

POLITICAL OPENING AND TACTICAL CHANGE: MEXICAN PROTEST, 1964-2000

Heather Sullivan

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Approved by

Evelyne Huber

Jonathan Hartlyn

Graeme Robertson

Abstract

HEATHER SULLIVAN: Political Opening and Tactical Change: Mexican Protest,
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(Under the direction of Evelyne Huber)

This paper explores the relationship between democratic opening and contentious politics. It focuses on one element of contentious politics, tactics, which are expected to change substantially alongside the move from an authoritarian to a democratic regime. Although the theories on tactical shifts in response to regime change were crafted in light of the early European experience with democratization, this paper shows that the theory holds in the radically different context of Mexico between 1964 and 2000. Tactics shifted from predominantly direct to demonstrative forms of action with the political opening that occurred during this period. As the political regime opened, even rural protesters shifted to a heavier reliance on demonstrative tactics. This paper also illustrates that full democratization is not required to precipitate the shift in tactics. During Mexico's hybrid regime, from 1988 to 2000, popular mobilization took on democratic rather than authoritarian characteristics.

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Introduction

There has been considerable debate over the relationship between democratization and political protest. Some scholars see outright peril in labor mobilization, asserting that labor must subjugate its interests in order for democratic transition to occur (Przeworski 1986), while others argue that some limited mobilization of the working class is not only acceptable, but often necessary to push democratization forward (Collier 1999; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) and Tilly (2004) are perhaps the strongest proponents of the importance of contentious politics to democratization. They accept that the multitude of contingent factors erupting in cycles of contention can lead to extremely varied outcomes, yet strongly maintain that: “democratic polities form through contentious politics and reshape contentious politics as they form” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

This paper sets out to probe the second half of the relationship that McAdam et al theorize; how does the formation of a democratic polity reshape contentious politics? I will focus in particular on one element of contentious politics, tactics, which are expected to change substantially in the shift from an authoritarian to a democratic context. First, I will lay out the theories on how the political context affects contentious politics. Then, I will frame the Mexican case in terms of the important historical developments and changing political contexts both leading up to and during the period under examination. I will then discuss the problems related to trying to operationalize and empirically probe some of the extant theories with data from a modern, non-European case and then I will explore how

protest tactics evolved alongside political opening in Mexico between 1964 and 2000.

Finally, I will examine and refute some alternate hypotheses that could be argued to explain the evolution of tactics that I observe.

Review of the Literature: Changing Contexts, Changing Tactics

Scholars of social movements and contentious politics have long understood that popular mobilization does not happen in a vacuum and that even when not focused on distinctly political matters, protest cannot be understood in isolation from the political system under which it takes place. Political opportunities, understood as state structure and strength, as well as the forms of elite alliances, shape popular mobilization. Political opportunities play a role in influencing not only whether mobilization occurs, but also the forms that protest takes and the level of success that different tactics can achieve (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1998).

Yet what constitutes an opportunity and the ways in which political changes influence protest is still an unsettled debate. For example, Kreisi (1996) argues that as institutional access points open and the likelihood of repression decreases, both characteristic changes in the process of democratization, civil society actors are more likely to mobilize. Gamson and Meyer (1996), on the other hand, note the potentially complicated nature of political opportunities. For example, while the introduction of competitive elections is assumed to channel popular action in some direction, whether it serves to encourage or constrain mobilization seems an open, contextually dependent question. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) echo this sentiment, noting that some transitions cause a popular upsurge while others do not. Roberts (1997) also observes that democratization “may provide social actors with new channels of access to political institutions, but it can also remove authoritarian rulers

against which opposition forces unified and mobilized, inject divisive forms of partisan competition into social organizations, and resurrect political parties and electoral activities that can siphon off energy from social networks” (139).

Hipsher (1996) argues forcefully that democratization leads to movement demobilization. She asserts that in order not to jeopardize transitions social actors are likely to acquiesce to limited democracy, defined as “the absence of military rule” (274). She attributes this change in part to the power that a social movement’s connection to a political party has in defining the tactics the movement employs. In the post-transition period, Hipsher considers institutionalization and demobilization of movements to be in the interests of the political parties in light of their nascent integration into the political regime. Herbert Kitschelt (1986) explains tactical shifts in a similar way, though the political structure is important in and of itself, without the necessary intervening variable of political parties. In an examination of democracies, he notes that more open systems invite “*assimilitative* strategies,” which use institutional mechanisms to make demands, while closed systems trigger “*confrontational*, disruptive strategies orchestrated outside established policy channels” (66, italics in original).

The distinct approaches chosen and the manner in which claims are expressed can be understood in terms of the repertoire of contention. Tactics are the maneuvers used by protesters and it is their ability to wield them and disrupt everyday politics, extract direct concessions, or influence public opinion that gives contentious politics its power. Changes in political opportunities may require changes in tactics, but this is only possible within certain bounds. What falls within these bounds has come to be called the repertoire of contention. Tarrow (1998), leaning heavily on work by Tilly, explained the repertoire as:

A limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. The limits of that learning constrain the choices available for collective interaction and lay the foundation for future choices. People experiment with new forms in the search for tactical advantage, but they do so in small ways, at the edge of well-established routines (30).

While changes are thus typically slow to happen, it has been postulated that there are two major exceptions which can lead to more decisive change. The first powerful change in repertoire happened in a particular historical moment and context. In Western Europe circa the 1770s, nation state penetration of society, democratization, and the rise of capitalism created a marked change in the repertoire, dividing protest into two distinct forms, pre-modern and modern. During this period, European countries experienced rapid urbanization and increasing concentrations of capital. The increased resources available to governments opened space for the creation of national educational systems, which put emphasis on national languages, cultures, and histories. Levels of literacy grew and print media in the form of newspapers and pamphlets came to be read by a wider, more economically and geographically diverse audience. This period marked the birth of national citizenship and identity, as well as the birth of modern popular media, which increased the salience of the state as a target for contentious politics while simultaneously creating a public print forum in which grievances could be expressed and shared and protest tactics diffused (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004).

It was between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries in Europe that the modern repertoire of contention developed. The pre-modern repertoire had been marked by protest that was contained within and pertained to a single locality. The tactics were very issue and place specific with direct, disruptive, unsustained action used against local antagonists while

intermediaries were used when authorities outside of the locality were targeted (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1983). Examples of pre-modern protests include food riots, invasions of forbidden territories, attacks on property, public taunting of antagonists, and the use of accepted public events such as funerals or parades to express political claims (Tilly 1983). The modern repertoire solidified in the nineteenth century and is marked by the shift to autonomous actions that are national in scope and conducive to coordination among localities. Strikes, electoral rallies, public meetings, marches, and demonstrations are the principle and paradigmatic forms of protest in the modern repertoire.

Tarrow (1998) expands on this distinction by specifying a particular shift in the types of tactics employed. The premodern forms of protest were “aimed mainly at extracting claims directly from antagonists or taking vengeance upon them,” while modern forms were much more performance oriented, designed to change public opinion and influence national politics or politicians (94). Tarrow notes that this type of performance protest emerged in the nineteenth century, but that it was not until the twentieth century “with the development of mass media and the growing role of states and third parties in determining the outcomes of protest, that the performance of political protest has become routine and professional” (94).

While Europe’s political, economic, and societal changes dramatically reshaped European protest forms, the rest of the world did not simultaneously experience this change. The factor which is thought to spur the second decisive shift in repertoire in other parts of the world and at other points in time is the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. Democratization is thought to transform contentious politics by altering the way in which grievances are expressed (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004). Tilly (2004) asserts that under undemocratic regimes protest is rarely tolerated and, therefore,

arises in two distinct forms; “either it adopts forbidden clandestine attacks on officials or it crowds into the relatively protected spaces of authorized public gatherings such as funerals, holidays, and civic ceremonies” (30). Tilly expects democratic protest to be less deadly and less destructive than its authoritarian counterpart and considers it more likely to be sanctioned by the regime as a legitimate form of participation. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) explain this shift more explicitly, noting:

First, on the whole, democratization greatly limits life- and property-threatening forms of public, collective claim making, substituting for them highly visible but less directly destructive varieties of interaction. Second, in democratic regimes, in the average, threats and declared intentions to act in a certain way (instead of nonnegotiable direct actions) occupy much more central positions in popular politics than they do in nondemocratic regimes (269).

The characteristics of pre-modern and modern repertoires get overlaid onto the authoritarian and democratic repertoires, respectively. Tilly (2004) repeats his earlier distinction between pre-modern and modern protest yet here he explicitly attributes the change in tactics to democratization. Democratization, he asserts, shifts the repertoire from “predominantly parochial, particular, and bifurcated interactions based largely on embedded identities to predominantly cosmopolitan, modular, and autonomous interactions based largely on detached identities” (8). Yet by collapsing the changes that occurred in Europe during the period of democratization to this single dimension, he glosses over the additional factors on which modern contention seems to lie such as urbanization, industrialization, and modernization of the press.

In addition, Tilly (2004) fails to address the role that uneven development might play in these tactical shifts. Uneven development implies the continued existence of rural areas and it has been theorized that the rural versus urban protest repertoire, much like the

authoritarian-democratic dichotomy, tends to map onto the pre-modern/modern distinction (Tarrow 1998; Tilly and Wood 2003). Tilly and Wood (2003) provide evidence of the rural-urban distinction in their examination of three counties in Great Britain, one urban, one industrial, and one rural. After parliamentarization, the urban-industrial counties shifted toward the modern repertoire, but the rural county, which also exhibited lower levels of contentious claims-making, did not. Rural protest remained split between personalized, direct action and indirect petitioning. If rural protest tends to predominantly take on a pre-modern form, failing to consider uneven development could potentially be a serious oversight in countries where, despite industrialization, rural populations remain high.

Another question that remains unanswered by Tilly's theory based on the early European experience is how should protest appear in the context of hybrid regimes? Hybrid regimes are regimes that combine features of democracy alongside features of authoritarianism (Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002). There has been a relatively recent proliferation of these hybrids, which has prompted various attempts to classify regimes along a more nuanced continuum rather than simply forcing them into a simple democratic or authoritarian category. Diamond (2002) identifies six regime types: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, ambiguous regimes, competitive authoritarian, hegemonic electoral authoritarian, and politically closed authoritarian, listed in order of decreasing openness. Schedler (2002), collapsing this typology into four slightly broader categories of liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral authoritarianism, and closed authoritarianism, notes that in 2001 fifty eight regimes, or thirty eight percent of the world's regimes, fell into the category he termed electoral authoritarianism. Although there are now

considerable numbers of hybrid regimes, their characteristics and internal dynamics are not fully understood.

This paper will explore the nature of protest in Mexico, where a closed authoritarian regime gradually shifted to a semi-authoritarian hybrid before transitioning to democracy in 2000. While protest is expected to look one way in democracies and another in authoritarian regimes the spaces in between are not well theorized. Mexico is an excellent case to examine the forms that protest takes under various regime types, as well as how protest evolves in response to slow political opening. Mexico also provides an interesting test of whether theories based on the early European democratization experience can be applied to the late democratizers, such as Mexico, where democratization, urbanization, industrialization, and modernization may not have been bundled in the same way and where economic development has been decidedly uneven.

Mexico in Historical Perspective

In Mexico, unlike in the early European democratizers, consolidation of the state, industrialization, urbanization, increased literacy and the birth of a modern popular press, and the rise of national identity preceded democratization by many years. In the 1870s, under Porfirio Díaz, the central state began consolidating its power and curtailing that of the regional strongmen throughout the territory. This consolidation paved the way for the first wave of industrialization. Beginning in the 1890s, the transition from small-scale family production methods to factories producing for national markets began and the diversity of goods produced increased substantially (Haber 1989). Collier and Collier (2002) note that, “Mexico had a remarkably large industrial workforce at an early point...[and] developed the

earliest and one of the stronger labor movements in the region [prior to the reform period, which Collier and Collier consider as beginning in 1911]” (76-77).

The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) disrupted industrial production, but the infrastructure and factories built during the Díaz dictatorship survived the period of civil unrest largely intact (Haber 1989). During the post-revolutionary presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), investment in infrastructure surged with increased construction of irrigation systems, roads, water and sewage systems, and schools (Mosk 1950). The legacies left by Díaz and Cárdenas provided the foundation for the rapid industrial development that occurred under Presidents Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-46) and Miguel Alemán (1946-52), whose economic policies centered around industrialization (Haber 1989; Mosk 1950).

With industrial output rising throughout the fifties, substantial rural to urban migration took place. Urbanization was occurring, but development was extremely uneven (Sherman 2000) and this pattern of uneven development has persisted. In 2000, 16 percent of the nation’s workforce was employed in the agricultural sector. However, there was considerable variance by state. The percentage ranged from 3 percent employed in agriculture in Nuevo León to 47 percent in Chiapas (INEGI 2000).

The processes of industrialization and urbanization happened concurrent with the project of state consolidation, which relied in part on the creation of a national education system and a modern media. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, only shortly after the technology was developed in Europe, daguerreotypes and lithography appeared in Mexico. Although literacy rates remained low in the nineteenth century, an assortment of magazines and papers, including a few aimed at urban workers, began to be published on a daily or weekly basis (Rubenstein 2000). It was not until after the Revolution, however, that a

Mexican national identity crystallized. Middlebrook (1995) asserts that the revolution sparked the creation of a national consciousness and that this new nationalism was centered around support for the revolutionary state. The post-revolutionary presidents continued the work begun by Díaz to consolidate power in the center away from regional leaders; creating a national public education system served this goal. Middlebrook goes on to note that President Obregón (1920-24) invested significant resources in public education and literacy campaigns as a way “to forge a cohesive sense of national identity and cement popular support for the new regime” (26).

An explosion in daily papers occurred between 1920 and 1940, by the end of which newsstands existed in most towns. The first radio transmission was broadcast in 1923 and radio soon became another important tool for building national consciousness. Every station had to carry certain government mandated programs and by the 1940s there was also a considerable body of national music, national sportscasts, and national soap operas (Rubenstein 2000). While state control of media content was strong, Rubenstein contends that dissenting voices gained a presence in the national discourse during the 1950s.

Thus, by the time period under study in this paper (1964-2000) Mexico had made many of the same advances that are understood to have contributed to the shift in the repertoire of contention in the European countries. Yet while the period of state consolidation, industrialization, and modernization overlapped with the period of political liberalization in much of Western Europe, this was not the case in Mexico. In Mexico these modernizing developments took place many years prior to democratization. In addition, Mexican development has been decidedly uneven with the southern states remaining, on average, much more rural than the northern states.

Political Liberalization in Mexico

Mexico has been holding elections faithfully every six years since 1929 with presidential succession occurring at each election. Yet despite stable civilian rule, Mexico was a one party system, where the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) held presidential power for 71 years and where, prior to each election, the president selected his successor. Then, in the year 2000, with the election of Vicente Fox of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the PRI was finally voted out of office and peacefully relinquished control. This was heralded as what Andreas Schedler (2005) termed “Mexico’s velvet transition from electoral authoritarianism” (32). While the alternation of the executive finally bumped Mexico over into the democratic camp, the political liberalizations that led to this transition in power began much earlier. The electoral reforms enacted after 1960 changed the political landscape and slowly created space for opposition parties to voice dissent.

Prior to 1963 electoral reform worked against opposition parties, reinforcing the PRI’s control of the political system. While the post-1963 reforms are also largely seen as attempts by the PRI to enhance their flagging legitimacy, these reforms also served to begin opening the political system. The 1963 reform designated a number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies for any party that received more than 2.5 percent of the vote, but the reform failed to increase the opposition in the congress in part because of the continued exclusion of some parties and in part because no party could reach even that threshold. In 1973 the threshold was lowered to 1.5 percent and requirements for party registration were loosened, still without much substantive effect (Cornelius 1987; Middlebrook 1985).

The failure of these reforms became particularly evident in 1976 when, to the embarrassment of the PRI, the PAN failed to run a presidential candidate, eliminating even

the appearance of competition. Thus, shortly after assuming the presidency López Portillo enacted the 1977 electoral reform. This reform increased the size of the Chamber of Deputies to 400 and reserved 100 seats for minority parties to be allocated through proportional representation. It also opened up opposition access to media by providing public financing for campaigns and the left was reincorporated into the political system. While this substantially opened access, the PRI also maintained a number of safeguards to ensure their dominance. And when the safeguards failed, opposition victory was averted by resorting to massive fraud (Cornelius 1987; Klesner 1997). Even so, the opposition presence in the Chamber of Deputies increased after 1979, making it a “new forum for opposition activity” (Middlebrook 1985).

In 1982 de la Madrid was elected president. In December of that year protests erupted over electoral fraud on the municipal level and, early in his term, de la Madrid opted to negotiate rather than repress electoral protests. But in 1983, the PAN won more local elections than the local PRI strongmen were willing to accept and de la Madrid’s commitment to liberalization flagged. Then, in 1984, local elections in several cities sparked riots which were violently suppressed by the police and army (Cornelius 1987).

The surge in opposition activity that resulted from the 1976 reforms and de la Madrid’s initially conciliatory response to protest created an effect quite contrary to the reform’s goal; as Klesner (1997) states, “far from legitimizing the government’s rule as they had in the past, elections were beginning to be *delegitimizing*” (10, italics in original). So, in 1986, de la Madrid passed another electoral reform. This reform increased the size of the Chamber of Deputies to 500 and added another 100 proportional representation (PR) seats,

but it also opened the PR seats up to the majority party and strengthened executive control over elections (Klesner 1997).

Nineteen eighty eight represents a turning point in Mexico; it is often considered the year in which political pluralism came to replace one-party hegemony (Camp 1999; Harvey 1993). Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who had broken away from the PRI, ran against Carlos Salinas in a presidential election marked by extensive fraud. Although the vote count favored Salinas, it was clear that PRI support had waned significantly. In addition, the PRI lost its two thirds majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and with it, its ability to unilaterally amend the constitution (Camp 1999). And by 1989, even governorships were beginning to be taken by opposition party candidates (Levy and Bruhn 1999).

Further reforms were passed in 1989-1990. One component of these reforms had a regressive impact on opposition opportunities in the Chamber of Deputies; the reform stipulated that if a party won 35 percent of the federal vote, they would receive the majority of the seats in the Chamber, a condition the PRI was guaranteed to meet. However, the reform also established an independent Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), which further reforms in 1993, 1994, and 1996 strengthened. The 1993, 1994, and 1996 reforms also put limits on campaign spending, increased public financing, and increased media access (Klesner 1997). In 1997, the PRI lost control of the Chamber of Deputies and lost its two-thirds majority in the Senate. In 2000, they lost the presidency.

Another way to examine the unfolding of the political reform is to consider Mexico's classification in polychotomous regime categories. For example, Smith (2005) created a regime categorization wherein countries with free and fair national elections are considered democracies, countries with free, but not fair elections or systems in which elected leaders

are not the true power holders are considered electoral semi-democracies, countries with fair elections, but a limited franchise are considered competitive oligarchies, and all else is a nondemocracy. Under his classification, Mexico was coded a nondemocracy from 1929-1987, a semi-democracy from 1988-1999, and a democracy in 2000. Mainwaring et al (2001) use a slightly different set of criteria, which includes the protection of civil and political liberties as part of democratic governance. Using their slightly different criteria, they also consider pre-1988 a nondemocratic period and 1988-1999 a period of semi-democracy. Hagopian and Mainwaring (2005) extended this regime classification from 1999, where the Mainwaring et al cut off, to 2003 and classify Mexico as democratic beginning in 2000 as well.

The gradual opening of the political system that began in the 1960s and the eleven year period of semi-democracy makes Mexico an interesting case for probing the relationship between political opening and tactical change in protest. The protest data, which span 1964-2000, overlaps nicely with Mexico's period of democratic opening.

Description of Protest Data

My empirical research was conducted using the Mexican Popular Contention Database which generously was made available by Takeshi Wada. Wada collected data from newspaper accounts of every disruptive event during the twenty-nine day period around each presidential and midterm election. This method of sampling introduces an obvious bias; electoral protests, which only occur around elections, are overrepresented in the sample. These protests are also overwhelmingly demonstrative (see Appendix A). While the changing importance of electoral protest is itself an important part of the response to political opening, having it so heavily weighted in the sample leaves an open question as to whether

the character of protest changed more generally or whether the results are driven by the electoral protest alone. To correct for this, data will be examined both with and without the electoral protests.

The analysis presented here utilizes the data from the newspaper, *Excélsior*, which covers the period from 1964-2000 (in three year intervals). Wada (2004) notes that *Excélsior* has “assumed a political stance close to the elites” (245). Thus, in his data collection he also sampled from *La Jornada*, a paper more sympathetic to the opposition. However, the data from *La Jornada* does not begin until 1979. The two sources cannot be combined because the same event may be recorded in each, causing them to be double counted and skewing the results. Since I have a theoretical interest in how protest tactics change over time the *Excélsior* data provides more thorough coverage. Data from *La Jornada* are used to cross-check the patterns that emerge and similar results are obtained.

Unfortunately, there are problems inherent in conducting event analysis with data from newspaper accounts. As Myers (2000) notes:

Bias exists not only in the specific information reported about events, but also in whether the event is reported at all...news media are more likely to report events that involve larger numbers of people and...events near the media source are more likely to be reported than those farther away (182).

While it is difficult to determine whether the Wada data has an overrepresentation of larger protest, it does appear that the proximity bias might have influenced the reporting.

Significantly more protest actions were reported for Mexico City than any other Mexican state. While it is conceivable that there are more protest events in Mexico City due to its political importance, it could also be an artifact of over-reporting since both *Excélsior* and *La Jornada* are headquartered in the capital.

While problems of reporting bias exist in all countries, there may be country-specific biases as well due to the authoritarian features of the Mexican regime during the time period considered. Intimidation of reporters and self-censorship existed and to some extent continue to exist today (Orme 1997); yet the Mexican print media has historically been relatively free (Levy and Bruhn 1999; Middlebrook 1995). Newspaper accounts, while imperfect, are one of the only windows onto how people protest. The accounts reported reflect the protest activities that were important enough to receive public attention, and as such they also reflect the changing importance of some types of tactics over others. Even though gaps in coverage exist, the rough picture of Mexican protest provided by these data can serve to deepen our understanding of concrete ways in which protest changes.

Problems and Possibilities in the Categorization of Protest Tactics

The extant theory that democratization shifts the repertoire of contention from a pre-modern to a modern form needs to be specified more clearly in order to put it into an empirically testable form. While the theory may allow for multiple dimensions to be explored, I will focus solely on the type of protest tactics employed. Therefore it is necessary to define what criteria will be used to categorize certain tactics as non-democratic, as opposed to democratic. Non-democratic tactics are those that are direct and disruptive. They include acts that can directly extract claims as well as those that are acts of vengeance, such as attacks on persons or property. Democratic tactics, on the other hand, are demonstrative and conducive to coordination. They are designed as performances to influence political leaders or public opinion. I will henceforth refer to the two categories of tactics as direct and demonstrative.

Some protest tactics easily fit into categories designed as such. Kidnappings, attacks, seizure or destruction of land or property, forced removal from a previously occupied location, prison escapes, and impeding the activities of others all clearly fall into the direct category. Likewise, demonstrations, dramatizations, and sit-ins fit nicely into the demonstrative category. Yet there were a variety of other tactics employed in Mexico between 1964 and 2000 that are more difficult to categorize.

For example, hunger strikes are clearly symbolic acts, yet they imply a direct and forceful act aimed at the self. And road blocks, while highly disruptive, are also performances intended to influence an often national audience. In addition, boycotts and refusing to pay for services also contain direct and demonstrative elements. These tactics allow for the direct extraction of a claim (nonpayment) or for the direct punishment of an adversary (boycott), but I argue that used collectively, the goal of these tactics is to influence public opinion in order to address a larger issue or claim. Because these tactics are designed primarily to make public statements, I will code these tactics as demonstrative for my analysis.

Strikes, as well as the related tactics of work and service stoppages, also contain elements of both direct and demonstrative action. In the European context, strikes were a distinctly modern phenomenon. But is it therefore appropriate to map them onto the democratic side of the non-democratic/democratic distinction? The shift to modernity involved more than just political changes. I assert that the strike was borne out of the change in the organization of production, an economic change, rather than a change in political organization. This is supported by the presence of strikes as prominent forms of contention in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. Therefore it does not necessarily follow that

the strike should be categorized as a “democratic” form of contention even though it has been considered a modern, rather than pre-modern, tactic. A further reason why strikes appear to fit into the non-democratic category is that intermediaries, in the form of union leaders, are often employed to interface with management, which often in the Mexican case was the government. The use of intermediaries is one of the main features of non-democratic protest. For the purpose of my analysis, strikes and other forms of work stoppages will be considered a direct action because I assert that the main goal is to directly extract an economic claim. However, because strikes have been considered such an important type of contention, I will subsequently examine them in greater detail.

Patterns of Protest

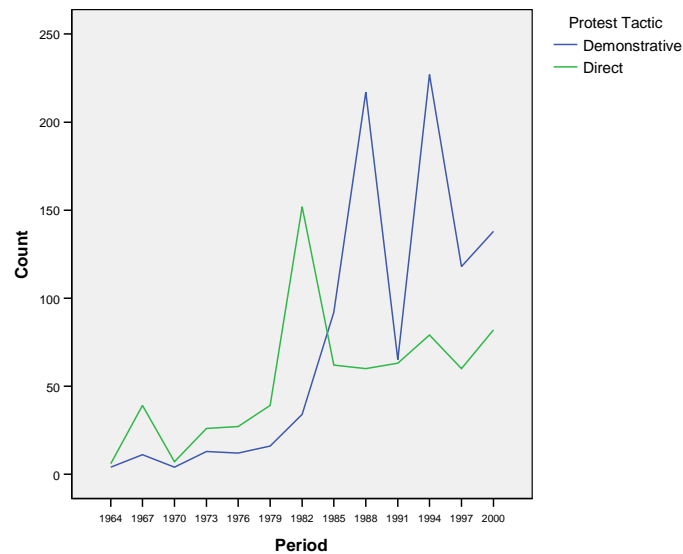
Between 1964 and 2000 the predominant tactical form shifted from direct to demonstrative actions. During the authoritarian period (1964-1985), 544 protest actions were reported in the full *Excélsior* sample. On average, only 34 percent of these actions used demonstrative tactics. However, the trend throughout the period was toward an increase in the overall number of actions and toward an increasing number of demonstrative tactics. In 1985, demonstrative tactics surpassed direct tactics as the most utilized form of action in the full sample. Though the two forms came close to parity in 1991, the use of demonstrative tactics never fell below the use of direct tactics after 1985.

In the semi-democratic period (1988-1997), 889 actions were recorded and the average of demonstrative tactics used had increased to 71 percent of all actions. The only data available for the democratic period are from 2000. Two hundred and twenty actions were reported of which 63 percent were demonstrative. While this is actually a slightly lower percentage than those reported in the semi-democratic period, it may be due to the

perception that the 2000 elections were cleaner and therefore incited less protest than, for example, the 1988 elections. This perception of clean elections has not transferred onto the 2006 elections, which have been marked by massive protest. Further data will need to be gathered for a more definitive understanding of Mexican protest in the democratic period.

Figure 1: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year

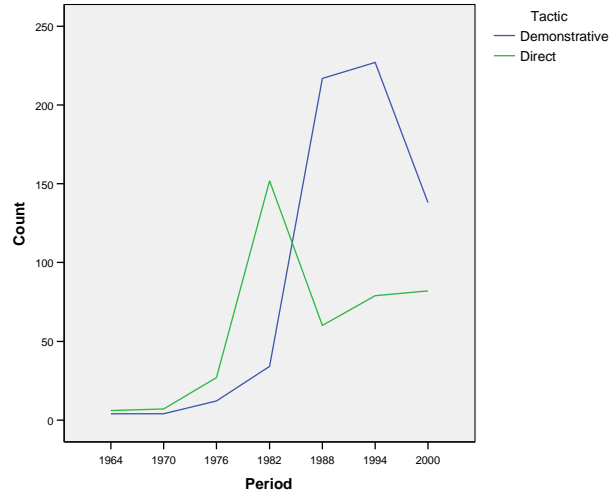
Source: Excelsior



The trend is even clearer if the presidential elections are separated out from the mid-term elections. The Mexican system over the period under examination was highly centralized. The executive initiated all important policy decisions and even as reforms were being passed to make Congress more competitive for the opposition, centralized presidential powers were preserved (Camp 1999). The continued importance of the president meant that presidential elections provided a more compelling focal point for protest. Looking at only presidential election years smooths the results; demonstrative tactics increase steadily both overall and relative to direct tactics up until 2000 when there is a slight drop in overall actions.

**Figure 2: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year
Presidential Election Years Only**

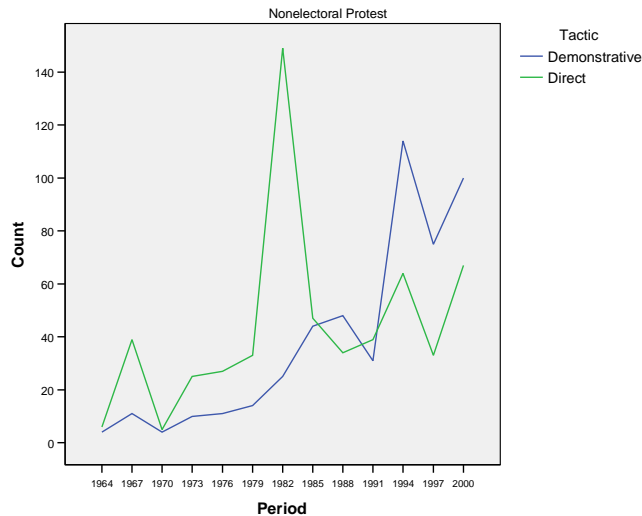
Source: Excelsior



While these results appear to support the extant theory, it could be argued that electoral protest are driving the results. In order to correct for the overrepresentation of electoral protest, I have examined the nonelectoral protests alone. The results are unexpectedly strong.

**Figure 3: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year
Nonelectoral Protest Only**

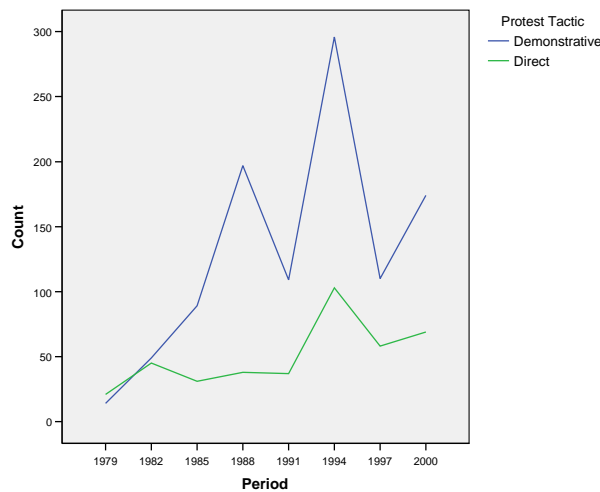
Source: Excelsior



As seen in Figure 3, demonstrative tactics trend upward across the period despite the exclusion of electoral protests. In 1988, the first year of semi-democracy, demonstrative tactics come to represent a larger proportion of overall tactics than direct tactics. While this reverses with demonstrative tactics dropping slightly below direct in 1991, the rise in demonstrative tactics relative to direct tactics after 1991 is dramatic. The pattern also holds when examining the shifts by period. In the authoritarian period, only 27 percent of nonelectoral protest recorded was demonstrative. This figure jumps to 61 percent in the semi-democratic period. Unlike the full sample, which shows an 8 percent drop in demonstrative tactics, the nonelectoral protest remains steadier between the semi-democratic and democratic periods, dropping only one percent to 60 percent of protest in 2000. This supports the hypothesis that the elections in the semi-democratic period were more highly protested than those in 2000.

Figure 4: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year

Source: La Jornada



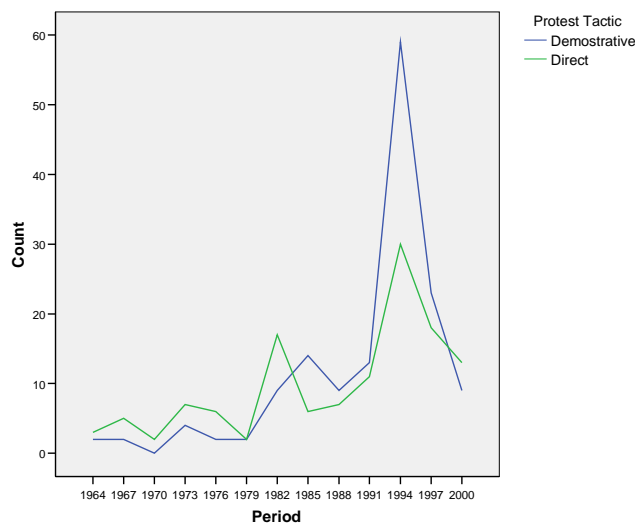
La Jornada shows a similar pattern though when the earlier years of authoritarianism are excluded, the results are less dramatic. In the authoritarian period covered by *La Jornada* (1979-1985), 249 actions were recorded of which an average of 61 percent were

demonstrative. In the semi-democratic period (1988-1997), 948 actions were reported with an increase in the average of demonstrative tactics to 75 percent. In 2000, the sole year representing the democratic period, there were 243 actions. Similar to the *Excélsior* data, the *La Jornada* sample shows a slight drop in demonstrative tactics, though in this case only to 72 percent.

These data support the hypothesis that democratization drives changes in the tactics employed in protest. They also suggest that a transition to full democracy is not needed to produce the shift. In Mexico, slow political opening created gradual shifts in tactics. Yet, during the period of semi-democracy, democratic tactics predominated. The evidence also suggests that Mexico’s uneven development did not hinder the overall tactical shift at the national level.

Figure 5: Protest Actions Conducted by Campesinos/Indigenous

Source: Excélsior



What is interesting to note about the uneven development hypothesis is that, in contrast to Tilly and Wood’s (2003) findings, peasant protest tactics in Mexico followed the same trajectory as protest more generally. This pattern can be seen by separating out protest

actions that were recorded as being carried out by *campesinos* (peasants) or indigenous people, who are overwhelmingly rural.

Looking only at *campesino*/indigenous protest actions, I find that political opening was accompanied by an increase in the number of protest actions as well as a shift towards demonstrative tactics. This suggests that in the modern period political opening causes tactical shifts for rural and urban dwellers alike.

Alternate Hypotheses

A series of economic crises and reforms took place concurrent with Mexico's political opening. The first balance of payments crisis occurred in 1976, though adjustment measures were avoided thanks to massive oil discoveries. However, the price of oil fell in 1981 and Mexico found itself in the midst of a serious debt crisis by 1982. President López Portillo devalued the peso and adopted contractionary fiscal policies, yet capital flight continued, commercial lending dried up abruptly, and foreign reserves reached record lows. He then nationalized the banking sector (Lustig 1998).

In December, de la Madrid assumed the presidency amidst the crisis and initially devalued the currency and implemented fiscal austerity measures. Another balance of payments crisis followed in 1985 and by the middle of that year de la Madrid began liberalizing trade. In 1986 there was another oil shock. In the same year Mexico entered into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Nineteen eighty-seven brought a speculative attack on the peso, prompting de la Madrid to introduce the Economic Solidarity Pact. The Pact added "the use of incomes policy to fiscal and monetary discipline" (Lustig 1998).

Carlos Salinas replaced de la Madrid as president in December 1988 and further pushed neoliberal economic reforms. In 1990, Salinas reprivatized the banks and sped the process that de la Madrid had initiated of privatizing the public enterprises. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was approved in 1993 and took effect in January of 1994, further opening trade between Mexico and its neighbors to the north. Though Mexico experienced another crisis in 1994 – the peso crisis – recovery was much quicker than it had been after the previous crises (Lustig 1998).

Kurtz (2004) argues that the shift to an open economy eliminates the institutional channels through which people can mobilize, making collective action difficult if not impossible. He asserts that neoliberal economic reforms, such as those undertaken in Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s, have a severely atomizing effect. In the face of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and declining real wages Kurtz sees a sea of silent masses. Thus he claims that economic liberalization has raised nearly insurmountable barriers to collective action. Mexico served as a paradigmatic case. While it is difficult to untangle the effects of the political changes from the economic ones due to their contemporaneous occurrence, economic liberalization must be considered as a possible factor affecting tactical choice. These economic changes could work either to reinforce or to undercut the shifts toward demonstrative tactics.

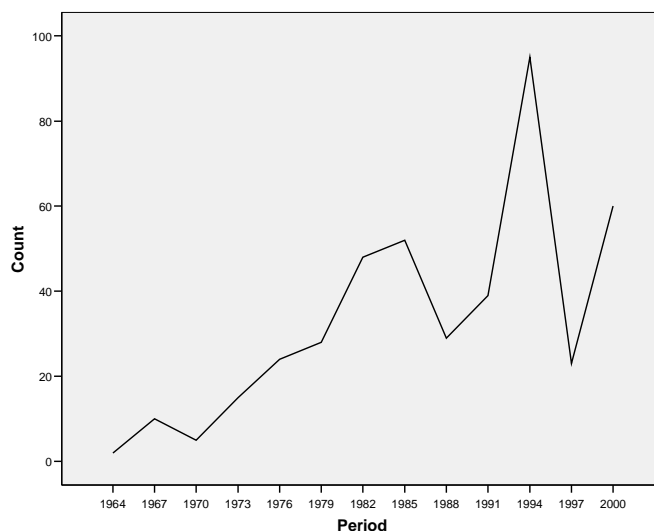
While I do not find support for the hypothesis that the neoliberal era is marked by popular silence, there are several important aspects of Kurtz's data that may be affecting the difference in results. Kurtz looks only at antigovernment demonstrations and riots that involve at least 100 participants. The data from the Mexican Popular Contention Database (MPCD) include any protest with more than 20 participants, in addition to hunger strikes

regardless of the number of people involved. The possibility exists that the increase in the number of actions in the MPCD is not driven by a decrease in barriers to collective action spurred by political opening; rather, the increase could reflect a splintering of protest into more numerous actions that involve fewer people. This would support Kurtz's thesis that economic liberalization raises high barriers against organized collective action.

I do not find support for this alternate hypothesis. Even when all protests with less than 100 participants are excluded, more actions are recorded in the later period. In the full sample, the result is dramatic: in the post-debt crisis period (1982-2000) on average 91 protest actions were reported per year, while the more economically closed period (1964-1979) averages only 16 protest actions per year. Even when considering only non-electoral protests the post-debt crisis period averaged 49 protest actions per year, while the earlier period averaged only 14 protest actions per year. If the neoliberal era is considered to begin in 1988 to correspond with what Kurtz considers the height of neoliberal reform, similar results are obtained.

**Figure 6: Protest Actions with 100 or More Participants
Nonelectoral Protest Only**

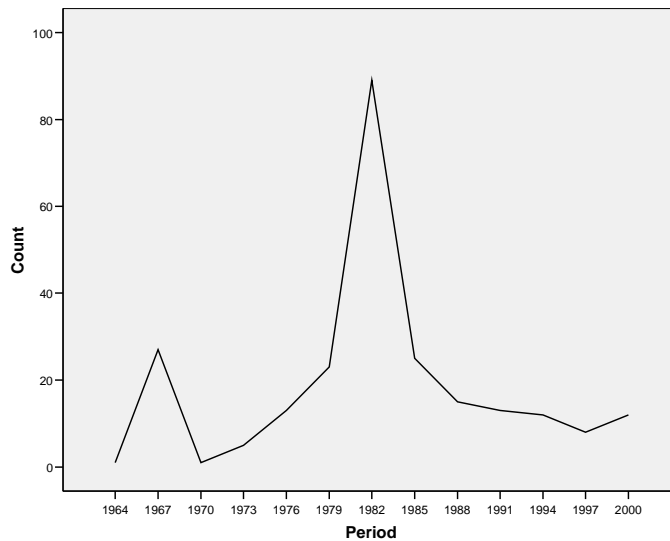
Source: Excelsior



Kurtz also argues that strikes declined significantly due to the economic reforms. Since I consider strikes a direct tactic, it might be argued that a decreased ability to strike, resulting from economic not political changes, is driving the shift towards more demonstrative tactics. In line with Kurtz's argument, the Mexican Popular Contention data also show a decrease in the number of *official* strikes. However, if wildcat strikes and service stoppages are included, the picture changes radically. Excepting a high peak of strike activity in 1982, my data do not show an overall drop in the use of the strike. The decrease in official strikes was counterbalanced by the rise in wildcat strikes. Therefore, the rise in the proportion of demonstrative tactics should not be seen as an artifact of a labor force responding to economic reforms with decreased activity.

Figure 7: Official and Wildcat Strikes, Counts by Year

Source: Excelsior

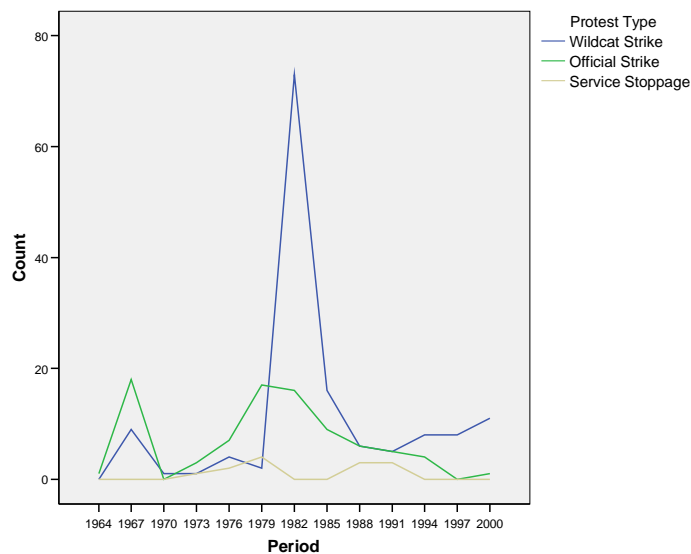


Aside from the role strikes have in the overall makeup of contentious actions, the nature of the strike as a tactic may itself have evolved over time. Tilly and Shorter (1971) assert that between 1830 and 1960 modernization changed the shape of strikes in France. Early strikes were longer in duration and involved low numbers of people, whereas modern strikes have

shifted to short events, involving large numbers of participants. The earlier strikes were more difficult to organize and therefore drew strength from their endurance while the modern strikes derive power from the symbolic show of strength derived from mass participation. The modern strike, as conceived of by Shorter and Tilly, might then be considered a demonstrative rather than direct tactic.

Figure 8: Strikes Separated by Type, Counts by Year

Source: Excelsior



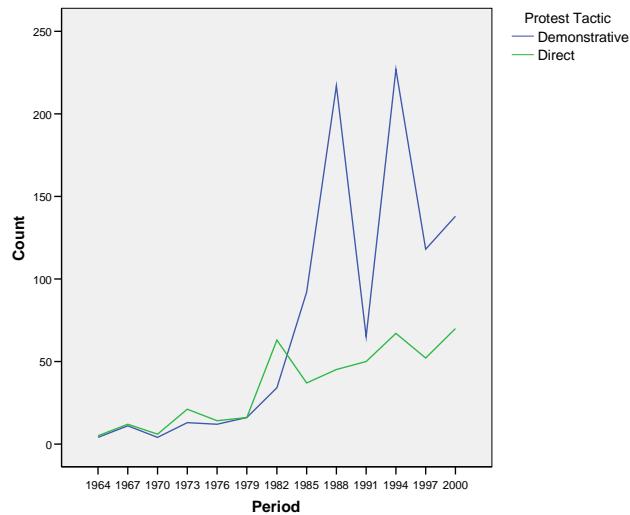
Perhaps due to the fact that the modernization of Mexican industry precedes the period under examination in this paper, a similar pattern does not emerge between 1964 and 2000 in Mexico. If Mexican strikes are categorized according to their duration and the number of participants, with long strikes considered those over five days and large strikes those with at least 500 participants, the bulk of the strikes fall outside the two categories of strikes theorized by Shorter and Tilly. In fact, only 17 percent of the strikes in the *Excelsior* sample are short and large and there is little variance in the percentage across the three

political periods. However, prior to the debt crisis (1964-1979) only 11 percent of the strikes were short and large, while in the post-crisis period (1982-2000) 20 percent were.¹

While the Mexican strike does not seem to have evolved in the same manner as the French strike, the type of claim that accompanies Mexican strikes has changed across time. Again political rather than economic changes seem to be driving the shift. In the authoritarian period, 16 percent of the strikes reported by *Excelsior* had political claims. If the period is restricted to the earliest, most closed years in the sample, from 1964-1973, the number of strikes with political claims jumps to 70 percent. In the semi-democratic period, only 8 percent of the strikes have political claims. Oddly, in the year 2000, strikes with political claims increased to 33 percent. While more data are needed to explore the democratic context, the data suggest that the goals of strikes may differ under differing political contexts.

**Figure 9: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year
Strikes and Stoppages Excluded**

Source: Excelsior



¹ These figures are computed with the 66 Telmex strikes that occurred over the period of a few days across Mexico in 1982, collapsed into one short and large strike (as opposed to 66 short small strikes). If the Telmex strikes are left in individually the figure of short, large strikes drops to only ten percent and the difference between the pre- and post-debt periods disappears.

While coding the strikes according to Tilly and Shorter's symbolic protest criteria did not change the overall pattern of tactics, the evidence on differing goals suggests that the nature of strikes may, in fact, be more complex than the blunt coding of strikes as a direct tactic reflects. Therefore, I have excluded strikes from the analysis in order to provide a further test of the robustness of my results on overall tactical change.

Though in 1979, direct and demonstrative tactics achieve parity, all other years prior to 1985 show a higher proportion of direct tactics. In 1985, demonstrative tactics become predominant and remain so through 2000. Thus, even with the exclusion of strikes and stoppages, the results showing a tactical shift hold.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that contentious politics change with democratic openings. The shift from direct to demonstrative protest tactics in Mexico occurred long after industrialization and in spite of uneven development. As the political regime opened, even rural protesters shifted to a heavier reliance on demonstrative tactics. The results are not driven by the overrepresentation of electoral protests in the sample nor are they driven by changes in strike patterns alone. This suggests that political change is the most salient factor affecting tactical choices.

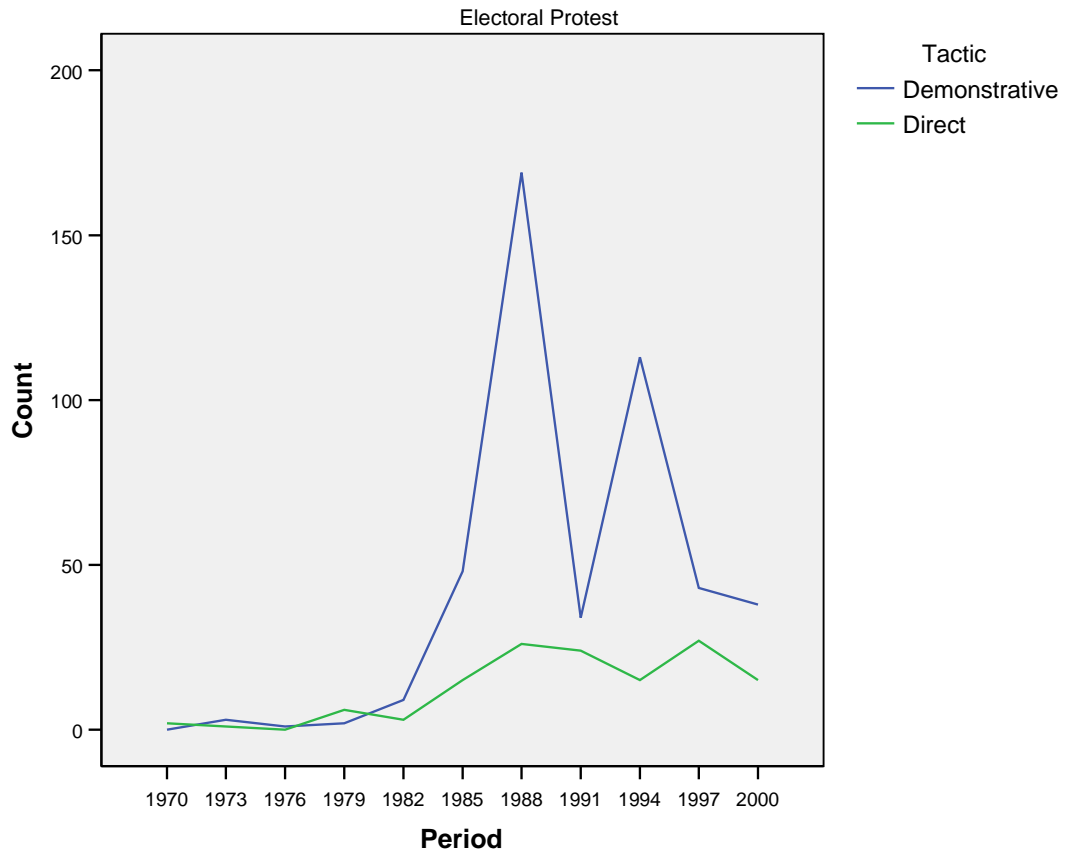
In addition, this paper illustrates that full democratization is not required to precipitate the shift in tactics. During Mexico's hybrid regime, from 1988 to 2000, popular mobilization took on democratic rather than authoritarian characteristics. While the authoritarian period in Mexico was marked by few protest actions and the predominance of direct tactics, during the hybrid period the level of protest actions increased and demonstrative tactics became the main tactical form. Because Mexico's transition to

democracy was so recent, further research is needed to investigate the patterns of protest tactics in the post-2000 democratic period.

One interesting wrinkle in the results is that when electoral protests are included, the shift to “democratic” tactics actually precedes the shift to semi-democracy as marked by scholars. From this finding, one might infer that the institutional reforms, which altered electoral politics, happened at a different pace from other political changes which affect protest, such as reductions in the application of repression. Inconsistent use of repressions and concessions in electoral protests in the early 1980s may have sparked increased levels of mobilization around elections, while not affecting protest more generally. Exploring in detail the particular mechanisms through which democratization affects protest would be a fruitful direction for further research.

Appendix A: Direct/Demonstrative Tactics, Counts by Year Electoral Protest Only

Source: *Excelsior*



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