



PROTEST AND DEMOCRACY

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Schools for Democracy? The Role of NGOs in Protests in Democracies in the Global South

Carew E. Boulding

Protest in developing countries is sometimes characterized as potentially destabilizing or threatening to democracy, but growing evidence shows that protest can coexist with democracy even in the younger and poorer democracies of the world. In Latin America in 2005, for example, 38.7 percent of respondents reported they had taken part in protests, and 15 percent said they had protested recently in activities like authorized demonstrations, unauthorized demonstrations, riots, land occupations, and blocking traffic—all in countries that can reasonably be classified as democracies (Latinobarómetro 2005). More recently, surveys from the AmericasBarometer show between 8 and 13 percent of respondents reporting having taken part in protest within the last year.¹

What factors drive contemporary protests in developing democracies? The literature on voter participation and social movements suggests that how people interact in their daily lives—what types of associations they join, how often they attend meetings of community organizations, how they interact with their neighbors—is an important determinant of how they choose to engage in political life. In developing democracies, nongovernmental organizations often make up an important part of associational life. This chapter explores how NGO activity influences the

ways in which ordinary people associate with one another and how they participate in politics, particularly contentious politics. NGOs today make up an important part of civil society in most developing countries, where they have taken on service-delivery and advocacy roles in numbers that have grown exponentially since the 1980s. Instead of social clubs and civic groups, today much of the fabric of civil society in developing countries is comprised of NGOs. There have been, however, few systematic efforts to analyze the role these organizations play in changing political participation and collective action, especially as they relate to protest activity.

This chapter uses survey evidence to explore the relationship between NGOs and protest in Latin America and in other democracies in the developing world, demonstrating that NGOs play an important and nuanced role in facilitating protest.² First, across all the countries in the 2005 Latinobarómetro survey (one of the few surveys that asks a direct question about contact with NGOs), people who report contact with NGOs are significantly more likely to have participated in protest than people who have not interacted with an NGO. The World Values Survey for the same year shows a similar relationship between associational membership and protest in developing democracies outside of Latin America. People who are members of associations are more likely to protest than non-members. Although studies of political participation in wealthy democracies have long pointed to associational life as important for facilitating protest, little work on NGOs in developing democracies makes this connection. Instead, the strong conventional wisdom held by both scholars and policymakers is that NGOs strengthen democracy by training citizens to participate in the democratic process, not by training protesters.

Second, and perhaps more surprising, although NGO contact is associated with protest in every country in the study, the effect is strongest in countries where elections are flawed. Having contact with an NGO in a country where elections are marred by election fraud, low public confidence, weak and changeable political parties, or limited competition makes people more likely to protest. The effect of contact with an NGO in a country where elections are clean and competitive, and where political parties are strong and stable, is weaker, although still present. NGOs have a strong impact on protest, but that impact is shaped by the context of the quality of democratic elections in a country.

NGOs and Protest in Developing Democracies

Both NGOs and membership associations influence the decision to engage in political life through direct and indirect mechanisms. In practice, NGOs in the developing world do many of the same things that other voluntary associations do, but often with greater financial resources since they are more likely to be supported by international donors (Hulme and Edwards 1997). NGOs work in service provision (health care, sanitation, education, etc.) and they can work in advocacy (providing education, legal services, or directly lobbying the government). NGOs also often target their activities toward needy communities, bringing new resources to historically excluded populations. NGOs, by virtue of being problem-oriented organizations, also create new opportunities for association. Sometimes this happens directly, as when NGOs organize workshops and forums for communities to discuss issues, but it can also happen indirectly as people wait in line to get vaccines for their children, or obtain a driver's license, or any of the quotidian activities that occupy everyday life. Both the resources NGOs provide and the opportunities for association facilitate political participation much in the same way membership in other types of community organizations or voluntary associations is thought to: people who know each other, trust each other, and have some recognition of shared problems are more likely to decide to engage in political action.

Table 5.1 summarizes the key differences between NGOs and other membership associations, all of which can fall under the broader label of civil society. This table shows how these terms are commonly used, although in practice there is also a great deal of overlap between categories. NGOs are nonprofit organizations primarily focused on humanitarian objectives. They can be large, international organizations or small, community-based organizations, and the range of activities they engage in is vast, including service provision (such as health care, water, sanitation, housing), advocacy, research, or a combination thereof. Although some NGOs are also membership associations, the universe of associations is much larger, and includes community groups, churches, professional groups, and sports groups. These organizations together are sometimes referred to as “civil society,” separate from the government and from business.

TABLE 5.1 Comparing Civil-Society Organizations: NGOs and Membership Associations

Civil-Society Organizations		
	NGOs	Membership Associations
Definition	Nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations primarily focused on humanitarian objectives	Voluntary, membership-based organizations involved in a wide range of activities distinct from government and business
Examples	<p>International NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CARE Save the Children World Vision Catholic Relief Services Amnesty International <p>Local service-provision NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health care Sanitation services Housing Education <p>Advocacy NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women’s empowerment Capacity-building Environmental advocacy Indigenous rights <p>Research NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy advice Think tanks 	<p>Community groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood associations Youth groups <p>Sports and recreation</p> <p>Churches</p> <p>Labor unions</p> <p>Arts or music groups</p> <p>Educational groups</p> <p>Professional associations</p> <p>Consumer organizations</p> <p>Charity and volunteer groups</p> <p>Advocacy groups</p> <p>Social movements</p>

All of these types of organizations have grown in number and influence in the developing world over the last hundred years, but most rapidly since the 1980s. In 1909 there were fewer than 200 international NGOs in the world; in 1956 there were more than 1,000; and in 2005 there were more than 20,000 (Werker and Ahmed 2008, 75).³ Similar growth in the number of domestic NGOs has been documented in countries across the developing world, including Nepal, Bolivia, India, Tunisia, Brazil, and Thailand (Edwards 2009, 21). This growth can be attributed in part to the growing availability of foreign aid funds for NGOs involved in development projects. Since the 1980s, there has been a shift in foreign aid spending away from governments (many of which were plagued by corruption) toward NGOs. NGOs in the developing world have become the face of civil society for foreign aid donors seeking to promote democracy through the strengthening of civil society (Ottaway and Carothers 2000).

Considerable portions of both multilateral and bilateral aid are channeled through NGOs, and many organizations have whole units devoted to strengthening ties with NGOs and building civil society. The World Bank, for example, involves civil-society organizations through policy consultations, information sharing and training, grant making, and in setting poverty-reduction strategy goals. The World Bank estimates that 5 percent of its total annual portfolio (or about \$1 billion) is channeled to civil-society organizations through grassroots development programs (World Bank 2006, xv). This effort to support civil society by collaborating with and funding NGOs and other civil-society organizations is found across the major donors, including the US and European aid agencies (Howell and Pearce 2002). Understanding how these diverse organizations affect political life is a challenging task. As these organizations become more numerous across the developing world, however, it is also a critically important one for many audiences, including international donors, governments in the developing world, academics, and NGO representatives.

What role do these organizations play in shaping political participation? There is abundant evidence from wealthier countries that associational life facilitates political participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1987), but whether that participation takes the form of voting or the form of protest is shaped more by the larger question of how well democratic

political institutions—especially elections—are functioning. People who are motivated to participate are more likely to vote when there is little fraud or corruption in the electoral process, when political parties represent meaningful choices, when there is real political competition, and when reasonable people have confidence that participating in elections might affect outcomes they deem important. These conditions are not fully met in any election, even in “advanced” democracies, but there is real variation in each of these factors that influences the likelihood that individuals see voting as a meaningful activity. And, where elections are failing on some or all of these counts, a motivated person views contentious political action favorably.

Dissatisfaction with formal mechanisms of participation is not only a function of electoral fraud or corruption; it can also be a function of electoral outcomes. More specifically, democratic governments’ failures to respond to the needs or interests of constituents can channel political participation into nontraditional and contentious forms of participation. For example, widespread dissatisfaction with formal voting can occur when elections are technically working fine but people have little confidence that electoral participation will produce substantive benefits. In fact, in some cases, the formal mechanisms of democratic governance may be functioning quite well, but the government is performing poorly in terms of meeting the real needs of citizens, or offering choices on issues that concern most people.

This is not to make the case that the individual activities, political leanings, or degree of activism that NGOs engage in do not matter. They quite obviously do matter. But there is also abundant evidence that the influence organizations have is not limited to their stated goals or outright activist pursuits. On the contrary—and this is the core of many of the arguments that claim that associations are the key to understanding stable civil society—organizations shape citizens’ interactions, their engagement with the state, even when their stated political aims are very limited. That is, even organizations that seek a low profile, never actively engage in politics, do not offer workshops on political engagement, etc., still bring resources into a community, and more importantly create associational space where neighbors and community members can talk (while waiting in line for a vaccine, for example, or attending a public meeting on

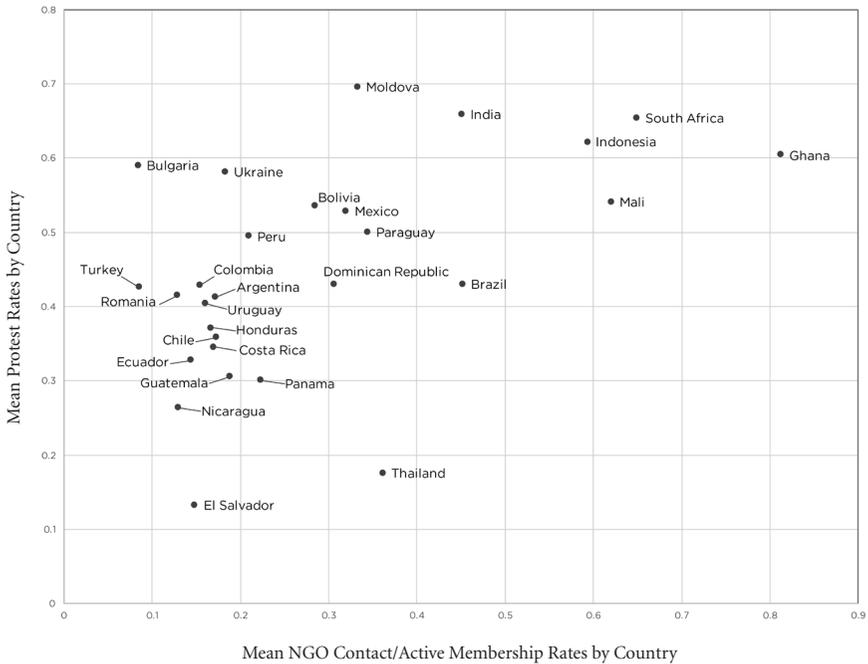
a proposed irrigation scheme). This simple interaction—talking between neighbors in an environment with the suggestion of solving problems—facilitates political action because those neighbors who do run into each other at an NGO office are more likely to discuss shared problems, and to trust each other enough to try to do something about them, than neighbors who have had no such opportunity.

For example, if you lived in a neighborhood where many NGOs are working, your chance of knowing your neighbors, having a shared sense of the problems facing your community, and deciding to take some action is higher than it would be if you lived in a neighborhood with no NGOs, community organizations, or voluntary associations. But the choice about how you are going to proceed—Are you going to vote? Are you going to sign a petition? March to the capital? Throw rocks and break windows?—is shaped by which options seem most effective in the context in which you live. Obviously, the context in which this decision is made is a vastly complex one involving a host of impulses, weighing costs and benefits and other practical considerations, but in general, we can expect that in cases where elections are viewed as rigged, corrupt, or irrelevant to the real policy issues at stake, it is more likely that people will pursue other tactics.

Survey Evidence: NGOs, Associational Membership, and Protest

Looking at the patterns of contact with NGOs and participation in political protest by country is a useful starting point for exploring these issues more systematically. Even at the country level, a clear pattern emerges: people in countries with high rates of contact with NGOs tend to experience higher rates of political protest. Figure 5.1 shows the relationship between NGO contact and protest in Latin America. Bolivia, Mexico, and Paraguay top the graph, with protest rates around 50 percent, and contact with NGOs between 30 and 40 percent. Brazil is unusual in its very high rates of NGO contact and relatively low protest compared with Bolivia and Mexico. Overall, the pattern is clear and fairly consistent: countries in which people are more likely to contact an NGO also witness higher rates of participation in nonvoting political action. Figure 5.1 also includes developing democracies from outside of Latin America, for which World

FIGURE 5.1 Contact with NGOs or Membership Associations and Protest Rates by Country



Values Survey data are available on membership rates and protest rates. Although the World Values Survey does not ask a direct question about NGOs, membership in associations serves as a useful proxy. A similar pattern is visible for the countries outside Latin America: countries with higher rates of involvement with voluntary organizations also tend to have higher rates of participation in protest activities. The pattern is similar if the measure for protest that only counts respondents who claim to have participated in demonstrations is used.

To test the effect of NGO activity and civil-society membership on political participation more systematically, I estimate models of protest participation using both individual-level variables from the survey responses and country-level factors, first for Latin America and second for a sample of developing-world democracies outside of Latin America. Because both

individual- and country-level factors are important for understanding the effect of NGOs, I estimate multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression.⁴ The individual-level variables are drawn from responses to the 2005 Latinobarómetro survey and the 2005 World Values Survey. Country-level variables come from a variety of sources, detailed below.

Data and Models

Individual-Level Variables

For the Latinobarómetro survey, the measure of protest is coded as “1” if the respondent participated in any of the contentious political actions listed in the survey (participating in demonstrations of any sort, riots, land or building occupations, or blocking traffic). *Protest* is coded as “0” if the respondent did not participate at all. It is also coded as “0” for those who voted or signed a petition but did not participate in the more contentious forms of participation. In the World Values Survey, *protest* is coded as “1” for respondents who have or “might” have participated in peaceful demonstrations. Similar variables capture the response to questions about signing petitions and joining in boycotts

The best measure of NGO contact comes from the Latinobarómetro in 2005, which asks a direct question about contact with NGOs in the past three years. This measure captures individuals who have sought out direct contact with NGOs, not just passive encounters with NGO activity. In this sense, it measures a direct individual effect, not the broader, more diffuse effects of having NGOs in a community. On average across all countries in the sample, 22.48 percent of respondents have contacted NGOs, ranging from a low of 13 percent in Nicaragua to a high of 45.18 percent in Brazil. This high rate of NGO contact is consistent across recent surveys. In 2001, the only other year this question was asked, 22.82 percent of respondents contacted an NGO. Both surveys include questions on associational activity, including membership in a variety of organizations. Since the World Values Survey does not ask a direct NGO question, associational membership is used as the main independent variable for the non-Latin American countries.

To control for other individual-level factors that affect political participation, I include variables for demographic factors (gender, age, education, personal income), and political attitudes (trust in government, interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, political ideology, political interest, personal experience with corruption, and political knowledge). To control for the possibility that some people are more active in all political participation, I control for having voted in the last election.

Country-Level Factors

Quality of democratic elections is the main country-level variable of interest. Since elections can fail to perform well in a number of ways (both procedurally and in terms of outcomes), measuring this concept requires some careful thought. First, if political parties are not organized around the issues that are important to people, or are not stable enough to offer meaningful cues from one election to another, elections fall short. Second, fraud, corruption, voter intimidation, vote buying, or any number of other directly fraudulent actions, can tarnish elections, which would impinge on an election being considered “free and fair.” Finally, even if there are not obvious indications of fraud, elections can be considered less than effective if there is widespread dissatisfaction with the process of voting, or the choices available in an election. That is, even if elections appear to be running fairly regularly without blatant fraud, people are still likely to look for other venues for participation if they have little confidence that voting can accomplish their aims.

In order to capture this conception of variation in the effectiveness of elections as a tool for participation, I use the index of party institutionalization compiled by the Inter-American Development Bank (Berkman et al. 2008). This index captures all the important election criteria described here, including the strength and issue-orientation of political parties, the degree to which the election is free and fair, and how much confidence voters have in the process. I chose the party institutionalization index as the most complete measure of the extent to which ordinary people perceive elections to be working, both procedurally and in terms of outcomes, but using other indications of the quality of democratic elections yields similar results. Specifically, the World Bank’s good governance indicators

produce very similar interactive effects as the party institutionalization index.⁵

Specifically, the index is composed of five measures. First is a measure of the extent to which there is a “stable, moderate and socially rooted party system to articulate and aggregate societal interests,” which is taken from the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (Berkman et al. 2008, 14). Second is an indicator of confidence in political parties and elections based on the World Values Survey. Third is a measure of vote volatility as an indicator of political competition.⁶ Fourth is a measure of the extent to which the elections are considered free and fair based on elite surveys conducted by Berkman et al. (2008, 14). And fifth is the age of the political party system according to the Database of Political Institutions, which is included as a measure of how well political parties are able to provide continuity between elections. Together, these five factors give a complete summary of how well electoral institutions are functioning in the eyes of ordinary people. This index is correlated at 0.70 with the Freedom House measure of democracy, so they are obviously related to other indicators or measures of quality of democracy, without merely measuring the same things.

Since there are only eighteen countries covered in the Latinobarómetro survey, including too many country-level variables poses a problem for estimation. However, there are several other country-level factors aside from party institutionalization that might influence the individual-level relationships we observe in the data. To address this concern, the full multilevel model is estimated with each of the following country-level variables separately, to check for the robustness of the individual-level relationships. The main result—that individuals who have contact with NGOs are more likely to participate in protest—is robust to the inclusion or exclusion of each of the following country-level variables: Freedom House democracy score, the Human Development Index, and civil-society density (measured a country’s average membership from the survey).

Findings: NGOs and Protest

Using the data described above, I first explore the hypothesis that people who have contact with NGOs are more likely to protest. The results are presented in Table 5.2. The models estimate protest participation using

TABLE 5.2 Protest in Latin America

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FACTORS		
NGO contact	0.769*** (0.04)	1.877*** (0.35)
Membership in associations	0.405*** (0.03)	0.384*** (0.04)
Female	-0.299*** (0.03)	-0.274*** (0.03)
Age	-0.012*** (0.00)	-0.013*** (0.00)
Education	0.027*** (0.00)	0.026*** (0.00)
Personal income	0.000 (0.02)	-0.004 (0.02)
Trust in government	0.039* (0.02)	0.011 (0.02)
Interpersonal trust	0.029 (0.04)	0.059 (0.04)
Life satisfaction	-0.109*** (0.02)	-0.092*** (0.02)
Left-right ideology	-0.002*** (0.00)	-0.002*** (0.00)
Political interest	0.299*** (0.02)	0.321*** (0.02)
Experience with corruption	0.346*** (0.04)	0.311*** (0.05)
Political knowledge	0.150*** (0.02)	0.136*** (0.02)
Voted	0.050 (0.04)	0.078 (0.04)
Constant	-1.508* (0.62)	

TABLE 5.2 Protest in Latin America cont'

INTERACTIONS		
NGO contact X party institutionalization		-0.659** (0.20)
COUNTRY-LEVEL FACTORS		
Party institutionalization	0.312 (0.34)	1.656* (0.72)
Observations	18887	18887
No. of countries	18	18

NOTE: Table entries are maximum likelihood estimates with estimated standard errors in parentheses generated using the command `xtmelogit` in Stata 10. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

SOURCE: Latinobarómetro (2005).

multilevel mixed-effects logistic regression models based on maximum likelihood. Model 1 estimates the effect of contact with NGOs on protest, controlling for the country-level measure of party institutionalization. Model 2 models the cross-level interaction between NGO contact and party institutionalization to test whether the relationship between NGO contact and protesting is constant across countries with different quality democratic elections (or, as I suspect, whether NGOs have a stronger relationship to protest in countries where elections are not working well).

Contact with an NGO is positively associated with participating in protest activity at a statistically significant level in all three specifications. The individual variables in the model illustrate tendencies of participation in Latin America. Women and older people are less likely to protest. More educated people protest more on average, which is consistent with findings from studies of protests in Europe and North America, but runs counter to the characterization of protest in Latin America as a pro-poor movement made up largely of the uneducated. Interpersonal trust and trust in government have no significant effect on protest. Less-satisfied, left-leaning people who are both interested in and knowledgeable about politics are much more likely to protest than their satisfied, right-leaning counterparts with little interest in politics.

These individual-level factors are stable in the interaction model, where the party institutionalization index is included in the estimation (Model 2). The index overall is a very poor predictor of protest: none of the variables are significant and only between 4 and 5 percent of the variance is explained by country-level factor, but the significance of the individual-level variables hold.⁷ The individual results are also robust to the inclusion of the country-level variables discussed above, although only compulsory voting laws are statistically significant: countries with compulsory voting laws not surprisingly have higher voting rates as well (results not shown here). The weak predictive power of the country-level variables can be partly attributed to the relatively small number of countries in the sample. With only eighteen countries, and over twenty thousand individual-level observations, only very strong cross-country relationships would likely be significant.

One concern with these models is that politically active people might be more likely to contact NGOs *and* more likely to participate in political actions, without any causal relationship between the two. If this were the case, we might still observe a positive and significant relationship between contact with NGOs and protest and voting, but not because NGOs influence protest directly. To the extent that this relationship still represents a serious departure from conventional characterizations of the type of effects that NGOs have, the finding is still of interest. More importantly, the measure of contact with an NGO is only correlated at 0.16 with political interest. That is, although people with high levels of interest in politics are slightly more likely to contact NGOs than those that are not at all interested in politics, the difference is relatively minor.

Similar models using questions from the World Values Survey in developing-world democracies outside of Latin America yield very similar results. Using the measure of membership in associations instead of NGO contact, I estimate similar models of protest in developing democracies outside of Latin America. The Latin American countries where the World Values Survey was conducted are not included in these models in order to allow for a clear comparison between Latin America and other regions.⁸ Several patterns stand out. First, membership in associations is a positive and significant predictor of participation in all the nonvoting types of participation (signing a petition, joining a peaceful demonstration, or joining

TABLE 5.3 Protest in Non-Latin American Developing Democracies

	PROTEST
Active membership in association	2.499*** (0.374)
Female	-0.339*** (0.042)
Age	-0.015*** (0.001)
Education	0.406*** (0.048)
Income	0.020* (0.010)
Life satisfaction	-0.045*** (0.010)
Life Confidence in government	0.070** (0.024)
Trust in people	-0.04 (0.052)
Ideology	-0.023** (0.009)
Political interest	0.353*** (0.023)
Political Voted	0.154** (0.056)
INTERACTION	
Active member X party institutionalization	-1.117*** (0.200)
COUNTRY-LEVEL FACTORS	
Party institutionalization	0.519 (0.696)

TABLE 5.3 Protest in Non-Latin American Developing Democracies
con't

VARIANCE COMPONENTS	
Country level	0.010
	(0.004)
Observations	11015
No. of Countries	11
-2 X Log likelihood	13593.5738

NOTE: Table entries are maximum likelihood estimates with estimated standard errors in parentheses generated using the command `xtmelogit` in Stata 10 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Countries are included in the sample if they are nominally democratic (score higher than a 6 on the combined Freedom House score), and have an income below \$12,000 per capita. The countries included are: Bulgaria, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Mali, Moldova, Romania, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, and Ukraine.

a boycott). Just as we see in Latin America, involvement with civil-society organizations has a larger and more consistent effect on protest behavior than it does on voter turnout in developing democracies. Table 5.3 presents the results of three models using a different measure of non-voting political activity as the dependent variable. The coefficient for membership in associations is positive and significant in each model, showing that people who are connected with civil-society organizations are more likely to participate in demonstrations, more likely to sign petitions, and more likely to join boycotts than similar nonmember individuals. These models yield similar results: membership is significantly associated with protest.

Since the multilevel regression estimates include individual responses from multiple countries, and since the interaction term suggests the effect of NGOs may be quite different under different quality-of-democracy conditions, it is helpful to look at the relationship between NGO contact (or membership in associations) and protest for each country as well as the aggregate patterns. Table 5.4 summarizes the results of the full logistic regression by country for the key variables of interest. A few patterns stand out. First, the effect of NGO contact or associational membership on protest is strong and consistent across Latin America. In all eighteen

countries in the sample, NGO contact has a positive and significant relationship with protest. Second, the effect of NGOs appears to be stronger and more consistent than other types of associational membership activities. Although NGO contact is positively associated with protest in *every* country, membership is a significant predictor of protest in most, with the exception of Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Similar results are evident outside of Latin America. Although membership has no effect on voting or protests in two countries (Bulgaria and South Africa), in every other country in the sample, membership in associations is a good predictor of participation in political protest. Despite the small number of countries represented here, the pattern is remarkably similar to what we observe in Latin America—in almost every case, membership in associations increases the likelihood of political protest, while the effect on voting is much less consistent.

People who are involved with NGOs and civil-society organizations are more likely to engage in a wide range of political actions, including voting, peaceful protest, and contentious protest. However, it would be misleading to claim that the relationship between civil society and participation is constant across different contexts. In fact, there is a great deal of variation in the strength of the relationship between individual involvement with civil society and protest. Although in most cases, contact with NGOs makes protest participation more likely, in some countries the effect is fairly weak. In others, it is very strong.

What explains the variation in the strength of the relationship between civil society and political participation across countries? What explains the relative impact on voting versus participation in contentious politics? Here, I return to the idea that how well the democratic political system is working is critical for understanding the effect of NGOs on protest. This section explores the role that civil society plays in mobilizing political participation under conditions that are common in democracies in the developing world: democratic institutions, including regular elections, but also problems with corruption, rule of law, and poor government performance. Does civil society have the same effect on political participation under conditions of crises of the democratic process? Does civil society influence political participation differently when the government is failing in terms of providing material benefits?

TABLE 5.4 Relationship between NGOs, Associational Membership, and Protest

COUNTRY	EFFECT ON PROTEST		NO. OF RESPONDENTS
	NGO Contact	Membership	
Argentina	+	.	1,200
Bolivia	+	+	1,200
Brazil	+	+	1,204
Bulgaria		.	530
Chile	+	+	1,200
Colombia	+	+	1,200
Costa Rica	+	.	1,200
Dom. Rep.	+	+	1,000
Ecuador	+	+	1,200
El Salvador	+	.	1,010
Ghana		+	706
Guatemala	+	.	1,000
Honduras	+	.	1,000
India		+	725
Indonesia		+	1,185
Mali		.	572
Mexico	+	+	1,200
Moldova		+	765
Nicaragua	+	+	1,000
Panama	+	+	1,008
Paraguay	+	+	1,200
Peru	+	+	1,200
Romania		+	735
South Africa		.	2,286
Thailand		+	1,475
Turkey		+	1,081
Ukraine		+	476
Uruguay	+	+	1,200
Venezuela	+	+	1,200

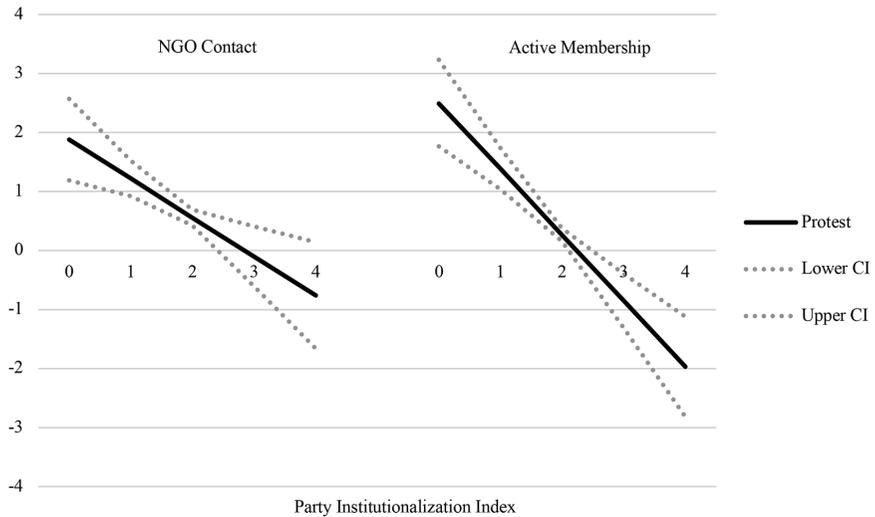
NOTE: “+” indicates a positive and significant coefficient ($p < 0.01$) in the country-specific, fully specified logistic regression with robust standard errors. “.” indicates no statistically significant relationship. Data for Latin American countries from Latinobarómetro (2005) and data for all others from the World Values Survey (2005).

Civil-society activity can be thought of as a stimulant for participation, but how that participation is channeled depends on how well democratic processes are perceived to be working. When the context is one of unresponsiveness—because of either problems with the democratic process, such as electoral fraud, or problems with government performance, such as a chronic inability to address serious poverty—individuals involved with NGOs and associations are more likely to direct their organized energies toward contentious politics than standard institutional participation like voting. Even at the extremes, civil society is only one small part of why people decide to engage politically and make the effort to participate, which is even more reason to expect that the form of participation will be shaped by the larger political context. In cases where the government is failing to perform well, in terms of either the democratic process or overall government performance, NGOs are more likely to have a stronger impact on promoting protest and less of an impact on voting.

These patterns raise some interesting questions about the importance of the political context in shaping the relationships between NGOs, associations, and political participation. To illustrate the conditional effect of how well institutions are functioning, I look more closely at the interaction between party institutionalization and contact with NGOs. In other words, I explore how the relationship between contact with NGOs and voting and political protest change under different conditions of party institutionalization. It is my contention that NGOs do more to stimulate political protest when party institutionalization is weakest. That is, where political parties are unstable, extreme, or disconnected from the needs of average citizens, where confidence in the ability of political parties to represent interests is low, where the fairness of elections is reasonably questioned, people involved with NGOs are more likely to take to the streets than to form orderly lines at voting booths.

To test for this conditional relationship, I estimate the models of protest and voting with a cross-level interaction term for the party institutionalization index and membership, and present the marginal effect of NGO contact at varying levels of party institutionalization. I do this first for the Latin American countries and then for the World Values Survey countries (see Figure 5.2). As party institutionalization increases, contact with NGOs has a declining effect on political protest. At low scores on the

FIGURE 5.2 Marginal Effect of NGO Contact and Active Membership on Protest



NOTE: NGO contact data from Latinobarómetro (2005) and active membership data from World Values Survey (2005).

party institutionalization index, NGO contact has a significant effect on protest, but the effect diminishes as elections and political parties work better. At a score of 3 or 4, NGOs no longer have a statistically significant effect on protest.

The graph for developing democracies outside of Latin America also shows a clear negative trend—at low levels of the party institutionalization index (where confidence in elections is low, political parties are young and unstable and claim only tenuous ties to real interests in society) membership in associations has the strongest effect on protest. As the party institutionalization index increases, the effect of membership weakens, until it becomes insignificant at an index score of 4. In other words, when elections and political parties seem to be working well as mechanisms for communicating to the state, membership in civil-society organizations

does not predict protest behavior. The marginal effect of membership on voting is not significant at any value of the party institutionalization index, which is not surprising given the weak significance of the relationship between membership and voting in most of the models estimated in this chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter presents surprising evidence that NGOs and other associations serve as an important mechanism for protests, even at the individual level. That is, people who are actively involved in civic life are more likely to participate in all forms of political action—including contentious political behavior along the lines of protests and demonstrations.

Despite the very robust finding that associational membership and contact with NGOs increases protest, there is real variation in the strength of this effect, as well as the relative influence of civil society on different types of participation. I have made the case that the form participatory action takes is largely determined by the context of how well the democratic institutions of elections and political parties are functioning. Where political parties are weak and unstable and people have little confidence in them, and where elections are viewed as fraudulent or unfair, membership in civil-society organizations does more to boost protest than it does to boost voting. What this finding suggests is that civil-society activity makes it easier for people to engage politically, and more likely that they will choose to participate. More interesting, NGOs play a crucial role in facilitating political protest—especially where democratic institutions are not working well. When voting is most likely to be ineffective, NGOs encourage other types of mobilization that may be more effective, including political protest.

NOTES

- 1 13 percent in 2008, 8 percent in 2010 and 2012, across a pooled sample of all countries. Thanks to the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available. The LAPOP data is available at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>.
- 2 For a more detailed exploration of how NGOs affect political participation in different contexts, including voter turnout, see Boulding (2010; 2014).
- 3 The statistics cited by Werker and Ahmed and referenced here come from the Union of International Associations.
- 4 For a discussion of the advantages of multilevel modeling, see Steenbergen and Jones (2002).
- 5 The World Bank's (2010) good governance score averages scores on indices of rule of law, control of corruption, and government effectiveness.
- 6 Vote volatility is calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between votes or seats won in the current election and votes or seats won in the last election, summing the results for all parties, and dividing this total by two (Berkman et al. 2008, 14). The data used in these calculations are taken from Mainwaring and Zoco (2007).
- 7 For the model of protest, $\rho=0.040$.
- 8 Estimating the models for the Latin American countries using the World Values Survey data yields very similar results to those using Latinobarómetro data—membership is a significant predictor of protest activity in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru when estimated using either logistic regression by country, or using multilevel, mixed-effects logistic regression, with the same control variables as the main models.

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