vehicles, washing machines, microwave ovens, indoor plumbing, indoor bathrooms and computers. 1-Lowest, 5-Highest	57,681	2.95	1.42	1	5

Education	"How many years of schooling have you completed?" 0-Lowest, 18+ Highest.	57,933	9.31	4.52	0	18
Urban	1 if interview took place in urban setting; 2 if rural.	58,231	1.29	0.45	1	2
Size of Place	1 if National Capital (Metropolitan Area); 2 if Large City; 3 if Medium City; 4 if Small City; 5 if Rural Area	58,231	3.07	1.51	1	5
2014	Control for the year 2014.	-	-	-	-	-
Accessed Public Health Services	"Have you used any public health services in the last twelve months?" 0-No, 100-Yes.	31,445	7.43	26.22	0	100
Presidential Approval	Same as Above Dependent Variable.	-	-	-	-	-
Ideology	Ideology placement that goes from 1-10 with 1 being most liberal and 10 most conservative.	47,858	5.49	2.68	1	10
Community Participation	A weighted index of community participation in religious associations, parents' associations at schools, and community organizations. 0-Lowest, 100-Highest.	58,207	27.37	23.30	0	100
GINI	GINI coefficient for each country year.	58,231	0.48	0.04	0.41	0.57
Economic Growth	Economic growth for each country year.	58,231	3.74	2.44	-4.0	10.2
Unemployment	Unemployment rate for each country year.	58,231	6.17	2.84	2.3	14.7

In spite of this compelling initial evidence that grievances surrounding public service provision are associated with swelling rates of contention, the possibility remains that this relationship is spurious for two reasons: 1) participation in protests actually increases awareness about public service provision, and thus fuels lower evaluations, and 2) evaluations of public service provision are shaped by evaluations of political actors and thus are not truly objective. To account for these limitations in our first two models, we use an instrumental approach that endeavors to extract what is exogenous from public service evaluations and determine if it indeed shapes protest participation.

The logic of instrumental variables regression goes as follows: when one suspects a key independent variable is endogenously related to the dependent variable of interest,

it must identify an instrument that satisfies two conditions. First, the instrument must be correlated with the endogenous regressor –in this case, public service evaluations. Second, the instrument must be uncorrelated with the error term –in other words, it satisfies the exclusion restriction (Dunning, 2012). In our case, the exclusion restriction requires that the instrument only affects protest participation through perceptions of public service quality. The instrument we have chosen comes from a survey item included in the 2014 AmericasBarometer designed to measure state capacity (Luna and Soifer, 2015). It asks how long it would take for the police to arrive at your house if you called them (Lapop, 2014). Unsurprisingly, this variable is highly related to perceptions of public service quality ($r = -0.21^{***}$), and wholly unrelated to protest participation ($r = -0.01$).

Table A2.
Public Service Evaluations and Protest in Latin America -
IV Regression

Variables	(1)
<i>Second stage (DV = Protest Participation)</i>	
Public Service Index	-0.086** (0.043)
Female	-1.613*** (0.334)
Age	-0.065*** (0.010)
Wealth (quintile)	0.848*** (0.120)
Skin Color	0.410*** (0.104)
Constant	13.201*** (2.353)
<i>First stage (DV = Public Service Index)</i>	
Police Response Time	-2.694*** (0.077)

Female	0.378*
	(0.222)
Age	0.042***
	(0.007)
Wealth (quintile)	-0.436***
	(0.080)
Skin Color	0.250***
	(0.070)
Constant	57.192***
	(0.690)
Observations	27,190
R-squared	0.007

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A2 reports results from an instrumental variables regression model (2SLS). The first stage models perceptions of public service provision includes our measure for state capacity, while the second stage models participation in a protest. Given the nature of the exclusion, we only include other covariates that are completely exogenous to protest participation –i.e., age, gender, wealth, and skin color (Sovey and Green, 2011). The results indicate that after purging our results of the potential bias associated with an endogenous regressor, the results presented about hold. This suggests that the causal arrow flows primarily from public service evaluations to protest rather than the other way around. It also rules out the possibility that public service evaluations are actually proxies for presidential approval as we argue that our state capacity measure is largely independent from political affiliations.

Table A3.
Public Service Evaluations and Presidential Approval in Brazil -
Separate 2012 and 2014 Models

Variables	DV: Presidential Approval in 2012 (0-100) (1)	DV: Presidential Approval in 2014 (0-100) (2)
Public Service Evaluations	0.138*** (0.037)	0.075 (0.050)
Interest in Politics	0.094*** (0.036)	-0.110** (0.047)
<i>Public Service Evaluations x Interest in Politics</i>	-0.001 <i>(0.001)</i>	0.003*** <i>(0.001)</i>
Corruption Victim	-0.039** (0.016)	-0.016 (0.018)
Crime Victim	-0.006 (0.012)	-0.009 (0.014)
Perception of Crime	-0.020 (0.017)	-0.010 (0.019)
Government Efforts to Fight Crime	0.141*** (0.017)	0.197*** (0.022)
Sociotropic Economic Situation	0.092*** (0.017)	0.116*** (0.017)
Pocketbook Economic Situation	0.036** (0.015)	0.068*** (0.018)
Skin Color	-0.118 (0.214)	0.046 (0.305)
Female	1.037 (0.999)	2.878** (1.215)
Age	0.064* (0.039)	-0.019 (0.042)
Wealth Quintile	-0.740* (0.389)	-1.845*** (0.496)
Education	0.128 (0.161)	-0.528*** (0.190)
Urban	2.817 (1.896)	3.060 (2.483)
Size	0.003 (0.429)	0.179 (0.810)

Constant	60.441*** (4.545)	64.464*** (5.650)
Observations	1,409	1,438
R-squared	0.138	0.237

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A4.
Public Service Evaluations and Protest in Latin America

Variables	DV: Participated in a Protest (0 or 1) (1)
<i>Health</i>	-0.002** (0.001)
<i>Roads</i>	-0.001 (0.001)
<i>Schools</i>	-0.002** (0.001)
Corruption Victim	0.005*** (0.000)
Crime Victim	0.005*** (0.000)
Government Efforts to Fight Crime	-0.000 (0.001)
Perception of Crime	0.000 (0.001)
Sociotropic Economic Situation	0.0002 (0.0005)
Pocketbook Economic Situation	-0.0005 (0.0005)
Skin Color	0.030*** (0.011)
Female	-0.298*** (0.035)
Age	-0.005*** (0.001)

Wealth Quintile	0.012 (0.014)
Education	0.051*** (0.005)
Community Participation	0.014*** (0.001)
Urban	0.017 (0.064)
Size of Place	-0.027 (0.019)
GINI	3.653 (7.929)
Economic Growth	-0.045** (0.023)
Unemployment	-0.131 (0.101)
Constant	-4.619 (3.915)
Observations	48,420
Number of Country Years	36

Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$