

What Caused the Chilean Winter?
Exploring Social Movement Emergence and the Chilean Student Movement

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in May 2011, the Chilean student movement emerged as a nationwide effort with massive demonstrations, public strikes, and international renown in just a few short months. Initially calling for education reform, the students' agenda has grown to incorporate the demands of discontented groups throughout the country, and now seeks a complete restructuring of the neoliberal model that has been held up as the dominant model for economic growth and political stability in Latin America. Although media attention has often cited the profound income inequality and high financial costs of the privatized education system in Chile as root causes of the student movement, the question of what ultimately sparked the mass mobilization, known as the "Chilean Winter," has remained a puzzle. This study investigated the case of the Chilean student movement through the lens of social movement theory in order to explain the root causes and underlying conditions that gave rise to the ongoing student protests in Chile. Using a descriptive case study method, the research applied qualitative analysis to analyze primary sources, including official rhetoric and documents of the student movement organizations and leaders, the response by government officials to the students' demands, and Chilean and international media surrounding the movements' emergence from May 2011 to August 2011, when the Chilean student movement emerged with a national and international force. Analysis revealed that the emergence of the Chilean Winter cannot be explained through any one single theory, but rather there exists an interactive relationship between the political processes model, resource-mobilization theory, and framing strategies, which led to the sudden emergence of the student movement.

I. FOREWORD

Every night at the same time, like clockwork, the city erupts. A piercing song can be heard throughout the quiet Santiago streets, metal pasta pots and sauté pans clanging in a steady, solid rhythm. Claudia Zamora leans out the window of her small apartment, striking her cooking ware with a metal spatula in time with the melody, as dozens of neighbors in their homes and out on the streets join together, clashing their serving dishes in shrill protest. These demonstrations are called *cacerolazos*, named after the casserole dishes being chipped away, little by little, as they get struck by cooking utensils.

The *cacerolazos* began during the presidency of Salvador Allende in 1973, according to Claudia, when housewives would bang their empty pots and pans in protest of the food rations that left them hungry and the long lines for what little was available. They wanted a change, she said, but not a dictatorship.¹ The casserole dishes came out again during the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet, ringing out in protest against seventeen years of dictatorship, human rights abuses, and repression. But when democracy was restored in Chile with democratic elections in 1990, the casserole dishes returned to their rightful place in kitchen cabinets.

In July of 2011, however, the *cacerolazos* were again being heard throughout the streets of Santiago. The 1980 Constitution enacted by the Pinochet regime had privatized the system of free university education to one of vouchers and loans that are increasing every year, leaving thousands of students unable to afford a quality higher education. Decades of neoliberal policies and privatization of resources and public goods had left many with little opportunity for social mobility. Suddenly, Chilean university students mobilized in protest: marching through the streets, occupying schools, and demanding free, quality education - *educación sin lucro* - education without profit. The students are calling for a restructuring of the educational system,

¹ Zamora, Interview.

but also the entire package of neoliberal policies that have been enacted since the Pinochet regime, the same economic program held up as the dominant model for Latin America.

The country is clamoring for change. It can be seen in the masses mobilizing and shutting down the Alameda, the main thoroughway running through Santiago, and in the universities and high schools *en toma*- on strike - “taken” by the student movement, where classroom chairs have been jammed through barred school gates for the past two years, a symbol of the high schools and university departments on strike since the student movement began. The call for change can be heard on the nightly news and in the impassioned speeches of student leaders; it can be felt in the sting of the teargas in the eyes of hundreds of thousands of students and can be tasted in the sour bite of the lemon juice to keep away the burn. It can be felt in the rush of the water coming out of the water cannons, nicknamed *guanacos* after a spitting, llama-like animal found in the southern part of the country, forcefully spraying into the crowd; it can be seen at the Casa Central at the Universidad de Chile, where a banner strung across the façade of the fading yellow building reads, *La Lucha es de la Sociedad Entera, Todas por la Educación Gratuita* - the fight is of the whole society, free education for all.²

And while the ringing of the *cacerolazos* continued to interrupt the city’s sleep and the mass mobilizations and national strikes shut down Santiago for entire days, it was almost impossible to not pick up a casserole dish and a wooden spoon, lean out a window to join the struggle, all the while wondering—why now?

² The information in this foreword is taken from the author's experiences as a participant in the American University Study Abroad Program in Santiago, Chile from July 2011 to December 2011.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Chilean student movement, began with gradual mobilization, but grew into a countrywide effort with massive demonstrations, public strikes, and international renown in just a few short months. But what were the defining factors that sparked this sudden revolutionary action? When looking at the root causes of this social movement, it is important to understand how the legacy of the seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship, both notorious for its use of repression and human rights abuses, and implementation of strict neoliberal economic policies known as the “Chilean Miracle” were catalysts for the current student mobilization.

Although these historical factors certainly are essential when analyzing the movement’s demands and origins, democracy was restored in 1990 with a string of governments from the leftist Concertación coalition presiding over the country from 1990-2010. The neoliberal model and education structure in Chile has been in place for decades, under administrations from both sides of the political spectrum. Certainly, in Chile there exists a notable existence of deprivation and inequality, as rapid economic growth among privatization, especially of the higher education system, leaves many groups without opportunities for social mobility. The puzzle therefore remains as to why mass social mobilization, first of students and then expanding across social groups and sectors, emerged so profoundly as the “Chilean Winter” of 2011.

When trying to understand the Chilean student movement, and more specifically, why the movement emerged, it is important to review the evolving field of social movement theory. Although there is no single definition for a social movement, it can be defined as a series of “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.”³ But under what conditions do normally

³ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 4.

apathetic, unorganized, or powerless groups band together under a common cause, take to the streets, and demand change to the status quo?

Although social movements have emerged as a common element of the political environment in recent decades, in many ways their formation remains somewhat of a puzzle.⁴ Understanding the mix of factors that give rise to a movement is perhaps the oldest, and arguably most important, question in the field.⁵ Nevertheless, there exists a substantial body of research on the subject of collective action and the emergence of social movements throughout the last century that attempt to answer this question. A review of the literature reveals an evolution of theories explaining social movements, ranging from psychological or individual factors to more structural conditions, as well as divergence among scholars regarding the key influential factors and ultimate causes of why social movements happen.

Due to the timely nature of the movement, there has not been much comprehensive analysis on the underlying causes for this outbreak of political unrest and mass youth mobilization. While the media has produced a plethora of news coverage of the demonstrations and scholars have been quick to point to the neoliberal economic structures and inequality present in Chile as root causes, greater in-depth analysis of the emergence of the movement is lacking. This study will attempt to connect the Chilean student movement to broader scholarship on the emergence of social movements in order to better explain the comprehensive set of conditions which gave rise to the ongoing student mobilization.

⁴ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 1.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

III. METHODOLOGY

This case study will look at the principal factors that led to the emergence of the student movement in Chile through the lens of social movement theory. Severe income inequality, the socioeconomic stratification of the education system, the legacy of neoliberal policies and privatization of the university system dating back to the Pinochet dictatorship had provided initial cause for collective grievance among Chileans. Additionally, the political climate in the conservative administration of Sebastián Piñera, the charismatic leadership shown by Camila Vallejo and other student leaders, and several previous instances of mass mobilization in recent years, contributed to the sudden emergence of the movement. This paper will analyze these principal factors and explain which conditions are the most important when looking at movement emergence in this particular case.

Defined by John Gerring, case studies are “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units.”⁶ Using the approach of a descriptive case study method, the research will use the Chilean student movement as an intensive study of modern social movements by seeking connections between the existent literature on social movement emergence and the current student mobilization throughout Chile. This will provide insight into the conditions leading to the emergence of social movements currently taking place around the world that are challenging structural inequalities, questioning the neoliberal economic development model, and demanding a change to the status quo.

The research will use qualitative analysis to analyze primary sources. These sources will include the official rhetoric and documents of the student movement and its leaders, the response by government officials to the students’ demands, and Chilean and international media stories surrounding the rise of the student movement. Although limited, various existing articles of and

⁶ Gerring, “What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?,” 342.

reflections on the movement in peer-reviewed journals will be also be analyzed. As it is too early in the trajectory of the movement to consider the impact of the mobilization on the Chilean education or political system, the research is restricted to understanding the various conditions under which movement emerged. Although the movement is currently still underway, this paper will look at the factors existent during the time frame of May 2011 to August 2011, in which the Chilean student movement emerged with national and international force.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW: Explaining the Emergence of Social Movements

It is well established throughout the literature that the most essential puzzle of social movement theory is in fact, under what conditions do they form in the first place. As scholars have attempted to answer this question, five major theories have developed to primarily explain the emergence of social movements: collective behavior; rational choice; resource-mobilization; political opportunities and framing processes. Each theory has strengths and weaknesses. When examining Chile's recent student movement mobilization, however, it is most important to consider the model explained by McAdam et al., which links the dynamic relationships between political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing process. This comprehensive theory offers the best explanation of the rise of the ongoing student mobilization in Chile.

Traditionally, the central focus in the field of social movement theory was an attempt to explain individual participation in collective action by focusing on theories of relative deprivation and collective behavior. These models explained social movement emergence by looking at sudden increases in individual grievances and perceptions of relative deprivation generated by the "structural strain" of rapid social change.⁷

⁷ Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," 528.

However, the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of significant social movement activity both in the United States and on an international level, gave rise to a revised approach to the study of social movements. The events of the decade challenged long-held assumptions and marked a theoretical shift. This transition was officially formalized in the “resource mobilization” theory, emphasizing the central role of resources, formal organization and shared identity as the ultimate catalysts to collective action.

In recent years, social movement theorists have emphasized the interaction of movements with their broader political context and other exogenous factors. This way of thinking became the “political process” or “political opportunities” model, which asserts the importance of the expansion of political opportunities in the formation of social action.⁸ In the following sections, I will expand on the evolution of the theories explaining social movement emergence, review the essential literature in which these theories were formalized, and discuss the case study of the Chilean student movement as it fits into the literature.

Collective Behavior Theory

Moving beyond the traditional view of social movement emergence, in which uprisings were characterized as unexpected, random, and irrational, collective behavior theory began to analyze the determinants of collective action at an empirical level. Borrowing the “value-added” method from economic theory, Neil Smelser proposed the “structural strain” theory of collective action, in which he described six characteristic factors that equate to collective social action: 1) structural cohesiveness, the factors that allow or prevent certain behavior to be possible; 2) structural strain, the existence of deprivation, inequality, or conflict straining a society or group; 3) generalized beliefs, in which the movement actors come to a consensus or explanation on

⁸ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 7.

what the societal problem is; 4) precipitating factors to serve as a “spark” to begin the movement; 5) mobilization for action, in which the group gets organized and 6) failure of authorities to control the group, or how they act or fail to act.⁹

Shared values and norms are the foundations of collective identity, therefore shared grievances and common beliefs about both the causes and solutions for reducing those grievances are significant conditions leading to the emergence of a social movement. An increase in the extent of those grievances or intensity of deprivation experienced by a group have to occur as necessary preconditions for the cause of social movements.¹⁰

The six points outlined in this theory can be seen throughout the Chilean student movement. Certainly, in the case of Chile, there existed the structural strain in the prevalence of income inequality and social stratification. The student organizations were well organized around common beliefs on what a different education system should look like. However, as the education system in Chile had been reformed and privatized to its current state in 1980, the deprivation had existed for many Chileans for decades. Regarding Smelser’s fourth point, it is crucial to understand what was the “spark” or precipitating factors leading to the sudden eruption of the movement. Therefore, additional explanations are needed to understand what conditions led to the student mobilizations emerging so profoundly in 2011, and not before.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Individuals who feel deprived and frustrated relative to others in society with whom they compare themselves—the tension between one’s actual state of well-being and the state one feels they should be able to achieve—produces tension and conflict, according to the theory of relative

⁹ Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Turner and Killian.

deprivation.¹¹ This creates a psychological sense of deprivation and frustration, the intensity and length of which increases the probability of aggression, uprising, and movement activity. Seeing others in society with more power, wealth, or status, disadvantaged groups will mobilize in order to achieve that for themselves. Social movements are therefore born out of a desire to achieve greater equality in society and provide a space to voice discontent at the status quo.

According to the theory, three distinct types of deprivation will lead to social movement emergence: 1) decremented deprivation, in which value expectations remain constant while capabilities to achieve those expectations fall; 2) “aspirational” deprivation, in which value expectations rise while capabilities remain the same, for example due to exposure of a better life; and 3) progressive deprivation, in which expectations and capabilities both increase, however capabilities do not grow at the same extent or may fall. This third category can be seen in the processes of “modernization” and development in countries such as Chile.¹² While the country experienced economic growth, expectations for development and income equality may have risen while the capabilities for many households and individuals failed to match up. Also significant in this argument is the emphasis on the “rational utility of violence,” which explains that individuals will act on their grievances if they believe that there is a real chance of relieving some of that discontent through collective action and even violence.¹³

Rational Choice Theory

Expanding on the argument for social movements to be seen as rational responses to grievances, rather than emotional reactions, rational choice theory suggested that political mobilization is a calculated response based on cost-benefit analysis. Movement participants will

¹¹ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 37.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47–53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 210.

pursue collective action to challenge the status quo only when they have no other means of accomplishing change. Due to the “free rider” problem, individuals in pursuit of their self-interest may be unwilling to take on the risk of mobilization when the “public goods” nature of the achievements gained may be assumed without direct action. Therefore, individuals will only be pushed toward collective action when the participants will receive selective incentives based on that participation, and non-participants in turn may be penalized for their lack of involvement.

However, critics assert that rational choice and relative deprivation theorists cannot account for the ways in which exogenous political or cultural factors such as group solidarity, collective identity, or a moral commitment to the cause might mobilize people for other reasons other than pure self-interest, claiming that what is rational for an individual may not be so for entire groups.¹⁴ In the case of Chile, these exogenous factors and political context were crucial to the lead-up to the current student movement, as a simple, rational reaction to grievances would have been possible in earlier years, when deprivation and inequality was at its peak. To further expand on this point, social movement theory evolved beyond the explanations of movement participation at the individual level, but rather sought to look at the organizational, structural, and political factors leading to movement emergence.

Resource-Mobilization Theory

The abundance of social movements in the late 1960s and 1970s led scholars to emphasize the significance of organizational structures, resource accumulation, and “collective coordination” to spark social movements.¹⁵ Rather than individual grievances as causal factors of collective action, resource-mobilization theory suggests that those grievances are “endemic” to

¹⁴ Eckstein, “Power and Popular Protest in Latin America,” 4.

¹⁵ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 15.

society and constant throughout time, and therefore are secondary and cannot in themselves account for the emergence of a movement.

Rather, resource-mobilization theory argues that the sustained changes in group organization, resources, and opportunities will give rise to movement formation.¹⁶ The definition of those resources vary, but may include economic support, effective communications, and human resources such as organizational and legal skills, the unspecialized labor of movement supporters, and dense interpersonal networks which serve as a catalyst for streamlined organization and mobilization. These have also been explained as “mobilizing structures,” the informal and formal means in which people mobilize and engage in collective action—be it groups, organizations, or informal networks of which social movements are comprised.¹⁷

John McCarthy and Mayer Zald first formulated this approach by looking beyond the psychological factors determining collective behavior, but rather at the political and economic resources leading to movements. Differing from the previous grievance-based theories, resource-mobilization focused instead on processes of group mobilization and the formal organizational structures of social movements, concluding that social movements become a driving force for change primarily through the social movement organizations they will generate. This “entrepreneurial theory” of movement formation cites the availability of resources, especially the power of leadership groups, as the major factor of movement formation. Rather than being driven by a specified set of personal grievances, the grievances to be addressed by the movement “will expand to meet the funds and support personnel available.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” 531; McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory”; Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

¹⁷ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 3.

¹⁸ McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” 13.

Group organization was later declared as the major determinant of social mobilization potential, arguing that formulation and mobilization of movements depend on changes in resources, group organization, and opportunities for collective action. The more centralized, formally structured movement organizations being seen in modern social movements were effective at mobilizing resources and overcoming challenges than decentralized, informal movement structures—in other words, organization was key.¹⁹

In the ongoing student movement in Chile, resource-mobilization theory can account for the power of organized groups, such as the university student federations, and student leaders such as Camila Vallejo, which successfully organized the movement and achieved nation-wide support for the student mobilization. However, these organizations were able to do so because of certain political opportunities and the broader political context that allowed the existing political and educational structures more vulnerable to confrontation.

“Political Opportunities” or “Political Process” Theory

Most contemporary theories of social movements now argue that the root causes of mobilization are less dependent on participants and organization, but rather emerge out of “systemic crises, which render the existing regime weak and vulnerable to challenge.”²⁰ Social movement theory therefore evolved to take into account for more than grievances, organization, or resources, which were declared inadequate to account for mobilization of groups to stand up against inequality and degradation, but came to consider external factors of the greater political environment.²¹ The political opportunities theory attempts to isolate the factors of the broader political context that are conducive to social movements, based on a central assumption that the

¹⁹ Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” 528.

²⁰ McAdam, “Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” 24.

²¹ Susan Eckstein, “Power and Popular Protest in Latin America,” in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1,

timing, type, and fate of those movements are often dependent on the opportunities allowed to movement actors, such as increasing access to political participation, absence of repression, divisions or allies within the elites.²²

The protest movement in the United States in the 1960s led scholars to reconsider movement emergence, as protest was increasingly understood as a “political resource” to be used to influence policy. This led to a shift in the research focus from *why* movements emerge to *how*.²³ The primary point of the political process approach was that activists do not choose movement goals or strategies in a vacuum, but rather that the political context and societal structure set the grievances around which activists mobilize. The participation by movement participants was understood through their political context and the “rules of the game” or the structure of the societies in which they were protesting.²⁴

Michael Lipsky was the first to cite this model by suggesting that variations in protest activity, social movements, and demonstrations was a function of the societal changes that left the broader political system more vulnerable or receptive to the demands of uprising groups.²⁵ However, it was Peter Eisinger who first coined the phrase “structure of political opportunities” in order to describe the differences in protest behavior in forty-three American cities, in what eventually became the “political process” model of social movements.

By looking at how receptive or non-receptive the urban governments were to protest, Eisinger’s study attempted to explain what factors led to extensive rioting in some cities, while not others. The findings concluded that cities with extensive institutional openings preempted

²² McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 10; Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 71; Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*.

²³ Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 127.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lipsky, “Protest as a Political Resource”; McAdam, “Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” 23.

riots by inviting groups to more conventional means of political participation in order to address grievances, while cities without visible openings for participation repressed or discouraged dissidents to suppress protesting. Therefore, the emergence of mobilization and protest was a result of the city's "political opportunity structure," defined as the extent that groups are likely to be able to gain power and influence the political system through mobilization.²⁶

The theory developed to a more comprehensive explanation of movement emergence, with emphasis on the connections between institutionalized politics and the social movements or revolutions they help create. Arguing that the existence of certain political opportunities explains which movement tactics will be used, it was suggested that if authorities offer their constituency more avenues to let their voice be heard, fewer members will protest because more direct and less costly routes are available. Therefore, the emergence of a social movement is based on changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of the national system.²⁷ A wide range of variables to explain the range or type of expression of social movements, including group interests, organization, mobilization, form of collective action, opportunity or threat, power, and extent of repression as major factors to consider.

Doug McAdam's asserts, "social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded."²⁸ Looking at which contributing factors led to collective action in the American civil rights movement, the political process theory was presented as an improvement to the previous theories of collective behavior and resource-mobilization. According to McAdam, movements emerge as a serious force only when external circumstances provided sufficient "openness" to

²⁶ Eisinger, "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities"; Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," 128.

²⁷ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*.

²⁸ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 3.

allow for group mobilization. These political opportunities lowered costs and dangers of organization, legitimized action and offered safe space for mobilization.²⁹ This mobilization then created a demonstration effect, which reinforced a sense of the political effectiveness of collective action and enhanced further mobilization, creating a wide-scale movement.

Sidney Tarrow employed the model to explain the range of social movement activity in Italian politics from 1965-1975, tracing the “cycle of protest,” and determining that government openings reduced the cost of collective action, and that an initial mobilization of one group encouraged other groups to mobilize. The life cycle of a social movement is a part of political struggle influenced by the existence, or lack, of political opportunity structures. Tarrow argues that social movement emergence is more closely related to the opportunities and restraints on collective action, rather than the social or economic factors that a group experiences.³⁰ The concept of political opportunities breaks down the specific dimensions of the political system in which changes will render it more receptive or vulnerable to challenges by a social group.

According to the theory, the dimensions of political systems that will lead to collective action are: 1) the level of openness, or access to the political system; 2) the stability or divisions in the elite classes; 3) presence of elite allies; and 4) a decrease in state repression.³¹ Changes of any of these four dimensions, whether through increased political participation, divisions within elite classes or elite allies, and the absence of state repression, will lead to mobilization.

David Meyer agreed that the context in which a movement emerges influences its development and potential impact, asserting that a movement’s prospects for advancing its

²⁹ McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*; Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 192.

³⁰ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 71.

³¹ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 10; Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 71; Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*.

agenda, mobilizing supporters, and affecting change are “context-dependent.” Research should direct attention to the world outside the social movement, looking at the exogenous factors that enhance or inhibit the movement’s prospects for mobilizing supporters.³² However, Meyer rightly criticizes the Political Opportunities model, arguing that the concept has become too broad and is in danger of encompassing nearly every aspect of social movement theory.

Framing Processes

The recent proliferation of scholarship on collective action frames and framing processes in relation to social movements indicates that framing processes have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements.³³ This focus on framing processes reflects a growing discontent with how little significance the resource mobilization and political opportunities theorists attributed to ideas, identity or culture, rather than the organizational or political opportunity structures leading to movement emergence.³⁴

The emphasis on framing processes has increased and is currently considered along with resource-mobilization and political opportunity theories as a primary lens through which to understand the origins of social movements.³⁵ These framing processes are defined as deliberate efforts by groups to create shared understandings of society, and their place in it, that justify and provoke collective action. From this perspective, movement participants are viewed as agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of shared meanings for an aggrieved group as a whole.³⁶

³² Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 126.

³³ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” 611.

³⁴ McAdam, “Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” 5.

³⁵ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” 612.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 613.

McAdam et al. suggest that political opportunities and mobilizing structures are not enough to ensure collective action. Although both factors, highlighted in the political opportunities and resource-mobilization models, provide the structural potential for movement emergence, they are insufficient. Rather, “mediating between opportunity, organization, and action are the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation.” Groups poised for mobilization need to feel both aggrieved by their situation, while also optimistic that by acting collectively they can address the problem. Lacking either of these, individuals and groups will fail to mobilize.³⁷

The relationship between framing processes and the political opportunities that facilitate movement emergence is interactive. Political opportunities encourage mobilization through both their effect on power relations, but also “by setting in motion framing processes that further undermine the legitimacy of the system or its perceived mutability,” revealing the interaction of changes in both structure and perceptions of grievances and agency.³⁸ McAdam suggests, “Framing processes clearly encourage mobilization, as people seek to organize and act on their growing awareness of the system’s illegitimacy and vulnerability.” Simultaneously, however, the possibility for “system-critical framing processes” depends on the mobilizing group’s access to mobilizing structures and resources.³⁹

V. Exploring the Emergence of the “Chilean Winter”

The ongoing student-led mobilization in Chile began in May 2011, which has become known as the “Chilean Winter,” with the demonstrations became increasingly stronger and gained more public support as the months passed. Initially, protests were a concentrated and

³⁷ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

direct response to a recently introduced government proposal to increase federal funding for private universities. However, students were concerned that these universities were turning a profit, which is against Chilean law. Additionally, one of these private universities had ties to the current Minister of Education, Joaquín Lavín, who had submitted the proposal. That Lavín had invested in a private institution led to calls of possible corruption and initial mobilization.

The Confederation of Chilean Students (*Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile*, CONFECH), the national student organization comprised of the student federations of both public and private universities, released a letter in late May 2011 in response to the government proposal. This statement criticized the “grave situation” of the higher education system in Chile, in which “unscrupulous entrepreneurs” had “negotiated and traded with the dreams and aspirations of thousands of Chilean families.” Examples cited in the students’ letter included discrepancies within the education system, including the “flagrant profit of many private institutions of higher education, the poor quality of academic plans, excessive student drop-out rates, lack of regulation in the education sector, lack of transparency in the use of resources, high interest loans” and other structural problems in the education sector.⁴⁰

In early June, student protestors had occupied nearly one hundred schools throughout the country and massive demonstrations later in the month brought together estimates of 100,000 to 200,000 activists.⁴¹ By July of 2011, the Piñera administration announced a compromise with the student organizations through the “Grand National Accord for Education” or GANE (*Gran Acuerdo Nacional por la Educación*) program, which would increase federal financing for public education. However, this policy would also provide a legal framework for institutions of higher

⁴⁰ CONFECH, “Carta Ministro Lavín - 26 Mayo 2011.” Translated by author.

⁴¹ Long, “Chile Student Protests Point to Deep Discontent.”

education to make a profit, which although was already being practiced, was officially illegal. The student organizations saw this proposal as inadequate and rejected the offer.

The protests, which had already escalated, continued to increase in power and number throughout the following months, reaching up to 120,000 students mobilizing in the city every other week, with smaller protests sprouting throughout the country. The students organized strikes, boycotted classes and occupied their schools and other buildings on university campuses. The height of the movement lasted for seven months and erupted in 36 massive marches in total.⁴² In addition to public marches and strikes, more than 200 schools and universities throughout the country were *en toma* - on strike - while the national and international press shone a spotlight on the plight of the students. At the height of the movement, national opinion polls show the movement with support from 80 percent of the Chilean population.⁴³

The country had not experienced demonstrations on such a massive scale since the protests held against the Pinochet dictatorship during the 1980s.⁴⁴ Therefore, this sudden wave of protest activity came as a surprise to national and international observers, as Chile is typically held up as a model of political stability and economic development in Latin America. This has been especially true since the return to democracy, as social discontent and political unrest had been minimal. On a macro-economic level, Chile is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America, demonstrating sustained economic growth in the last decades and one of the highest rates of GDP per capita in Latin America. The current student mobilization had begun during a period of economic success, as Chile is enjoying six percent GDP growth and a falling

⁴² Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," 224.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Schnbruch and Donoso, "Chilean Winter of Discontent: Are Protests Here to Stay?"

unemployment rate,⁴⁵ as well as rising wages.⁴⁶ While 15 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2009, this is a significant improvement from 45 percent in the mid-1980s.⁴⁷

However, the success of Chile's economic development has been eclipsed by a profound level of inequality. Although years of neoliberal economic policies have fueled economic growth and helped many Chileans out of poverty, many are left out of the process and unable to take advantage of the country's economic expansion. Chile has the highest level of income inequality and the third highest poverty rate among all members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).⁴⁸ And with a Gini Coefficient of .54, Chile has the most unequal distributions of income in the organization.⁴⁹ It is suggested that the inequality in Chile has led to this rising social discontent, and is one of the most negative aspects of what is commonly understood as a successful model for development in Latin America.⁵⁰

Additionally, Chilean university students faced profound inequality and socioeconomic stratification throughout the entire education system, and especially at the university level, which led to the mass student mobilization and the call for education reform. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test conducted by the OECD in 2009 revealed that Chile has the most segregated educational system among countries in the organization, ranking 64 out of 65 countries in terms of segregation of economic class in schools and colleges.⁵¹

In response to this inequality, the students' initial concerns cited tangible grievances, such as addressing the high costs of tuition and school fees and the expansion of student loans to pay for education. The cost of a university education in Chile is proportionally the world's most

⁴⁵ Long, "Chile Student Protests Point to Deep Discontent."

⁴⁶ "Chile: Progress and Its Discontents."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ McSherry and Mejía, "Student's Challenge Pinochet's Legacy," 31.

⁴⁹ "Chile: Progress and Its Discontents."

⁵⁰ López and Miller, "Chile: The Unbearable Burden of Inequality," 2680.

⁵¹ Long, "Chile Student Protests Point to Deep Discontent."

expensive: while a college degree in Chile costs \$3,400 a year, the annual average salary is just \$8,500.⁵² Contributing to the problem is the fact that in Chile, public expenditure for higher education is one of the lowest in the world, and while degrees take longer than in other countries, no comprehensive system of financial aid for students exists.⁵³

The state contributes little to public expenditure for higher education. The Universidad de Chile, the most prominent university in the country and one of the most renowned in Latin America, currently only receives 14 percent of its budget from the state.⁵⁴ And as a whole, the Chilean government spends just 0.7 percent of its total GDP on tertiary education, while the average in other countries in the OECD is 1.3 percent.⁵⁵

The neoliberal reforms advocating for a reduced role of the state have passed the financial burden of paying for education to students and more often, their families, resulting in a significant financial burden. According to the OECD, Chilean households bear 39 percent of the costs of all education costs in Chile, a higher rate than all other members of the organization and almost double the rate in United States.⁵⁶ Many of the not-for-profit, private universities receive subsidized student grants and loans, but are in reality for-profit organizations in which shareholders will set up some sort of company and then lease their facilities to the university for a profit.⁵⁷ The “for-profit spirit” is advocated by neoliberalism is proliferated throughout the education system, revealed in the students’ cries of *educar, no lucrar* - educate, don’t profit – a common slogan of the movement.

⁵² Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

⁵³ “Universities in Latin America: The Struggle to Make the Grade.”

⁵⁴ Cabalin, “Students March for a Better Chile.”

⁵⁵ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, 254.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵⁷ Elacqua, “Chile’s Students Demand Reform.”

Even though the neoliberal model promised the freedom for students to choose their education, their economic backgrounds only allow them to attend public schools in their neighborhoods, and the socioeconomic stratification of the education system allows access to quality education based on the purchasing power of their family.⁵⁸ Privileged students are able to attend private schools, obtaining better test results and attending the most selective universities, while and middle class students attended voucher schools with other middle class students, performing lower than the national average on standardized tests and having to finance higher education with expensive loans.⁵⁹ When the protests began in 2011, only 20 percent of students at the university level were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.⁶⁰ In this way, the Chilean neoliberal reproduces social inequalities, rather than generating socioeconomic integration.⁶¹

With continuing inequality in the Chilean education system, the country has seen a significant increase in university students in recent years. Over the past twenty years, high school graduation rates in Chile have increased to the point where almost 90 percent of 25-34 year-olds have completed a high school education, while less than 40 percent of 55-64 year-olds have done so.⁶² Over 1.1 million students now attend universities or technical colleges, an increase from just 200,000 in 1990, and out of the 45 percent of 18 to 24 year olds enrolled in higher education, 70 percent are the first generation of their families to do so.⁶³

To add to the disparity, tuition at both public and private universities has increased by more than 60 percent over the past ten years. As a result, many university students find themselves strapped with high levels of postgraduate debt. In fact, Chilean college graduates pay

⁵⁸ Matear, "Equity in Education in Chile: The Tensions Between Policy and Practice," 112.

⁵⁹ Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," 225.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 222.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Elacqua, "Chile's Students Demand Reform."

⁶³ "Chile: Progress and Its Discontents."

as much as three to five times more of their income to pay off student loans than their peers in other OECD countries.⁶⁴ While student enrollment has increased, educational opportunities expanded to keep up with demand while for-profit, private institutions emerged to fill the gaps between the supply and demand of university education.

As an alternative, the student movement has called for a higher quality public education system, the end of the free-market education system that had been championed during the Pinochet era, and improved conditions and social mobility for impoverished students. This can be seen as an inherent criticism of the neoliberal model that had been imposed throughout most sectors of society, including the education system.⁶⁵ Since its initial declarations, the student movement has asserted that its principal objective is “to help in the construction of quality education, focused on the growth of Chile and Chileans rather than the ‘for-profit education’ by which many students and their families are indebted.” More specifically, their objectives as currently outlined on the CONFECH website, include:

Equitable access to education regardless of economic status; equal opportunities to education; addressing the high costs of higher education; a demand for state regulation of for-profit universities, which are illegal; increasing state funding, which at 16 percent is the lowest in the world; addressing student debt; and increasing democratization through student participation in political decisions.⁶⁶

Although various policy initiatives to ensure equitable access to quality education have been undertaken since the return to democracy, Chile faces challenges in altering the legal framework of the education system that was imposed under the neoliberal reforms introduced by Pinochet.⁶⁷ Chile was one of the first recipients of neoliberal economic reforms, prescribed by the Washington Consensus as an economic remedy during the era of the 1980s Latin American

⁶⁴ Elacqua, “Chile’s Students Demand Reform.”

⁶⁵ Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise,” 224.

⁶⁶ CONFECH, “Nuestros Objetivos.” Translated by author.

⁶⁷ Matear, “Equity in Education in Chile: The Tensions Between Policy and Practice,” 1.

debt crisis. The neoliberal economic reform followed the program of free-market economic policies implemented throughout the region and inspired by University Chicago economists known throughout the country as “Los Chicago Boys.” These reforms included an emphasis on free-market initiatives, a decreased role of the state in matters of economic policy, and a focus on individualism and competition in the market that spread to the education sector.

The radical restructuring of the education system occurred in the early 1980s. The reform sought to foster competition and increase choice, centering on decentralizing the education administration to local governments and financing education through a voucher system. As cuts in public expenditures for education increased, private and subsidized private schools expanded.⁶⁸ These policies profoundly impacted the structure of the education system, as it became understood as a “commodity,” rather than a responsibility of the state, and students and their families were then responsible for the financial burden of education.⁶⁹

These economic policies were held up as a “magic prescription” to combat the effects of the debt crisis, and this free-market fundamentalism became known as the “Chilean Miracle” due to the positive impact on GDP growth.⁷⁰ However, while Chile, perhaps more than any other country in the region, has been held up as the representation of the epitome of the neoliberal paradigm, the mass political mobilization of university students and other discontented groups sends an important signal of social unrest that cannot be ignored.⁷¹

The argument by supporters of the neoliberal program is that by increasing privatization, schools will improve through competition for students. These groups also argue that parents will have more freedom to choose the best school for their children due to the competition—however,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁹ Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise,” 220.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 225.

⁷¹ Ibid.

students from lower and middle classes are unable to make these choices due to the costs of private, elite schools. Additionally, the historical roots of the education reform run deep, as the Pinochet military regime passed a legislation named the Organic Constitutional Law of Education (*Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Educación*, LOCE), to ensure that any future amendments to the education reforms of 1980 and 1981 would be subject to an extremely difficult-to-obtain quorum in the Chilean Congress.⁷²

Therefore, when considering the student movement it is necessary to consider the legacy of the seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship on the national psyche of the country, and its impact on the lead-up to the 2011 student movement. In Chile, the legacy of the dictatorship remains a divisive and emotional subject, the consequences of which cannot be ignored when attempting to dissect the causes and implications of the student movement. While the significance of the dictatorship may not be directly or personally relevant to many of the student protestors, the student activists constantly invoke the past, even though the majority of the protestors have no personal memories and were not even alive during the dictatorship.

In the case of Chile, official rhetoric and public speeches have framed the movement as an traditional us-versus-them conflict, citing social and economic justice, the legacy of the repressive Pinochet dictatorship, and calling for an end to the deep inequality in Chile. The student leaders frame the current state of education as a “consumer good” or a “commodity for consumption,” blaming extreme capitalism and the neoliberal model for the segregated, unequal education system. In contrast, they call for education to be a “basic and fundamental right” and a “public good” rather than private.⁷³ Additionally, the student leaders have framed the issue of

⁷² Matear, “Equity in Education in Chile: The Tensions Between Policy and Practice,” 104.

⁷³ “Chilean Student Movement Awarded for Organizing Nation’s Largest Protests Since Pinochet Era.”

education inequality as a systemic symptom of deeper structural problems in the country.

According to student leader Camila Vallejo, the former spokesperson for the student movement:

We must recover from the Pinochet dictatorship's terrible consequences if we want to have a true democracy... In our country, there is no justice. Even if we don't have a dictator anymore, we still haven't gotten rid of the political model that his regime imposed upon us — a market-driven dictatorship. This neoliberal model has proven to be incompatible with respect for human rights. When the great wealth of the very few is derived from the life and work of the vast majority, it isn't compatible with democracy.⁷⁴

Although the student movements have remained focused on education reform and their protests invoke a sense of whimsicality, creativity and youth, darker undertones and the collective memory of a repressive era are never far from the national consciousness or political dialogue.⁷⁵ Along with the parallels drawn in official rhetoric of the movement between the students' fight for education and the legacy of the dictatorship, Allende flags are present at student demonstrations and the movement has called for large demonstrations on September 11, the anniversary of the 1973 coup d'état that usurped the Allende presidency and democratic rule in Chile and brought Pinochet to power.

Profound income inequality amidst a growing economic market, a continually segregated education system leaving many students strapped with the burden of student debt, and the ability to trace these grievances back to the legacy of a repressive dictatorship have all been cited as necessary conditions leading up to the student movement. Yet perhaps here lies the puzzle of the movement's sudden emergence: while the education system was completely transformed during the Pinochet dictatorship, from a strong public system to the existing unequal, privatized model, the education structure has remained unchanged even decades after the return to democracy.

⁷⁴ Vallejo, "Camila Vallejo's Letelier-Moffitt Acceptance Speech."

⁷⁵ Randall, "In Chile, Explaining Massive Protests Entails Remembering the Past," 20–21.

The Concertación, the coalition of leftist political parties that governed from the democratic transition until the election of Sebastián Piñera in 2010, had failed to remedy the situation. Presidents including Michele Bachelet, a Socialist Democrat, attempted to reform the education system, after high school students protested in 2006. However the focus of education reform remained on improving access, rather than quality of education. This is not to say that reform has not been successful in some areas. Due to various education reforms instituted throughout since the return to democracy, education access has increased significantly, but there has been an increase of voucher or subsidized schools and private institutions to meet that demand. Although the quantity of students has increased, the quality of that education has not.⁷⁶ High levels of socioeconomic segregation can be found at every education level. Chile holds the most segregated educational system in all the OECD countries, with the degree of socioeconomic integration at 45 percent, compared to the OECD average of almost 75 percent.⁷⁷

As the student movement continued to emerge as a massive force in June and July of 2011, the massive protests over funding for higher education have led to more direct action, such as university strikes and seizures of grade schools by student groups. The protests have become well known for their unique nature and “joyful, carnival madness,” drawing national support and international attention. Flash-mob activities such as a “kiss-in,” in which students kissed each other for 1,800 seconds in front of the presidential palace, or the 1,800 laps that students jogged around La Moneda in relay teams to draw attention to the \$1.8 billion it would cost for the state to fund public education, became news stories in their own right.⁷⁸ And of course, the *caceralazos* continued to ring throughout the city as protestors and movement supporters display their discontent through hitting their pots and pans.

⁷⁶ Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise,” 220.

⁷⁷ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, 460.

⁷⁸ Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

In one demonstration that soon became a media sensation, protestors even dressed up as zombies and danced to “Thriller” by Michael Jackson, to send the message that they would still be paying for their education even after death. And after one of the mass protests, the student movement participants and Camila Vallejo collected the shells from the tear-gas canisters and laid them out in front of La Moneda, the presidential palace, in the shape of a peace sign in the plaza, with Vallejo in the center. The resulting image was published internationally, with the caption that the 50 million pesos spent on tear gas and the military-level security for the student demonstrations could have been better spent on public education.⁷⁹ These events brought the movement to the international spotlight with supporters and observers around the world, as media outlets drew comparisons to the movement to other international protests, including the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, and the protests against austerity measures in Europe.

The student mobilization has at times resulted in violent confrontations. *Carabineros*, the military riot-police mounted on horseback, regulate the marches and armored water cannons called *guanacos*—after the spitting, llama-like animal found in the country—surround the protest routes, often spraying into the crowd. Hooded *encapuchados* wear scarves around their faces, throwing rocks, glass bottles, and Molotov cocktails at police. Stores along the Alameda, the main avenue running through Santiago, have been looted and vandalized.

Although the students have insisted that these groups are from outside the movement, and possibly even infiltrators trying to de-legitimize the student groups, the government and some media outlets have framed the protestors as violent and radical in attempts to break down the movement’s massive popular appeal. The marches typically end with teargas, multiple arrests and hospitalization for the students. However, although violence has been highlighted in media

⁷⁹ Ibid.

reports of the student movement, the CONFECH continues to hold much of the nation's support for their goals. In 2012, the student movement still held a national approval rate of 72 percent.⁸⁰

In addition to the collective grievances setting the stage for mass mobilization, the group organizations and resources necessary to impact the emergence of the student movement were already somewhat in place. The 2011 university student protests were perhaps foreshadowed by the “Penguin Revolution” which took place in 2006. High school students in Chile, called *penguinos* – penguins – due to their white and black school uniforms, were the first to demand a change in the education system and had pressed the government for education reform five years earlier. In May 2006, under the Bachelet administration, secondary students took to the streets and occupied their high schools. While early student protests attracted 1,000 people, the *Revolución Penguinino* movement grew to 10,000 participants in a few weeks.⁸¹

Although the Penguins' initial demands began as a call for free transportation passes and the elimination of the expensive university entrance exam fees, the movement grew into a general fight against the inadequate quality of education in the country and a challenge to the inequality of opportunities offered by the public and private model. Although President Bachelet signed the General Education Law in 2009, replacing the controversial law enacted during the Pinochet era, the education reform failed to change the overall structure of Chilean education system in a significant way.⁸²

Discontent continued to grow within the same generation of students, and as the Penguin Revolution mobilization was the first public rejection of free-market fundamentalism in education system in Chile, the impact was significant. Although the reform enacted as a result of the Penguin Revolution was seen as a limited political victory, the first mass mobilization of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise,” 223.

⁸² Ibid.

students paved the way for 2011 movement and provided a framework for further protests against the neoliberal system.⁸³ When the “Chilean Winter” emerged in 2011, most of the former “penguins” were enrolled in colleges and universities throughout the country. After a disappointing political solution and inadequate education reform five years earlier, many students realized that past collective action had done little to impact their education situation, which at the university level was even more unequal, segregated, and expensive. They then became protagonists of the Chilean Winter.⁸⁴

The political opportunities which led the way for the emergence of the movement can also be marked back to the 2010 elections of president Sebastián Piñera, in whom the students gained a clear villain in the fight for a more equitable education system. The fact that Piñera is the first president from the right in Chile since Pinochet cannot be the ultimate catalyst to the protests, but it cannot be entirely ignored.⁸⁵ In response to the student movements’ initial demands, Piñera and his administration rejected the idea of free public education, asserting that education was a “consumer good” as the state’s role in public education had essentially been abolished during the Pinochet era.⁸⁶ As the founder of the major Chilean credit card company Bancard, Piñera was wealthy and successful in the business realm before taking office, and was regarded by the public as favoring big business and capitalism at the expense of public opinion. This can be heard in the popular protest chant and slogan seen at student demonstrations: *“Piñera entiende, Chile no se vende”* - Piñera, understand, Chile is not for sale.⁸⁷

Additionally, Joaquín Lavín, Piñera’s first appointed Minister of Education, was the owner of a private university and had been a member of the “Chicago Boys” economic team

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁵ Randall, “In Chile, Explaining Massive Protests Entails Remembering the Past,” 21.

⁸⁶ Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

⁸⁷ Randall, “In Chile, Explaining Massive Protests Entails Remembering the Past,” 20.

through which neoliberal economic policies were implemented in Chile in the 1980s. Students saw the partnership between Piñera and Lavín as a threat, with aims to even further extend the neoliberal model into the education sector.⁸⁸ In fact, the first student protests had come as a direct response to Lavín's plan toward further legitimization of privatized, for-profit institutions. In an attempt to appease the students, the Piñera administration has engaged in several cabinet restructurings since the movement emerged. Lavín was replaced in July of 2011 by Felipe Bulnes, who was in turn ousted in December 2011 and replaced by Harald Beyer, the current Minister. To date, not any of the three Ministers of Education has demonstrated much success in coming to an agreement with the CONFECH student federation.

President Piñera's initial response to the protestors was seen as "inept," being slow to respond and then responding with a combination of first giving in to the protestors' demands, and then drawing a hard line.⁸⁹ The Piñera administration responded with violence at times, jailing students and sending in the military-like *carabineros* to monitor protests, reminiscent of the Pinochet regime. This further exacerbated the conflict between the students and the government, leading to an "us vs. them" mentality and division throughout the country based on who supported the students, and who supported the government. In September of 2011, Piñera's approval rating had fallen to a devastating 22 percent. This is a far cry from its height during the successful rescue of the Chilean miners in October 2010, which was at 63 percent,⁹⁰ and is now the lowest public opinion for a Chilean president since the return to democracy.⁹¹

Chile was already poised for massive popular demonstrations before the student movement emerged. Almost simultaneously to the student movement emergence, popular

⁸⁸ Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," 224.

⁸⁹ "Chile: Progress and Its Discontents."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Long, "Chile Student Protests Point to Deep Discontent."

discontent for the planned HydroAysén dam project in Aysén, in the Patagonia region of Southern Chile, had also grown into mass mobilization. In much the same vein as the student mobilizations, protestors against the energy project invoked the legacy of neoliberal and market-driven policies, such as the privatization of public lands for consumption. In response to the emergence of various collective mobilizations throughout the country, President Piñera has said, “We would all like education, health care, and many other things to be free, but when all is said and done, nothing in life is free. Someone has to pay.”⁹²

The influence of the Penguin Revolution in 2006, the conservative Piñera administration, and the already existing mass protests as a result from the anti-HydroAysén movement, added to the expansion of political opportunities, opening up the space for continued mobilization. However, the generational identities and shared beliefs of the university students must also be noted. According to Vallejo, “For many years our parents’ generation was afraid to demonstrate, to complain, thinking it was better to conform to what was going on... students are setting an example without the fear our parents had.”⁹³ Without a fear of government repression, one of the political opportunities outlined by McAdam in the political opportunities model, students were able to take advantage of collective action.

Although the students invoked the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship when calling out the failures of the neoliberal education model, in reality, it did not have much personal significance to the student movement participants. When Giorgio Jackson, in an interview with the Mexican magazine *Gatopardo*, was asked what the dictatorship meant to him, he replied, “Nothing, I was born in 1987.”⁹⁴ Because this generation grew up without the weight of the Pinochet dictatorship, but rather in the midst of an emerging democratic transition and economic

⁹² Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

⁹³ Barrionuevo, “With Kiss-Ins and Dances, Young Chileans Push for Reform.”

⁹⁴ Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

boom, they are better able to challenge the accepted, but flawed, development model, which had resulted in social and environmental consequences, and instead use social action and democratic means to call for a more democratic and equitable system, without fear of state repression.⁹⁵

In addition, the young people mark a generational shift in the country, as the university students have grown up in a democratic society with great economic and technological progress, while embracing new means of communication. According to Fernando García, a political scientist at the Universidad Diego Portales, Chile has the fourth-highest rate of Twitter usage per person in the world and almost 30 percent of the population uses the social media site. Eighty percent of Chileans under 30 years old are on Facebook, and there are more cell phones than people in the country.⁹⁶ The CONFECH, Vallejo, and Jackson engage on social media as a primary means of communications with supporters, students, movement actors, and the media. With relatively no costs to mobilization, the movement's ability to organize is profound.

As the movement has reached international renown and nation-wide support, the demands of the students have grown accordingly, reaching beyond their initial calls for education reform and tackling broader, systemic challenges such as income distribution and inequality. In its latest proposal, the CONFECH has called for a paradigm shift from the neoliberal model, asserting the necessity to see education as a "social right which should be guaranteed by the state" rather than a "consumer good and financed by families."⁹⁷ In this way, the student demonstrations have evolved into a nationwide rejection of the neoliberal policies so proudly held up as a success story since they were implemented during the Pinochet regime, and are

⁹⁵ Langman, "Chile's Winter of Discontent."

⁹⁶ "Chile: Progress and Its Discontents."

⁹⁷ CONFECH, "Carta al Presidente."

challenging the legacy of the repressive era by demanding further democratization and equality throughout all sectors of society.⁹⁸

After rejecting the first proposal outlined by the Piñera administration in July 2011, the student movement has grown to encapsulate a variety of interest groups within the country who have both sympathized and joined with the students. The education agenda has become a vehicle for broader societal transformation as what began with the students has spread as Chileans of all ages and occupations, who are rebelling against an economic system that brings prosperity to select few and widens the gap between rich and poor.⁹⁹ The students' struggle has grown to incorporate the demands of various sectors of Chilean society who are frustrated with the status quo, and demands have become wider to promote an overall more just society.

For the first time since democracy was re-established in Chile in 1990, high-school students, university students, parents, teachers, union members, and workers have all joined together to mobilize. Environmental groups, copper miners, gay rights campaigners, transportation workers, and farmers have also caught on to the movement, spreading the main goal of education reform to broader systemic challenges in the country.¹⁰⁰ The emergence of the student movement has been fueled by this demonstration effect, cumulating in a unified, nationwide left-wing call for a variety of political reforms, from an overhaul of the 1980 Constitution, to tax reform, to the nationalization of resources.¹⁰¹

As the spokespeople and organizers of the movement, student leaders Camila Vallejo, former President and current Vice-President of the Federation of Students of the University of Chile (*Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile*, FECH), and Giorgio Jackson,

⁹⁸ McSherry and Mejía, "Student's Challenge Pinochet's Legacy."

⁹⁹ Langman, "Chile's Winter of Discontent," 11.

¹⁰⁰ Long, "Chile Student Protests Point to Deep Discontent."

¹⁰¹ Randall, "In Chile, Explaining Massive Protests Entails Remembering the Past," 19.

president of the Federation of Students of the Catholic University (*Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica*, FEUC), have become popular voices, almost celebrities, in the education debate.¹⁰² Vallejo, the spokesperson for the CONFECH, especially has been the most prominent leader of the student movement. A Geography student at the Universidad de Chile, Vallejo was elected “Person of the Year” by a national Chilean media poll in 2011, claims over 400,000 followers on Twitter, and has gained international renown, appearing in media stories around the world.¹⁰³ She has been featured in TIME Magazine’s 2011 Person of the Year issue, as well as named one of Newsweek’s “150 Fearless Women” in March 2012 and featured in a 2012 article entitled “The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary” in The New York Times.

Vallejo has become an international icon, almost synonymous with the student movement, gaining sympathy and trust throughout working and middle-class neighborhoods throughout the country. “La Camila” as Chileans refer to her, appears in the news and political talk shows frequently. Vallejo holds a considerable amount of political capital and power, enjoying widespread admiration and affection from the Chilean population.¹⁰⁴

In addition to the leadership of Vallejo, the student movement was also aided in the fact that the key student groups, the CONFECH and the FECH, were already in place and organizationally strong. The CONFECH is a student-led organization made up of federations from a number of prominent universities in Chile. The FECH, one of the federations in the CONFECH, has been the most prominent actor in the student movement. While the FECH had no official role in the government, the leaders of the student group out of the Universidad de Chile had always extended significant influence on Chilean politics. It was founded in 1906 and had graduated all but three of Chile’s presidents in the 20th century, including Allende, many of

¹⁰² Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise,” 225.

¹⁰³ Goldman, “Camila Vallejo, The World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

which were leaders of the FECH. Pinochet had worked to lessen the organization's influence by diminishing the school's budget, closing many of the departments, and supporting the elite and conservative Universidad Católica instead.¹⁰⁵

The second government proposal to the students was declared on August 1, 2011, and included a plan of education reorganization throughout the entire system. Although the proposal did include a number of student demands, including allowing student participation in decision-making processes, increases in scholarship funding, and addressing high levels of student debt, it was once again rejected, as the students saw it as a culmination of current policy rather than the structural shift they had called for. The movement leaders responded with a call for a national strike and mass mobilization. A third and final government proposal was given in the middle of the month, once again failing to reach a successful compromise. In late August, the union organization Workers' United Center of Chile (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile*, CUT) organized a nationwide, two-day strike from August 24-25, 2011. These protests, marches, and citywide shutdowns of stores and businesses resulted in violence and the death of a 16-year-old student, from the bullet of a police officer.¹⁰⁶

The students assert that it is no longer adequate to just improve the current education system, but rather necessary to completely overhaul and replace it with a new structure to guarantee free, public, and quality education granted by the government to all students.¹⁰⁷ Talks between the student representatives from the CONFECH and the government subsequently broke down in October 2011 after the students withdrew from the negotiations.

As of May 2013, after almost two years of mobilization and collective action, discussions on resolving the conflict have not been resumed in any significant manner. While the student

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Sehnbruch and Donoso, "Chilean Winter of Discontent: Are Protests Here to Stay?"

movement has been on hiatus, picking up again recently in 2013, the leaders have acknowledged that no gains will be made while Piñera remains in power. A March 2013 poll revealed that 85 percent of Chileans still supported the students' demands,¹⁰⁸ although the population was not expecting the Piñera government to give any significant concessions.¹⁰⁹ With continued popular support, the students now seek to influence the November 2013 presidential elections, as what began as the Chilean Winter has proved a lasting movement calling for political change.

VI. CONCLUSION: Social Movement Emergence and the Chilean Student Movement

Social movements may emerge for a variety of reasons, due to changing factors in the context of political opportunities, the strength of mobilizing structures and group organization, or the framing processes that persuade the masses that addressing grievances is worth the risk of participating in collective action. Considering the evolution of social movement theories that attempt to explain the root causes and underlying conditions that lead to social movement emergence, it is possible to further understand what led to the Chilean Winter, which began in May of 2011 and great in power and support throughout the following months.

However, no single social movement theory can completely explain the emergence of the Chilean student movement. Instead, a more comprehensive model must be applied. McAdam et al. synthesized the three latter theories on social movement emergence beyond the limits of their theoretical constraints, noticing that since the 1990s, the prominent social movement studies had in common an emphasis on three major factors contributing to movement formation: "1) the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement; 2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available to insurgents; and 3) the collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and

¹⁰⁸ "Chile Student Protests Resume as 100,000 March."

¹⁰⁹ Goldman, "Camila Vallejo, The World's Most Glamorous Revolutionary."

action.”¹¹⁰ While previous scholars had typically focused on only one aspect of movement emergence, McAdam et al. sought to understand the relationships between all factors, linking political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes.

This comprehensive model of looking at social movement emergence can be applied to explain the case of the Chilean student movement that emerged in 2011. In the Chilean case, a dynamic relationship exists between all three factors of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes, as all factors relate to one another as precursors to the movement emergence. Looking through the lens of this more inclusive model it has been possible to break down the various dimensions that gave rise to the student mobilization.

The stage was set for the student mobilization through the existence of widely held grievances resulting from the profound income inequality and a severe stratification and privatization of the education structure in Chile. These underlying societal conditions had historical roots in the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship and the neoliberal education reform that was implemented in 1980. Yet, the Chilean student movement still required a variety of conditions to spark the 2011 mass mobilizations of students and other aggrieved social groups throughout the country.

The current evolution of social movement theory, along with the comprehensive model proposed by McAdam et al., emphasizes that the emergence of social movements primarily follows the theoretical foundations of the political process model, declaring that that majority of social movements or revolutionary actions are sparked by social changes that allow the existing political order to be either more vulnerable or receptive to challenges.¹¹¹ Various political opportunities were recognized and exploited by the student movement, allowing the movement

¹¹⁰ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 2.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 8.

to erupt as it did in 2011. These opportunities, as outlined throughout this case study, can be seen in the conservative administration of President Sebastián Piñera and actions to further legitimize for-profit education, as proposed by the Minister of Education, Joaquín Lavín. Additionally, the previous mobilization of the *Penguinos*, or high school student activists, in 2006, an environment of political demonstrations with the concurrent protests against the HydroAysén dam project in Patagonia, and the reaction of the Piñera administration to respond with frustration and even violence, further expanded political opportunities and popular support for the students.

Although political opportunities are a necessary condition to make way for social action, without organization and effective framing by group participants, these political opportunities may not be taken advantage of in the form of collective action. The theory of resource mobilization emphasizes a movement's ability to both acquire and utilize resources and to mobilize supporters and participants toward advancing the movement's goals. According to McAdam et al., "No matter how momentous a change appears in retrospect, it only becomes an 'opportunity' when defined as such by a *group* of actors sufficiently well organized to act on this shared definition of the situation."¹¹²

Mobilization of resources was essential in catapulting the movement to national support and international renown. In the case of the Chilean Winter, resources such as the strength of the CONFECH student organization, the group identities and generational aspects of the university students, who had grown up without fear of repression or dictatorship and were able to demand a shift in long-held beliefs, and of course the influence of powerful student leaders was crucial to the emergence and further mobilization of the student movement. With the charismatic and powerful Camila Vallejo as the most visible leader in the movement, public support was not hard

¹¹² Ibid.

to achieve, especially among middle and lower class communities and the movement soon became an international media sensation, bringing the students' cause to global attention.

While the protagonists of the Penguin Revolution in 2006 grew up to become the university students mobilizing five years later in 2011, it is also significant that the participants in the student movement were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The generation of current university students grew up experiencing both the transition to democratization and the entrance of Chile in the global economic market, coming of age in an era marked by both high levels of economic growth in the country, but also democratic norms and institutions.¹¹³ The protestors are the first generation to be born after the dictatorship, and had not experienced repression like the previous generation but rather had a space to vocalize their discontent through participatory democracy. It is suggested, "in contrast to those who endured the savagery of state-sponsored terror, [the students] are not afraid of government threats and repression."¹¹⁴ The absence of the fear of repression and the ability to organize through democratic means offered the students the change to organize through mass mobilization

The third factor in this theory is that of framing processes, or the "collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction" that influence groups toward mobilization.¹¹⁵ This played a large role in the movement's emergence as a powerful force driving change. The students' rhetoric involving the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship, calls for increasing democratization even decades after the democratic transition in 1990, and a demand for social justice in an era of hyper-privatized, neoliberal Chile, succeeded in framing the issue in a clear manner. Without the specific way in which the grievances were framed, the student movement

¹¹³ Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," 224.

¹¹⁴ McSherry and Mejía, "Student's Challenge Pinochet's Legacy," 30.

¹¹⁵ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, 2.

would not have taken off as successfully or forcefully as it did, and may not have caught on to the numerous sectors of society, from miners to union members to environmental groups, taking the student movement from its initial calls of education reform to a broader and more complex goal of replacing the long-held neoliberal model in the country.

Throughout the emergence of the Chilean student movement, all three factors—expanding political opportunities, effective mobilization of resources and organization, and strategic framing processes—can be seen in the lead-up to mobilization, with the necessity to understand the dynamic relationship between them. Although political opportunities were a requirement for group action, collective grievances, mobilization of resources and organized group action, and effective framing processes and official rhetoric came together to fuel the emergence of the movement. The combination of these factors explain why the social movement has been both seen on a massive scale and strongly supported by the majority of Chileans, and suggest that the protests are not an isolated phenomenon, but will be a recurring theme unless the structures of both political representation and distribution of economic and social gains is fundamentally altered, as the students' demands have gone far beyond a restructuring of the education system, but seek a complete overhaul of the existing neoliberal model of the country—and rejecting any government proposal that fails to do so.

Although it is crucial to understand what, in the Chilean case, sparked the students' revolutionary collective action, there may be more significance to the student movement than just the conditions through which it emerged. Perhaps more importantly, the protests mark the first time since the transition to democracy in which ordinary Chileans spoke out their grievances. When looking at this case, it is impossible to ignore the recent history of dictatorship and its repression. Through the student movement and mass mobilization in Chile, the country is

demanding their right to speak and be heard, the right to have a say in national policy, and the right to have agency in the face of power and injustice—a right that was denied and repressed during the dictatorship.¹¹⁶ More than the driving forces leading to the emergence of the Chilean student movement, it is significant that, regardless of what triggered the movement, the mass political mobilizations in Chile were able to emerge, and did so without fear of repression. As the movement continues, students continue to exercise their power and agency for political change, a right that was denied to their parents just a generation ago, challenging the structure of inequality in the country—and the *cacerolazos* are still waking up the country, ringing out in protest.

¹¹⁶ Randall, “In Chile, Explaining Massive Protests Entails Remembering the Past,” 21.

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