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# Educational Opportunity and Contentious Politics: The 2011 Chilean Student Movement

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## Abstract

*The 2011 Chilean student movement was one of the most massive and original processes of social mobilization in Latin America in the last decade. Led by university students, the movement challenged the longstanding free-market orientation of educational policies in Chile, demanding a more active role for the State in the regulation and supply of education. In this article, we study the main educational and social factors that explain the emergence of the movement. We draw upon social movement theory as an analytical framework and use newspaper articles as basic sources of data. Our research suggests that the simultaneous expansion and privatization of the Chilean education system provided students not only with mobilizing grievances (e.g., disparity in access and quality) but also with capabilities and resources (e.g., critical awareness and higher aspirations) to advance political mobilization. We also find that student organizations created effective frames to take advantage of the windows of opportunity opened in Chilean democracy. Implications for comparative international research on education reform and social movements are also discussed.*

*Keywords:* social movements, market-oriented reform, student protests, educational expansion, Chile

The 2011 Chilean student movement, in which university students led a nationwide process of mobilization and demanded structural reforms from elementary to higher education, was one of the most massive and original social movements Latin America has seen in the last decade. Scholars of education and political science, even those familiar with the Latin American region, had reason to be surprised by the news of widespread demonstrations occurring across Chile. Based on standard economic and educational indicators, Chile has often been presented as a success story in international forums and scholarly conversations. Two years before the movement exploded, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) celebrated the appointment of Chile as its first South American member, a gesture of recognition for its democratic institutions and decades of continuous economic growth (OECD, 2009). Similarly, a survey of international studies of educational achievement showed that the overall performance of Chile surpassed most countries in Latin America (Ministerio de Educación de Chile

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[MINEDUC], 2011a). Why, then, did demonstrations occur in Chile, and why was education the target of discontent and protest? What exactly did students want to change, how supportive was the general Chilean population of their demands, and how successful was the movement in generating policy changes?

This paper explores these questions by providing a set of hypotheses about the conditions and factors that explain the emergence of this student-led social movement for education reform in Chile. We describe the movement's main characteristics, dynamics, and context and discuss its future prospects and implications for comparative research on education and social movements.

Theoretically, we use social movement theory both to formulate the substantial questions raised by our case study and to ground the study in analytical categories in order to observe the dynamics of the mobilization process. Social movement theory is based primarily on cases of industrialized Western nations. By introducing the Chilean student movement to the academic literature, we attempt to contribute to an eventual "comparative turn" (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996) that can provide a better account of movements in developing economies and the less stable democracies of the Global South. Social movement researchers have not paid systematic attention to education reform movements, and scholars of education reform have mostly overlooked social movement theory as an analytical framework. Our analysis of the 2011 Chilean student movement brings both literatures together and further discusses how expanding education opportunities can create new conditions for political mobilization in contemporary society.

Methodologically, we followed standard practices and procedures in social movement research. We gathered extensive evidence from online newspapers (both Chilean and international) and other secondary sources of data (e.g., police data and public opinion surveys) in order to establish a chronology of mobilization events, systematize the movement's main characteristics, and gain qualitative insight into the key aspects shaping this phenomenon.

Overall, our analysis suggests that the Chilean student mobilization was an organized, collective reaction against the unequal effects of the neoliberal economic and educational policies implemented in Chile over the last three decades. Student leaders, through their organizations and their actions, effectively framed and communicated educational grievances. Their demands gained widespread sympathy and support from the population. At the same time, the government was unresponsive to student demands and, at certain points, had a repressive response. Our analysis also indicates that the massification of the secondary and especially tertiary school sectors, goods restricted to Chilean elites in previous decades, played a key role in creating new conditions for political mobilization. Student action announced the arrival of a new generation, acquainted with the long-term opportunities opened after two decades of democratization (e.g., enhancements in the freedoms of speech, organization, and protest), and the new human and organizational resources available as a result of the social and economic development of the country in the last decades.

The case speaks directly to the international community of scholars interested in the politics of market reform in education. In Chile, the institutional arrangements associated with the free-market model have restricted equalization of educational opportunities. The

Chilean students' essential political claim was that changing the structural patterns of education allocation, in both quantity and quality, depended not on individual self-interested decision making, but on collective organization and action. Disagreement on the technical aspects of specific student proposals should not be confused with the larger legitimacy of the movement and the deeper questions and demands the movement has posed.

### **Overview of the Chilean Student Movement**

#### **From 1980s Free-Market Reform to the 2006 Penguin Revolution**

To understand the 2011 Chilean student mobilization, one must first examine the context of free-market educational and economic policies implemented in the country beginning in the early 1980s. Following the dominant institutional trends in Latin America (Bernasconi, 2007), Chile had free, state-administered public schooling at all educational levels by the early 1970s. This system lasted until radical neoliberal reforms were introduced under the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) with the technical guidance of the "Chicago Boys," economic advisors who received graduate training in neoclassical economics at the University of Chicago. As Fourcade and Babb (2002) put it, "Chile was the first nation in the world to break with the dominant postwar policy paradigm by implementing a radical package of free-market reforms" (p. 542). Unlike the U.S., where voucher programs since the 1990s have targeted disadvantaged populations or have been limited to specific regions, Chile introduced nationwide nontargeted school choice as early as 1980 by providing a publicly funded voucher to any primary or secondary student wishing to attend a private school (Bellei, 2009; Gauri, 1998; Torche, 2005a). Similarly, in higher education, strong financial and regulatory incentives were created to support private supply (Brunner, 2009). The magnitude of the reforms were such that it is common for comparative scholars to use Chile as an example of one of the most highly privatized, market-oriented educational systems in the world (Carnoy, 1998; Plank, 2009).

The consequence of nearly 30 years of neoliberal education reforms was an extensive privatization of the educational supply, expressed in a massive reallocation of students from public to private educational institutions. In 1981, 78% (2,215,973) of Chilean students attended public schools and 15% (420,232) attended private-voucher schools. By 2009, private-voucher schools had captured 51% (1,722,503) of the enrollment while public schools had lost about one half of their enrollment share, now enrolling only 42% (1,460,320) of Chilean students (Marcel & Raczynski, 2009; Ministerio de Educación, 1986, 2009). Several studies have shown that the children of more educated, middle-class parents are more likely to attend private-sector schools while the children of less educated, low-income parents are more likely to attend underfunded public schools (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; McEwan, Urquiola, & Vegas, 2008). As a result of this strong sorting process, the Chilean education system today has one of the highest levels of segregation by social class in the world (OECD, 2011; Valenzuela, Bellei, & De los Ríos, 2009). Similarly, Mizala and Torche (2010) report marked socioeconomic stratification of educational achievement in the Chilean voucher system. At the same time, the higher education sector also underwent drastic changes involving the participation of the private

sector. First, higher education expanded rapidly, with the enrollment coverage of the 18 to 24 years old population increasing from 15.6% in 1990 to 38.3% in 2006 (Brunner, 2009). By 2010, about 80% of all Chilean higher-education students were enrolled in private universities (Meller, 2011). Under Chile's privatization scheme, this expansion also meant a sizeable increase in tuition and financing costs. In 2011, 85% of general investment in higher education in Chile came directly from family resources while public funds covered only the remaining 15%. This figure is significantly lower than the average in OECD countries where 69% of the general investment in higher education comes from public sources (OECD, 2011). Comparatively, Chile has the largest ratio between the average tuition fee and the average income per person within the OECD countries: the average tuition fee in Chile is 41% of the gross domestic product per capita, followed by the U.S. (35%) and Korea (20%) (Brunner, 2009; Meller, 2011). Furthermore, reliance on student loans has increased for students who cannot afford the higher education fees. The levels of debt for students with middle and lower socioeconomic backgrounds increased dramatically in the last two decades. In 2009, over 60% of students in the three lowest income quintiles financed their education through loans. The average graduate's debt represented 174% of her projected annual income, compared to a rate of 57% of annual income in the United States (Meller, 2011).

This was the context that in 2006 led secondary-school students to organize massive street protests, school takeovers, and an extended national strike. The leaders of the Penguin Revolution (*Revolución Pinguina*), as it was known in reference to the colors of the public high school uniform, criticized what protestors considered to be a low-quality, highly segregated, and unequal educational system (Bellei, Contreras, & Valenzuela, 2010). Students' primary demands included more state support, the end of decentralized (municipal) administration of public schools, and the elimination of for-profit private-voucher schools. High school students and supporting organizations appeared in 2006 as new and unexpected collective actors in Chilean democracy. Although the policy outcomes were minor and disappointing to the movement's participants and sympathizers, the Penguin Revolution generated a political crisis in Chile and established a key precedent for the 2011 mobilization wave (Silva, 2008).

### **The "New Deal" in Higher Education and the 2011 Student Movement**

In 2010, four years after the Penguin Revolution, the former senator and presidential candidate Sebastián Piñera, supported by a coalition of center-right, conservative political parties, was elected president of Chile. Early in his administration, Piñera announced a forthcoming reform project containing a "new deal" for higher education institutions, creating mixed expectations among educational actors (López, 2010). In the final days of May 2011, the Minister of Education, Joaquín Lavín, finally presented the project. While considering a funding increase for public or so-called "traditional" universities, the proposal aimed to make the allocation of public resources more dependent upon performance indicators and upon increased competition with nontraditional, private-independent universities ("Reforma a la Educación Superior," 2011). The proposal was made in light of protests initiated by student organizations at Universidad Central, a major private university. Universidad Central students occupied their campus, denouncing stakeholders' illegal profit-making operations as harmful to the quality of

instruction (“Más de 200 Estudiantes,” 2011). Although, according to the Chilean General Law of Education, higher education institutions in Chile are not allowed to be for-profit, educational actors are aware that a significant number of private universities receiving public funding have not respected this norm. Instead, against legal restrictions, they have established loopholes to distribute surpluses to owners and stakeholders (Monckeberg, 2005). The Universidad Central protests brought the chain of problems linking weak regulation, illicit profit-making, and the lack of quality-assurance mechanisms in the private higher education sector to the fore.

Taking advantage of these events, the Confederation of Chilean Students (*Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile* [CONFECH]), which has been a longstanding organizational platform that gathered the student organizations or federations of traditional universities, decided to take action. The federations of the two major universities in the country, the University of Chile and the Catholic University of Chile, have commonly been the leaders and spokespersons of CONFECH. CONFECH took the lead in rejecting the new government proposal and calling for national mobilization against it. The opening words of their public declaration established the basic points of the movement’s critical diagnosis:

Education is in a deep crisis. This is evident in the dreadful quality of many higher education institutions, the limited access to the system for the most vulnerable social sectors, the excessive indebtedness of families, the weakening role of the State and its institutions, the illegal profit-making by many private institutions, and the explicit prohibition of participation of the university community in the development of the higher education policy. . . . The students, grouped in CONFECH, accuse the nonexistence of the right to education and the false notion that higher education is serving as a real tool and guarantee of social mobility; furthermore, it is not faithfully contributing to the harmonic development of Chile in cultural, political, social, and economic aspects. (CONFECH, 2011a, para. 2-3)<sup>2</sup>

According to news reports, the first national protest on May 12, 2011 attracted approximately 20,000 demonstrators in the capital city of Santiago alone. The primary student leader and spokesperson of CONFECH, Camila Vallejo, stated that the movement’s demands included “more equity in access to higher education, more funding for public universities and democratization of decision making within universities” (Águila, 2011, p. 6). In the weeks and months to come, protests, demonstrations, takeovers, and different kinds of public actions followed one after another. Police data provide a good estimate of the increase in the number of protest events and participation levels in 2011 compared with previous years. According to police data, the number of “events of control of the public order”<sup>3</sup> that occurred during 2011 were 6,938, a number four times larger than in 2009, when there were 1,598 protest events. More important, the

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<sup>2</sup> Translation by the authors.

<sup>3</sup> The count includes events related to the student movement and to any other mobilization activity, although the 2011 increase is largely the result of the student movement. See methodology section for more details on police data.

number of participants in these events increased almost 10 times: whereas participants in 2009 events numbered 232,959, 2011 police data provides an estimate of 2,194,609 participants.

From early on, a wide range of social organizations and actors supported the movement. Bringing back their previous experience in the Penguin Revolution, high-school student organizations presented their own list of demands, basically repeating the petitions of 2006 (“*Secundarios Entregarán Carta*,” 2011). They gained some visibility through the media to make their claims, although university students continued to lead the 2011 movement. Other actors joining the movement included student organizations of private universities and schools, teachers’ unions, the public employees’ union, political figures from the center-left political coalition, *Concertación*, independent left-wing parties, and, occasionally, presidents of public universities. In August, expressing this larger convergence, CONFECH, secondary students, and the teachers’ union presented a new list of demands entitled “Social Agreement for Education” (*Acuerdo Social para la Educación*). The authors of the document argued that the State should be responsible for providing free, egalitarian, and high-quality education at all levels. Furthermore, the authors proposed tax reform measures in order to finance free education at all levels (CONFECH, 2011b).

The Piñera administration attempted to end the conflict by offering partial, rather than substantial, concessions to student demands. In early July, the President announced, through a national television broadcast, the “Great National Agreement for Education” (*Gran Acuerdo Nacional por la Educación*, [GANE]). Its most salient components included a new fund that provided scholarships for students from the lowest two income quintiles and a reduction of student loan interest rates (MINEDUC, 2011b; “*Presidente Piñera Convoca*,” 2011). Students rejected the proposal for leaving untouched the market policy orientation and for not addressing key student demands, including a ban on the illegal practice of profit-making by higher education institutions (Ramírez, 2011). As demonstrations continued, students questioned Minister of Education Lavín for his participation as a financial stakeholder in two private universities (“*Secundarios Consideran Positiva*,” 2011). Felipe Bulnes, the Minister of Justice, subsequently replaced Lavín. Mr. Bulnes presented a new proposal without substantial changes that was predictably rejected (“*Presidente Feusach*,” 2011). Finally, an attempt at direct dialogue in October failed after two meetings, with students accusing the government of having no real intention to introduce change and Bulnes accusing students of intransigency (“*CONFECH Confirma*,” 2011). Despite these difficulties, the student movement enjoyed strong approval from the Chilean population throughout the year, with approval rates between 67% (October) and 79% (September) according to nationally representative surveys (Adimark Survey, 2012).<sup>4</sup> By contrast, approval of President Piñera’s administration declined from 41% in April 2011 to 27% in August 2011, maintaining consistently low approval during the months to come.

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<sup>4</sup> The questions were: “Regardless of your political position, do you approve or disapprove of the way Sebastian Piñera is conducting his government?” and “Faced with the recent demonstrations by university and high school students, do you approve or disapprove of the demands that university and high school students have submitted to the authorities of the country?” Other public opinion surveys in the country (e.g., Centro Estudios Públicos survey) showed the same trends reported here.

The most critical moments of confrontation occurred in August when the government began to deny permits for demonstrations in the most traditional and symbolic locations at the center of Santiago. CONFECH decided to call for protests regardless of government authorization, resulting in an increase in the level of violence between protesters and police forces. The most dramatic example was the national protest of August 4th, when activists and police clashed in the major avenues of Santiago. More than 874 protesters were arrested, and 90 police officers reported injuries (“Gobierno Confirma Detenidos,” 2011). At this point, students developed a new tactic: internationalization. In October 2011, the main leaders of the student movement traveled to Paris to hold meetings with representatives of the OECD, United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the European Parliament, among other actors. Upon their return, student leaders claimed a new legitimacy based on the support of these international organizations. They cited the example of Nordic countries, where high-quality public education, including higher education, is free (“Líderes de la Confech,” 2011). Towards the end of the year, also the end of the academic year in Chile, student organizations tacitly admitted and tactically decided that no substantial policy changes were going to occur under the Piñera administration. They returned to classes, committing to give pause to the conflict until 2012. In December, the Chilean Congress passed a national budget for 2012 that included a substantial increase in education funding and some changes that may not have been considered without the movement, such as scholarships for 40% of the most vulnerable students and increased student loans at lower interest rates (“Escalona Confirma Acuerdo,” 2011; Lustig, Mizala, & Silva, 2012). These were minor, last-minute victories for the students, still far from the structural policy changes for which they had aimed.

To provide a deeper understanding of the 2011 wave of student mobilization in Chile and the lessons it can offer to build our understanding of social movements and education reform, we need to put this narrative overview of events under the lens of a more systematic and theoretically informed analysis. In the following section, we review social movement theory, which we then apply to cast light on the forces and mechanisms shaping our case.

### **Social Movements and Education**

Social movement theory is the most sophisticated corpus of scholarship on the dynamics of collective action available in the social sciences. It provides us with analytical categories rooted in a long history and large variety of contentious activism in the modern world, if mostly from industrialized Western countries. Scholars of education reform have just started to explore social movement theory, and social movement theorists have paid little attention to movements aiming at education reform. We claim that social movement theory is a relevant framework to study education reform movements. This paper aims to strengthen the link between the two by studying a student movement from a South American developing nation.

### **Social Movement Theory**

Since the 1960s there have been major theoretical and methodological changes in the way the social sciences have approached the study of social movements (for overall



reviews see, e.g., Snow & Soule, 2010 and Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004). These changes resulted from the decline in the traditional approach, which understood collective action mainly as expressing irrational and anomic behavior of alienated individuals “losing their minds” in the crowd (Le Bon, 2002). This rather unsympathetic portrait of social movements was influential in early studies of “collective behavior” (Blumer, 1969; Park, 1967), but did not make sense to a generation of scholars trying to understand the new wave of social mobilization that emerged in the second half of the 20th century in the U.S. and Europe, including the civil rights, antiwar, women’s, and environmental movements, among other “new social movements” (Koopmans, 1995).

Since these new theoretical approaches started to become dominant in the 1970s, four main factors have been identified as key to explaining the emergence and development of social movements: mobilizing grievances, strategic framing, changes in the structure of political opportunity, and the accumulation and mobilization of resources.

The notion of grievances (or “strain theory”) as a factor of mobilization is the most intuitive of the four. The theory asserts that dire social conditions are likely to generate discontent and motivation for collective actors to challenge and change a given state of affairs. Empirical evidence supports the importance of grievances. For example, the frequency of homeless protests in the U.S. during the 1980s was associated with grievance indicators, such as homelessness or unemployment rates, in different cities (Snow, Soule, & Cress, 2005). Accordingly, we begin our analysis by asking whether there is empirical evidence of educational grievances in Chile that might have motivated massive mobilization. Also, we ask why problems in education, as opposed to other problematic issues in Chilean society, became the locus of protest. Finally, because grievances might be a necessary but not sufficient factor of mobilization, we analyze whether discontent over education worked on its own or in interaction with other factors.

Proponents of strategic framing theory have argued that mobilization occurs not just where objective grievances exist but rather as a result of the way social actors discursively name, define, and communicate those grievances (Snow, Rochford, Jr., Worden, & Benford, 1986). Effective frames are discursive or “ideological packages” (Gamson, 1988, 1992) that define an existing problem or condition as both “unjust” and “mutable” (Tarrow, 2011). These frames attribute blame or responsibility to targets and make claims promoting individual and/or collective transformation (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004). “Framing contests” between challengers and opponents are common through competition of messages in the media (Gamson, 2004; Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Variables such as the performative character of mobilization and the dramatization of meaning (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008), or the structure of “discursive opportunity” (also discursive field), which is the cultural context in which meaning contests occur (Snow, 2004), have been elaborated and shown to be important by scholars in this tradition. In his study of the effectiveness of competing frames in generating women’s suffrage organizations in the United States, McCammon (2001) provides empirical evidence that “framing matters.” The literature is less clear on whether framing matters in social movements taking place in the Global South. To address this problem, we paid special attention to framing processes in the Chilean context.

The third factor fostering collective action refers to how changes in the context or structure of political opportunities enable or impede mobilization. The literature on

political opportunities has provided extensive insight into the tactical side of contentious politics, including the importance of studying both incentives (e.g., allies, system accessibility, etc.) and obstacles to protest (e.g., repression), and the strategic use of “modular” repertoires of collective action that can be copied and adapted in different settings (Kriesi, 2004; Tilly, 1984). In our analysis we consider the political opportunities made available by Chile’s transition to democracy and the more recent arrival of the conservative Piñera administration.

Finally, resource mobilization theorists (Cress & Snow, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) argue that the intensity of the grievances (postulated as omnipresent) matter less than the distribution and accumulation of different kinds of resources, which are available and unevenly distributed in the social context, to explain the likelihood of collective action (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Several detailed typologies have been produced to account for different kinds of resources that can be channeled into mobilization (Cress & Snow, 1996; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004); all of the typologies differentiate, as we do in this paper, between financial (material), human, and organizational resources. The comparatively resource-scarce conditions of developing countries might be a limitation for this approach, which was developed to explain movements in the wealthier democracies of the North. We analyzed the types of resources that appear to be most important for Chilean student organizations and whether these resources compensated for the environmental scarcity of financial resources. We also explored how education (the educational system and the expanding but unequal opportunities that it provides) might be working not only as a grievance but also as a resource for mobilization, an issue that has not been adequately conceptualized in either political or educational theory. It might be the case that capabilities and attitudes learned through schools (e.g., classroom, peer socialization, etc.) might be used to understand and challenge the inequalities and disadvantages created by the education system.

Although there has been ample discussion among scholars advocating for each one of these four approaches, a more nuanced view can be gained by understanding them as complementary instead of mutually exclusive. We consider and use social movement theory as an overall framework of observation that provides generalized hypotheses on different dimensions or factors of mobilization, which in turn have to be contextualized and evaluated in any given case. Many empirical researchers (e.g., McAdam et al., 1996; Snow, Soule, & Cress, 2005) have used this approach to compare the relative importance of factors associated with different theories and to decide which work better in each case. Moreover, social movement theory as a whole has moved towards this kind of complementary understanding of its internal streams (Tarrow, 2011).

### **Education Reform and Social Movements**

Social movement theorists have not studied student movements in a systematic manner. Students as collective actors have a history of issuing highly contentious calls for political and social change. The waves of student activism in the U.S. and France in the 1960s are emblematic cases (Sica & Turner, 2005). Nevertheless, student activists have received little systematic attention from social movement researchers, most likely because the emergence of the “new social movements,” which demanded most of the

researchers' attention (Koopmans, 1995), occurred in parallel with the decline of campus activism in the last decades of the 20th century.

Correspondingly, education researchers have underused social movement theory to study how a number of lasting educational reforms were the outcome of social movements. According to Apple (2003), the conflict resulting from the clash of social movements and the educational establishment was a major mechanism for change in otherwise static educational systems. In the U.S., for example, the very institution of mass public schooling was the outcome of local, and mostly rural, movements driven by a Protestant nation-building ideology that eventually originated the so-called "common school" movement (Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Moreover, other major examples are the progressive movement in the first half of the 20th century (Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 2000) and the school choice movement, with its diverse streams, during the second half of the century (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Ravitch, 2010). Recent research on how key organizational properties or different framing strategies explain the success of certain education movements partially compensates for the disconnection between social movement theory and education reform studies. For example, Stevens (2001) has analyzed the homeschooling movement in the U.S. by studying how cultural values influence the organizational structure and outcomes of homeschooling advocacy groups. He found that Christian believers had highly structured and hierarchical internal organizations that were more effective than the open and politically innocuous organizations of inclusive homeschooling advocates. In another study, Binder (2002) analyzed the impact of Afrocentric and Creationist movements on curriculum change and concluded that, although different ideologically, they shared a common strategy of framing their demands in terms of civil rights, free speech, and accommodating schools to cultural diversity. Similarly, Davies (1999) found that religious groups in Ontario, Canada framed their demands for curricular change in nonreligious terms, such as multiculturalism, in order to signal to educational authorities, and to society in general, that their demands were related to respect for minorities rather than religious reasons.

Overall, these studies have focused on organizational, especially cultural, dimensions of framing, only partially compensating for the disconnection between social movement theory and education reform scholarship. For example, these studies have shown how groups have avoided sectarian messages in favor of more universal (e.g., civil rights based) language to formulate their claims. However, other social factors found to be relevant for noneducational movements, such as grievances, political opportunities, or resources, have received little attention. Our case provides an opportunity to strengthen the link previous authors, such as Dugas (2001), have initiated between social movement theory and education reform. In the next section, we present the methodological approach used in this work.

### **Methodology**

Our methodological approach was informed by the dynamic nature of our object of study. Defined in broad terms, the Chilean student movement can be tracked back several decades and understood in historical unity with cyclical manifestations, or waves, of contention over time. It can also be argued that each wave's distinct differences in

movement goals (e.g., political versus educational reform) and political and historical contexts (e.g., dictatorship versus democracy) might justify a separate analysis. The 2011 wave had direct roots in the Penguin Revolution of 2006. It also had some important connections with the more or less isolated student demonstrations that occurred in the democratic period (1990-2011), and more indirect roots in previous historical waves of student mobilization in Chile and Latin America. These previous historical waves of student mobilizations include the university student protests in the 1960s (Bernasconi, 2007) and the Chilean student activism in the 1980s, which postponed all educational demands in order to join the larger political movement to end dictatorship and return to democracy (Garretón, 2001). Yet the 2011 mobilization was also a point of originality and the climax of political contention within the larger education reform in Chile. For the purpose of this paper, we focus exclusively on the mobilizations led by university student organizations in 2011. Our analysis includes all events of student collective action observable during that year.

Given that this wave of the Chilean student movement is ongoing and its unfolding development and future consequences will be observable only in the years to come, the analytical effort of this paper and the findings we advance are essentially exploratory and in need of further empirical verification. We are historically too close to our object of study to produce the extensive primary data required to perform the statistical analysis that one might find in a more extended historical quantification of student protest activity. On the other hand, we have taken advantage of the positive aspects of proximity with the events to keep track of the movement as it evolves, provide a timely analysis of the issue while it is still pertinent, and help build the foundations of future work related to this area. We have organized this historical and qualitative research effort using the most complete set of secondary data available at this time, following standard methodologies and guidelines used in social movement research, as reviewed in Koopmans and Rucht (2002).

Our major sources of secondary data included newspaper articles reporting on the movement and published online during 2011 in the main Chilean and international newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Economist*. Most Chilean news reports came from *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera*, and *La Segunda*, newspapers that are national in the scope of their coverage, highly professionalized, and among the oldest and most widely read in Chile. Their editorial line has been identified traditionally with neoliberal economic policies and conservative politics. As a complement, we used materials from *El Mostrador*, an electronic journal with progressive politics, which represents the growing online communication that has characterized contemporary social movements and receives contributions from a wide range of actors in civil society in addition to its own professional and independent reporting.

Newspaper articles served two purposes. First, we used these stories to reconstruct the chronology of major protests and related events that composed the 2011 wave of the movement. Second, these articles provided substantive qualitative insight for the analysis. To study framing processes, we analyzed the claims and issues students highlighted in their declarations to the press before and after each of the 12 student-initiated national protests in 2011. CONFECH leaders centrally called for national protests and were joined by student organizations from all around the country. The protests were major

demonstrations of student empowerment that were extensively covered in the media and became dominant issues in Chilean news during the second half of 2011. We also observed framing tactics students used when articulating their main demands during the protests. Analysis of media coverage on protests or other events occurring at a subnational level, such as actions organized independently by regional or local student organizations and lacked the massive participation levels of the national protests, was less systematic. We did not directly study these events of smaller size and scale, though we estimated their numbers using police data, as explained below. Previous studies have shown that “selection” and “description” biases are the main sources of potential problems encountered when researchers use media to study protest activity (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; McCarthy, McPhail, & Smith, 1996; Oliver & Myers, 1999). Selection bias refers to the likelihood that a protest event will receive press coverage; events that are bigger in size and aligned with current media issues are more likely to be covered. For our study, we dealt with this problem by focusing our analysis on national, rather than regional or local, student demonstrations that were massive in size and had strong agenda-setting power. Description bias refers to the lens under which selected events are described. In other words, description biases are potential biases in the content of the media reporting due perhaps to political preferences. Following the example of previous research (Jasiewicz, 2012; Koopmans & Statham, 1999), we focused only on the factual reporting of statements and events (e.g., main message, size, or location) and disregarded journalists’ opinions or symbolic interpretation (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002).

In addition to newspaper articles, we used three other secondary sources. First, we analyzed documents created by student organizations (e.g., letters to authorities and public declarations) and by governmental actors (e.g., reform proposals) involved in the conflict. Second, we analyzed publicly available police data, which provided us with an official quantification of participation and violence at protest events for the 2009-2011 time period. Chilean police data include counts of what they call “events of control of the public order,” that is, all events that involved police action, both authorized and unauthorized by the official authorities, including demonstrations and protests, strikes, hunger strikes, and occupations. Because we did not use media to quantify the total number of events (only the national protests), police data provide a good estimate of the protest events that occurred all over the country. The third additional source is data from public opinion surveys conducted by Adimark, an independent research firm with experience in political survey and data analysis. In each survey, approximately 1,200 interviewees (the figure varies slightly by month) were selected from a random probabilistic sample (estimation error was +/- 3% with a 95% confidence interval).

A major limitation of our approach was the lack of data on financial resources. Chilean student organizations do not have publicly available records. These data would have helped to explore whether the availability of financial resources operated as a mobilizing factor in this case. Based on findings from previous studies on social organizations in Chile (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2004), we hypothesize that financial resources were less important for fostering movement activity than other kinds of resources more readily available to students. However, further supporting evidence of these findings would require the collection of primary data

through questionnaires or interviews with members of student organizations. This is an issue to address through further research. We thus turn to the analysis of the 2011 Chilean student movement.

### **Analysis: Factors Shaping the Emergence and Development of the 2011 Chilean Student Movement**

All four factors highlighted by social movement theory—grievances, framing, political opportunity, and mobilizing resources—are relevant to understanding the Chilean student movement. We offer here a brief summary of the findings that will be explored in more depth throughout the section.

The 2011 Chilean student movement was a notable case of mobilizing grievances, which, as we said above, are the objective strains or problems that increase the level of unrest and lead people to mobilize. Several studies suggest that growing educational inequalities are the outcome of free-market institutional arrangements (Bellei, 2009; Mizala & Torche, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2009). In their everyday lives, families have experienced the disadvantages of a system in which educational access and quality are correlated with socioeconomic resources. In addition, the financial burdens and risks that an expensive, highly privatized, and weakly regulated education system put on the middle class and poor are significant.

By framing those grievances in a way that resonated with the larger population, the student movement produced massive participation in protests and strong public demand for education reform in Chile. The movement's frames—that is, the interpretations and discursive choices made to present claims and demands—highlighted clear educational problems, were displayed through innovative repertoires, and were communicated by highly articulate and critical leaders. These frames were not sudden inventions but rather the emergent results of an accumulation of narratives, ideas, and claims from previous waves of mobilization in the student movement sector. At the same time, claims changed over the course of the conflict, gaining discursive complexity and transformative scope over time. To the previously known “historical demands” of equality of access, more funding for public education, and university democratization, students added new demands, such as free university education, improved quality, and the notion that educational reform was not a benefit for a narrow interest group, but was for the country as a whole.

The third factor, political opportunities, refers to the transformations in the political context that might open opportunities for contentious agents. The student movement took advantage of a local political context that created unexpected political opportunities. The center-right, conservative government coalition was mostly unresponsive and, at times, repressive in its treatment of the movement, but it was also incapable of sorting out the challenges posed by an empowered movement supported by a massive constituency, public opinion, and powerful international actors. In addition to these recent changes in the government administration's political affiliation, the process of democratization over the last decade provided a context of long-term political transformation, which created new opportunities for social movements in Chile.

Finally, according to theory, the availability of different kinds of resources can operate as a vital input to spark protest. In our case, the mobilization of human and

organizational resources, more than financial resources, seems to have been a key factor in the movement's emergence and empowerment. In particular, the expansion of education appears to have been a long-term, structural process; one that has changed the conditions for collective action in Chile by creating civic-critical awareness and increasing aspiration for social mobility.

### **Mobilizing Grievances and Tactical Framing**

The economic and social policies implemented in Chile since the 1980s, and continued with partial adjustments during the democratic 1990s and 2000s, have had a complex set of effects. On the positive side, the country experienced sustained economic growth, a reduction of poverty rates, and overall improvement of the living standards of the population. On the other hand, economic inequality has sharply increased over time along with an extreme concentration of wealth in the top income decile, which has turned Chile into one of the most unequal countries in the world (Torche, 2005b).

In the educational system, the picture is equally mixed and even a little more troubling. The massification of secondary and tertiary education, which by definition expanded the overall "pie" of educational opportunities, did not affect the patterns of allocation of opportunity among social classes. Instead, it replicated the pattern of "persistent inequality" that some have found in the U.S. and European countries (Lucas, 2001; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). In Chile, the institutional arrangement of privatization policies is a key explanatory factor for the persistence of educational stratification and the qualitative inequality between private and public schools (Torche, 2005a). The massive shift of middle-class students from public to private schools (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; Marcel & Raczynski, 2009), the socioeconomic segregation of schools (OECD, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2009), and the barriers to higher education that financial costs create (Brunner, 2009) are just some of the causes of distress that families experience in their struggle for opportunity. But the existence of educational grievances does not explain why education, and not other issues in which grievances are also clear (e.g., income or health inequality), became the source of a social movement of this magnitude. Social theorists tend to agree that while the existence of grievances of a particular kind is important, grievances alone do not guarantee mobilization. As Tarrow (2011) writes, "it is no simple matter to convince normally passive people that the indignities and inequalities of everyday life can be challenged" (p. 145). If this is true, why did educational inequality in Chile turn into a truly contentious collective action instead of remaining a private problem dealt with through individual rational choice in the ever-growing educational market, as economic theories would predict? The intensity of educational grievances is the first part of the answer; a second part is that no actor in Chilean society had the discursive power that student organizations possessed to frame a problematic issue—in this case, the "crisis in education"—which connected with the experiences of large parts of the Chilean population. To give meaning to a political challenge to the current educational arrangements, students carried out the two main re-signifying processes involved in any successful diagnostic framing (Snow & Soule, 2010): "problematization" of issues and "attribution" of responsibilities. Student problematization of educational issues evolved during the conflict, gaining discursive complexity and moving gradually from specific demands to more structural issues. Our

analysis of newspaper stories on each of the 12 national protests of the year showed gradual but significant change in student discourse.<sup>5</sup> When the movement was just beginning, student framing was essentially aligned with the so-called “historical demands” of Chilean university students in the democratic period: (a) *equity* in access to higher education through the elimination of barriers like university admission tests (because the rich were more likely to do well on the tests); (b) an increase in funding for *public education*; and (c) *democratization* of universities, which meant increased student participation in internal decision making. We can see these three points clearly defined in the document that students gave to the government explaining their demands (CONFECH 2011a). Student leaders also highlighted these demands in the media after the event (Águila, 2011).

To the demand of more funds for public education, activists added the demand for increased quality, an issue that they highlighted in their media appearances in all national protests occurring after July 14th. After protests that gathered 200,000 people in different cities, Vallejo declared: “Today this movement has gained self-awareness: we want to move towards a national system of public education that promotes democracy and social diversity, of quality for all Chileans” (Miño, 2011, p. 2). Similarly, the demand for free higher education was not present at first and only started to appear systematically after August (“Estudiantes Califican,” 2011), after students and their supporters signed the landmark document “Social Agreement for Education,” which established the demand for free education (CONFECH, 2011b). As the movement grew in size and power, and popular support became evident, students began to describe themselves as representing the interest of society as a whole: “Even if this hurts Piñera,” said Giorgio Jackson, the student leader at Universidad Católica, “we are the people of Chile, we are the invincible” (German Press Agency [DPA], 2011). The scope of their discourse grew larger, and educational problems began to be presented explicitly as national issues. After the last national protest of the year, which 300,000 people attended, Vallejo declared: “This fight is for the future of our country. To build the bases for development we have to guarantee gratuity and quality in the educational system” (Rivera, 2011a, p. 6). The attribution of responsibility for educational problems was clear from the beginning. The neoliberal policies installed in the authoritarian period, continued during democracy and defended by the Piñera administration, were the main target for protesters. The government was accused of being repressive and unresponsive, especially after the national protest of August 4th, which was not authorized by the government and ended in intense confrontations between students and the police (“Minuto a minuto,” 2011). After a nonviolent “family” demonstration later that month at the O’Higgins Park in Santiago, Vallejo declared:

If the government does not want to give a solution, we have to give it. We will show that we are able to break the political institutions that are in crisis, with the political class and their model, which is unable to dispose of their interests and businesses not only in education but also in health, in mining, in the labor market and in all corporations that we have today with this level of inequality. (“Camila

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<sup>5</sup> Dates of national protest: May 12th and 26th; June 1st, 16th, 23rd, and 30th; July 14th; August 4th, 9th, 18th, and 21st; September 22nd and 29th; and October 19th.



Vallejo Cifra,” 2011, p. 6)

The problem of profit-making by private institutions receiving public funds was frequently mentioned from the beginning. After the first national protest, Vallejo said to the media, “We won’t allow the resources of all Chileans to be used to finance institutions that profit from families with illusions that they are not being abused” (Águila, 2011). The demand for more regulation of the private educational sector was present from the first national protest in May until the end of the conflict. At the end of September, Vallejo declared, “We don’t want more public resources going from the State to private institutions and pockets without prior regulation of the system” (“Vallejo,” 2011).

Overall, these elements converged into a “master frame,” a single unity in which different claims congregate to appeal to different constituencies and build a coalition (see Snow, 2004), that demanded structural reform and the creation of a new system of free, high-quality public education at all levels. As effective, contentious frames typically allow, students were able to re-signify the current state of affairs as both “unjust” and “mutable,” creating an “us-versus-them” scenario where “us” signified “the people” asking for basic educational rights, and “them” signified the government denying those rights.

This frame expressed itself through several forms or “repertoires” (Taylor & Van Dike, 2004) of contention. The most noticeable were the traditional massive national protests, but they were not the only ones. Other “repertoires” of contention included takeovers (*tomas*) of universities or high schools, massive student refusal to attend class in universities or high schools (*paros*), hunger strikes (“Estudiantes Secundarios Deponen,” 2011), occupation of public buildings (“Secundarios se Toman,” 2011), collective performances in the streets and at symbolic public sites, kiss-ins (Barrionuevo, 2011), press conferences, national referendums on education policies (Rivera, 2011b), litigation, and more. Thus, our focus on national protests covers just the tip of the iceberg of the mobilization process. One of the most outstanding events was a massive protest performance of “Thriller,” a pop song by Michael Jackson. At this protest performance, about 4,000 students danced and dressed up in zombie costumes to show symbolically that, under current conditions, they would still be paying back their college loans after their deaths (“Estudiantes se transforman,” 2011).<sup>6</sup> The action was organized as a flash mob through various electronic social networks, and the video has had several hundred thousand views on YouTube. These online forms of organization were not available to previous waves of mobilizations and have introduced innovative strategies that social movement theorists are just starting to observe and understand. Another prominent event called “1,800 Hours For Education” (“1800 horas por la educación”) lasted for two months as a group of students ran for 1,800 continuous hours around La Moneda Palace (the house of the president), in symbolic reference to the \$1.8 billion dollars that were needed, according to the organizers, to fund a reform that would make higher education free. During the last hours of the event, up to 4,000 people joined the running effort,

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<sup>6</sup> Some of these performances had the kind of strong, visual, celebratory and almost ritual symbolic character of contemporary forms of cultural contention described in Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) or Taylor and Van Dyke (2004).

many of them regular citizens or bystanders (“Finaliza la maratón,” 2011). This action was so acclaimed that it turned into a new student organization of its own, and the same activity has been replicated in different cities across the country. The strong leadership provided by the main student leaders was also a key factor in empowering the movement and linking it with public opinion. Both Vallejo and Jackson were highly articulate spokespersons who were able to communicate the purposes and claims of the movement to the mass media. Since the mobilizations began, Vallejo and Jackson have made regular appearances on television and radio shows, visited congress, and received invitations from international organizations. Media attention was especially focused on the 23-year-old geography student and Communist Party member, Vallejo. The British newspaper *The Guardian* described her in the following terms, “Not since the days of the Zapatistas’ Subcomandante Marcos has Latin America been so charmed by a rebel leader” (Franklin, 2011). Months later, the readers of the same newspaper chose her as the “Person of the Year” (Franklin, 2012). Other mainstream international media such as *The Economist* have pointed to the possible political future of Vallejo (“Chile: Progress and its discontents,” 2012) while *The New York Times* referred to Vallejo as “the world’s most glamorous revolutionary” (Goldman, 2012). Finally, *Time* and *Newsweek* included Vallejo on their lists of relevant world figures (“150 Fearless Women,” 2012; Padgett, 2011).

A noticeable framing contest occurred between students and their main target, the Piñera administration, around the issue of violence. Throughout the conflict, students defined their movement as nonviolent, whereas the government accused them of promoting disorder and destroying private and public property. A common feature of social protest in Chile, including but not limited to student protests, has been the presence of hooded protesters who have usually appeared towards the end of marches and demonstrations throwing stones, starting fires, or looting stores. Student leaders denied responsibility for these actions and made persistent public calls to their fellow students to use only pacific means of protest. Police repression of these kinds of actions was very strong, and the number of individuals arrested and injured in protest events extraordinarily increased as the movement gained momentum, as shown in Table 1. Supporting student disclaimers, the National Human Rights Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos*) prepared a document presenting cases of police torture, repression, and illegal detention of students in the movement (“Instituto de DD.HH.,” 2011).

Table 1  
*Individuals Arrested, Police Injured, and Civilians Injured in Events of Control of Public Order, 2009-2011*

	Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Individuals arrested	5,630	3,956	16,464
Police injured	142	73	1,115
Civilians injured	165	91	822

After some of the worst moments of police repression (in particular, during the national protest on August 4th), an old protest form from decades past was brought back to life: the *cacerolazo* (striking a casserole), where people make concerted noise with pots and pans either in the streets or from their gardens or yards, usually in the night. Although this form of protest originated in the 1970s when upper-class housewives began protesting against the socialist government of Salvador Allende, in the 1980s, its significance took a 180-degree turn and *cacerolazos* became a popular form of protest against the dictatorship, mainly because people could protect themselves from repression in the darkness. This form of protest was largely absent from previous demonstrations during the democratic period in Chile. The fact that it was brought back again for the first time since the Pinochet dictatorship was symbolic because many members of Piñera's administration were Pinochet's supporters or members of his government. By protesting in a way that reminded citizens of the time of the dictatorship, the movement also revived a basic ideological dichotomy of that time: the people/public versus the government/private sector.

### **The Changing Structure of Political Opportunities**

Political changes that opened a policy window (Kingdon, 1995) and created conditions for the emergence of the Chilean student movement can be differentiated as recent events or long-term processes. Among long-term changes, the key factor has been the enhancement of political and discursive opportunities created by the process of democratization in Chile. In 1990 the formal structures of Chilean democracy were reestablished, but the creation of a mature democratic political culture has been a long and slow process. More saliently, the so-called authoritarian enclaves (i.e., institutional arrangements designed before 1990 by supporters of the dictatorship in order to guarantee power for themselves in the new democratic period) have proven hard to undo (Garretón, 2001). In the early years of democracy, social organizations in Chile had less political space to speak up and challenge authority. The population was also less willing to support social organizations in the early years because the legacy of the dictatorship was more present. The generation represented by the leaders and participants of the student movement is a generation born into democracy. These leaders did not directly experience the human rights violations perpetrated by Pinochet's dictatorship in the ways that students of the 1980s and even the early 1990s had. When student leader Giorgio Jackson was asked what the dictatorship meant to him, he replied: "Nothing. I was born in 1987" (Goldman, 2012). Jackson's response implied that he belonged to a generation that was free from the weight of dictatorial repression, which lasted from 1973 to 1990. In the words of Camila Vallejo, this is "a generation that was born without fear" (Ouvina, 2012). This, of course, does not mean that the dictatorship was irrelevant for the student movement. Vallejo further explained that the student movement continues to fight against the legacy of the dictatorship, represented in the 1980 constitutional laws of education that the democratic government has largely maintained. Vallejo asserted that, in order to really achieve democracy, the current constitution needed to be changed and that it was the duty of the student movement to achieve these changes in the educational arena (Ouvina, 2012). Therefore, beyond its specific educational meaning, the student movement has also constituted an implicit effort to expand the quality of democracy in

Chile. The student movement's discourse contained both a critique of the undemocratic character of what they perceived as the technocratic, short-term decision making behind educational policies and a critique that political parties did not represent citizens' interests. They argued that the educational and social problems that Chile faced could not be solved merely through technical solutions; Chile's educational and social problems required political redefinitions. Furthermore, they claimed that because political parties did not properly represent the demands and interests of the larger population, any political redefinition should include a deep democratic process involving sectors of civil society.

Among recent events that substantially altered the structure of political opportunity for social movement organizations in Chile, the most important was the ascension of Sebastian Piñera as the first right-wing president in 20 years. Many of his government officials were among the original creators or advocates of the free-market policies in Chile. Piñera's first Minister of Education, the economist Joaquín Lavín, was an emblematic member of the "Chicago Boys" in the 1980s. If in 2006 the high school students criticized the center-left *Concertación* coalition for not having the political will to introduce structural changes to the policies put in place in the dictatorship, in 2011 higher education students were targeting the very creators of the system they decried, who were now back in power. The fact that the Piñera administration defined 2011 as the "year of higher education reform," a year in which they furthered policies that, according to the students, would merely strengthen the socially reproductive effects of an already unequal system, pulled the trigger for student protests. In other words, it was the Piñera administration that provided a discursive opportunity because it installed higher education reform in the public agenda, giving students the opportunity to respond with a major counterattack.

Furthermore, the Piñera administration represented a political coalition that had little recent experience in the public sector. The vast majority of the administration's ministers came from private firms or academia (Jimenez, 2010). Therefore, they had practically no knowledge or experience dealing with social unrest. This led to the proliferation of a series of erratic government strategies that included praising the student movement in an international context (as Piñera did in a UN meeting), repressing the student protests (including a law in congress seeking to detain any person who attended a mobilization hooded), and launching a series of proposals (up to this date there have been three different ones), none of which responded to the students demands. On the other hand, the administration lacked agents able to mediate between the government and the leaders of grassroots organizations, such as those leading the student movement. Tironi (2011) has argued that the availability of these "political operators" was a great strength of the *Concertación* coalition but was lacking in the Piñera administration. One of the mediation roles of these grassroots operators was to contain protest or facilitate consensus with activists. The absence of these operators created a policy window for students by extending the conflict and allowing students to hold public attention for a longer period of time. Also, due to the undesirable results of the Penguin Revolution of 2006, where the proclaimed consensus did little to satisfy the students' demands at that time, the movement was highly distrustful of any government announcement or intention to reach a consensus. The results of this combination explain why it has been so difficult to

resolve this conflict. Overall, 2011 was a special year in which a profoundly democratic spirit brought together a generation of students that no longer had to bear the weight of the dictatorship. These students, highly distrustful of political institutions, clashed with the newly elected center-right government. This government had little-to-no experience dealing with social groups, had conflicts of interest in the educational sector (like those of Minister Lavín) and, according to the students, shared ties or sympathies with the Pinochet dictatorship, which was responsible for the implementation of the educational structure that the movement tried to change.

### **Mobilizing Resources: The Primacy of Organizational and Educational Resources**

A final relevant factor to understanding our case is the more general process of economic and social development in Chile. According to resource mobilization theory, three decades of economic growth, decline in poverty levels, expansion of the educational system, and similar modernization processes should have substantially increased the overall level of resources that individuals and organizations had available for collective action.

In Chile, however, financial resources did not appear to be as relevant as other kinds of resources such as organizational and human resources. For example, a case study showed that gay and lesbian organizations and performing actors' unions in Chile actively used organizational networks, leadership, and a close relationship with mass media to counterbalance a lack of financial resources (UNDP, 2004). This suggests that despite economic growth, income concentration at the highest levels has made financial resources less available compared with other kinds of resources. Through Simonsen's (2012) interviews with student leaders, we know that student organizations received some nonfinancial support such as mobilization, lodging, and food for meetings and assemblies, as well as support from actors such as teachers' or workers' unions and even sympathetic senators. Although we have little data on financial resources for the 2011 student movement, our hypothesis is that student organizations similarly adapted to the scarcity of money by maximizing their use of organizational and human resources. This issue should be taken up in further research.

The substantial organizational infrastructure of students across the country was a key resource activated during the 2011 cycle of demonstrations. Micro-level social movement organizations (i.e., student organizations in universities and high schools all around the country) and meso-level organizations (especially CONFECH for traditional universities) have traditionally been strong and vital in Chile, if not as powerful and coordinated as in 2011. The National Map of Organizations produced by the Chilean headquarters of the United Nations Development Program in 2000 found 468 student organizations all over the country (UNDP, 2002); an updated number would most certainly be higher than that. But beyond the number of organizations, previous waves of mobilization had an important effect on accumulating different kinds of organizational resources that were readily available in the 2011 wave. In particular, the Penguin Revolution of 2006 provided a strong discursive base and was likely an experience of what McAdam (1982) and others have called "cognitive liberation," that is, an event that triggered a change in the collective perception of the legitimacy and mutability of structural social inequalities.

A lively network of student organizations was not the only resource that members of the movement obtained from schools; schools also provided students and graduates with new knowledge, attitudes, and life expectations that made them more willing to sympathize with, and participate in, social movement activities. Previous research suggests that individuals can channel their educational resources into social engagement, political participation, and social movement activity (Pallas, 2000). This is consistent with the finding that more educated individuals are more likely to participate in social organizations and other forms of political engagement (Levin & Kelley, 1994; Smith, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980), either because schools contribute to the political socialization of youth (Wiseman, Astiz, Fábrega, & Baker, 2011) or because they provide human capital and grant access to better jobs and income that can be channeled into collective action.

The expansion of education as a resource to sectors that were historically excluded was a key component of the Chilean students' identity as a collective actor: they had access to new educational opportunities and, at the same time, they were demanding conditions that would allow them to take the largest possible advantage of these opportunities. As the student leader Jackson has put it, "the promise of growth and expansion in higher education came without the regulatory framework that is necessary to prevent this huge gap between the expectations of students and their families that were created by expending millions in advertising and a much less promising reality" (Jackson 2012, para.12). In other words, if the massification of education does not by itself solve the problem of equal opportunity (thus making education appear as a grievance), it nevertheless generates new social conditions to generate solutions (education as a resource).

Several studies suggest that the massification of secondary and tertiary schooling played a key role in creating conditions for the 2011 student movement. For example, a comparative survey on civic knowledge and engagement of upper-secondary students conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA, 2000) in 14 countries found that Chilean students scored above the international mean in appreciation of social movements and also in attributing society-related responsibilities to the State (as opposed to market-related responsibilities). The IEA study offered several hypotheses for the mechanisms contributing to the effect of education on mobilization, including engagement in school organizations, political attitudes, civic knowledge, and expected educational attainment. First, Chilean students' confidence in school participation was also higher than the international mean. This indicator referred to student perceptions of the effectiveness of school organization, the positive consequences of engaging in collective action, how collective action can be more powerful than individual action, and how expressing student opinion can achieve school change. As the IEA study stated, the school and classroom indicator functions as a proxy for real-life social participation and engagement. It is in school that students first learn to interact with peers and negotiate and pursue objectives. This suggests that Chilean schools have built an adequate climate to help foster these values for students. Second, the IEA study showed that 12th-grade students (children around 17 and 18 years old) in Chile were more likely to master civic knowledge, engage in civic activities, and be more distrustful of government-related institutions than 14-year-old students. One hypothesis is

that more years in the school institution tends to have a cumulative effect, where civic engagement and knowledge grow as well as distrust in institutions. Consistently, a recent OECD finding showed that the more civic knowledge a Chilean student possesses, the more they distrust civic institutions (OECD, 2011). Third, the IEA study showed that good predictors of civic knowledge and engagement in Chile are political interest, newspaper reading, home literacy resources, and parental educational levels. However, the highest predictor is expected years of education, which refers to the self-reported level of education a student desires to achieve. Furthermore, the strength of the expected education level as a predictor of civic knowledge and engagement was among the highest of all countries included in the study. Expected education is a proxy for expected status attainment, and thus the association between higher expectations and civic knowledge and engagement reveals the importance of educational demands as a channel for opportunity and social mobility. A vivid portrait of how all these processes actually worked is provided by Simonsen (2012) in her reporting of how student organizations worked inside schools. Simonsen reported the existence of complex networks of organizations within and between schools and found that several student leaders, according to their own accounts, ended up creating educational expectations that went beyond their family expectations as a result of their experience in school and their active engagement in secondary-school activism. One of Simonsen's (2012) interviewees, José Soto, an 18-year-old secondary student at Instituto Nacional, recounted his path from a small primary school in southern Chile to a secondary school in the capital, Santiago:

When I entered high school I had a change of mentality, a maturity in every sense, a natural growth. That is why I participated [in] the student assembly, and my interest in politics grew. I made friends among the people in the student council and they passed me books; that's how I became a reader. Making the change from primary to high school was strong. (p. 18)

Like José, many students found spaces and relationships in schools that provided them with new cultural resources, political experiences, and expectations about themselves and society.

The irony of this situation is that formal instruction, made possible by the expansion of the educational system, could be pointed out as a key condition of the collective demand for educational reform. The student mobilization could be seen as a mobilization of increasingly educated masses that, due to the level of instruction they had received, have gained awareness of the gaps in access and quality of educational institutions, developed a critical understanding about them, and, in turn, a willingness to take action to change them. Therefore, the student mobilization might be one of the greatest achievements of the Chilean educational system—an educational system that produced the conditions for its own reform and further institutionalization.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have offered an overview of the 2011 Chilean student movement and an analysis of the factors shaping its emergence and development. Overall, the Chilean student movement emerged out of the interaction between four sets of factors: growing

inequalities in education that were an outcome of three decades of neoliberal economic and educational policies; the discursive agency and communication tactics of student organizations that provided meaning to a collective challenge to current policy; the opportunities opened by long-term (i.e., democratization) and short-term (i.e., the Piñera administration and the “year of higher education”) changes in the national political context; and, finally, the new conditions created by economic development and educational expansion in Chile for a young generation with increased capabilities and critical attitudes readily available to channel into political action.

Our analysis suggests that social movement theories are useful instruments to examine specific features of the Chilean student movement. Education grievances, tactical frames, political opportunities, and resource availability all had a role in mobilizing thousands of students and citizens, and hundreds of social organizations, into a single process of contesting educational inequalities and demanding structural education reform in Chile. This suggests that social movement theory can be a relevant framework for studying educational movements. We think that scholars of education reform have underutilized this framework and, with few exceptions, little research has been conducted linking the two. A more intensive use of the intellectual and methodological materials of this scholarly tradition among education scholars could be a productive path for future research.

Furthermore, some of our findings make a first step in suggesting refinement of existing social movement theories when applied to education. In our case, the educational system seemed to be working simultaneously as a grievance and as a resource for mobilization. We suggested some of the mechanisms through which education might affect mobilization, particularly increased civic knowledge and engagement, and new aspirations of access and mobility contrasted against the highly concentrated benefits of development. The political potential of education as a kind of resource and locus for mobilization and change seems to defy widely held notions of reproduction and resistance theories, which offer few tools for understanding the ways education creates conditions for change or why students with higher expectations of educational attainment are more likely to engage in political protest. Furthermore, the extent to which an increasingly educated world population might be thought of as a driving factor for the contemporary “social movement society” (Meyers & Tarrow, 1998) is a question that is also worthy of further research. Educational grievances became the most urgent public issue in Chile after 30 years of privatization policies. These policies produced high levels of family indebtedness due to limited funding access to an expensive and low-quality system of private education. Readers in the U.S. and other countries will find similar grievances in their own contexts. The question seems to be clear: Under what conditions does the demand for education in contemporary society go beyond individual choices and established institutional channels, and turn into an organized, collective, and contentious movement, as was the case in Chile? This question has not yet been answered in any thorough manner by the social sciences. From a policy and international perspective, Chile is an instructive case for studying the shortcomings of applying free-market principals to education. Before the student movement, socially segregated schools and rising loan debts were described as mere “negative externalities” of the massification of secondary and tertiary education and the expansion of the private sector. This case



suggests the importance of broadening the set of indicators used to evaluate policies and to go beyond growth to incorporate distribution, equality of opportunity, democracy, and social cohesion. By challenging the effects of market reforms, the events in Chile are not so different from other recent mobilization events taking place in Spain, Russia, or the U.S., where people have protested against what they consider to be the uninvited intrusion of market criteria into the realms of public values and democratic deliberation. Observers of the Occupy Wall Street movement will recognize the references to rising student debt and the increasing cost of higher education as well as deeper political commonalities (Byrne, 2012). Chilean society's massive rejection of market rule in education will surely be informative for similar debates in other parts of the world.

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