Social Movements and Processes of Political Change:
The Political Outcomes of the Chilean Student Movement, 2011-2015

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Research Puzzle & Research Question

• Comprehensive body of literature on social movement emergence but comparatively little research on their political outcomes

• **Research Question:** What are the political outcomes of social movements, and how are these outcomes achieved?
  
  • *What were the political outcomes of the Chilean student movement, and how were these outcomes achieved?*
Theoretical Context

• **Political Outcomes:**
  • Disproportionate focus on *policy* outcomes
  • Overlooks non-institutional outcomes

• **Mechanisms:**
  • Theoretical understanding of *how* movements cause political change is underdeveloped
  • Existing theories based primarily on movements in northern democracies
    • Disruption mechanism
    • Political access mechanism
    • Public opinion shift mechanism
My Argument

• Non-institutional outcomes are a key form of political change

• Social movements achieve their outcomes through *simultaneous activation* of various causal mechanisms
So What?

- Insights into scholarly debate about causes of political change

**Theoretical Significance**
- Develops an original framework that integrates various political outcomes
  - A multidimensional conceptualization of political change
- Advances a theory of *how* social movements cause political change (causal mechanisms)
- Adds a new case to political outcomes literature
Research Design

• Why the 2011 Chilean student movement?
  • Typical case
  • Data rich
  • Social movement in developing world

• Multi-methods approach
  • Qualitative interviews with 10 student leaders
  • Analysis of public opinion data
  • Content analysis of presidential platforms and speeches
  • Process tracing
Empirical Findings

The political outcomes of the 2011 Chilean student movement

- Bachelet and Piñera administrations, and the Chilean Congress
  - Procedural change
  - New political party
  - 4 former student leaders in Congress

- The media:
  - La Tercera
  - El Mercurio
  - El Mostrador
  - Education on political agenda
  - Education reform

- Changes in political consciousness of movement participants and Chilean citizenry
  - Public opinion change

Key:
- Causal mechanism
- Feedback effects
Empirical Findings: Key Political Outcomes

• Policy change: education reform passed in 2015

• Changes in political consciousness (non-institutional outcome)
  • Increased politicization of movement participants and Chilean citizenry
The fact that today politicians talk about education as a right is precisely because the people in the streets have said that it is a right… The student movement is responsible for this, that today politicians dare to talk about citizen rights, about social rights. This is, I think, the paradigm shift that the movement has caused. A paradigm shift, an awakening; there’s no longer a fear of the streets, of protest but, instead, quite the contrary.

—Grace Arcos, Federation President 2014, Bernardo O’Higgins University
Non-Institutional Outcomes

1. Agenda Setting

2. Paradigm shift in how education, and broader neoliberal model, are perceived

3. Re-legitimization of protest

4. Awakening of Chilean citizenry
Changes in Political Agenda

Frequency of education-related words in presidential speeches, 2006-2014

- **Bachelet**
- **Piñera**
- **Bachelet**

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Emergence of Penguin Revolution
Emergence of student movement
Changes in Political Agenda

Frequency of education-related words in presidential platforms, 2005-2013
Public Opinion Change

Emergence of student movement

% of Chileans who claim education is one of top 3 national problems
Causal Mechanisms

- How did student movement place and maintain education on public agenda and influence educational policies?
  - Informal channels: protest
  - Formal channels: meetings and correspondence with important political actors

- Disruption mechanism
- Political access mechanism
- Public opinion shift mechanism
Conclusions & Implications

• Conclusions
  • Student movement’s impacts on education
  • Impacts beyond education system

• Theoretical Implications:
  • Outcomes must be studied in both institutional and non-institutional arenas
  • Overlooking non-institutional outcomes underestimates political impacts of social movements
  • Importance of looking into “black box” of causal mechanisms
  • Implications for theories of political culture and quality of democracy
Future Research

• More research on political outcomes of 2011 Chilean student movement

• Importance of a long-term approach to study of movement outcomes

• More cases

• Effects of social movements on political culture?