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Making sense of “La Salida”

Challenging left-wing control in Venezuela

Juan Masullo

Abstract

In the first half of 2014, Venezuela went through one of the most contentious periods in its recent history, a disruptive event only comparable with the 1989 Caracazo and the 2002 Coup. After several electoral setbacks, one flank of an increasingly divided opposition took to the streets, under the banner of La Salida (which means both “the exit” and “the solution”), to call on left-wing President Nicolás Maduro to resign. What began as a peaceful protest in early February quickly turned violent: 3,306 protestors were detained, 973 injured, and 42 killed in the short period between February and June. However, despite a huge number of newspaper articles, op-eds, and blogs dealing with various aspects of this wave, little scholarly work has analyzed it. This chapter therefore aims to provide a balanced descriptive account of these events and to offer some initial analyses to make sense of them. The chapter deals with some of the elemental questions that students of contentious politics typically pose and uses some of its conceptual tools in order to improve the understanding of La Salida. To do so, it builds on a large amount of primary and secondary material published in newspapers and blogs, data collected by different organizations, and personal interviews with activists and scholars.

Keywords: La Salida, Maduro, Venezuela, 2014 protest, MUD, López

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4.1 Introduction

The context

*Cuando el 19 de abril Nicolás Maduro juraba como el primer presidente chavista de la historia, se abría en Venezuela una nueva etapa.*

Mariano Fraschini, 2014, *Le Monde*

The date of March 5, 2013, is one that Venezuelans are unlikely to ever forget. On this day, after 14 years in power, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías died of cancer in a military hospital in Caracas. A month after his death, on the 14th of April, presidential elections were held to fill Chávez’s empty seat. Nicolás Maduro, Chávez’s long-serving foreign minister who had assumed the interim presidency since his death, ran as his hand-picked successor. In the closest presidential elections Venezuelans had seen since the late 1960s, Maduro was elected president of the Bolivarian Republic: only a 1.59 percentage point margin (234,935 votes) gave him a victory over a strong opponent, Henrique Capriles Radonski, the representative of the more moderate line of the umbrella opposition group, the Table for Democratic Unity (MUD).

It was not the first time that Capriles had lost a presidential election: on October 7, 2012, he had lost against Chávez. While on that occasion Capriles promptly conceded defeat to Chávez and acknowledged the electoral outcome, in 2013 he and his campaign team refused to accept the electronic vote tally and demanded that the electoral authority open all the boxes and count the paper ballots one by one. Inviting his supporters to protest, Capriles tweeted right after the results become public: “Until every vote is counted, Venezuela has an illegitimate president and we denounce that to the world.” Although he called the demonstration off shortly thereafter due to security concerns and instead invited people to nightly cacerolazos,

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2 Maduro, a former bus driver and union activist, rose through the ranks of Chavismo. He was elected to the National Assembly in 2000, became its speaker in 2005, and was appointed foreign minister in 2006. He held that post until Chávez named him vice president. When Chávez died, he became the interim president.

3 Official data from the National Electoral Council (CNE) www.cne.gov.ve/web/sala_prensa/noticia_detallada.php?id=3165. This difference, according to the Carter Center, was even smaller: 1.49 percentage points and 224,268 votes (The Carter Center, 2014).

4 *Cacerolazo* is a form of popular protest that consists in banging pots and pans in order to call the attention of others. It has been widely practiced not only in Venezuela, but also in several Latin American countries, Argentina being a remarkable example.
several protestors in various cities took to the streets. The demonstrations became violent and, according to the authorities, more than seventy people were arrested and nine died (see Ore, 2013). However, although these events are interesting in their own right, they simply provide the background to the protest wave examined in detail in this chapter: *La Salida*.

This new cycle began almost a year later, in early February 2014, when a new wave of protest erupted in the country. It was again an anti-government (anti-Maduro) protest, but this time it was carefully organized and led by two political figures representing the hard line of the MUD, Leopoldo López and Maria Corina Machado, and it was set up without Capriles’s consent. The event immediately preceding and triggering this wave was, once again, an electoral setback for the MUD: in December 2013, Maduro’s party won the municipal elections, and this time the margin was considerably larger than that of the presidential elections held in April. These results, which were portrayed as a plebiscite on Maduro by the opposition, sent a blunt message to the opposition: they showed that Maduro indeed had considerable support among the electorate and gave legitimacy to the April presidential elections, which had never been recognized by Capriles.\(^5\)

This situation fed already existing divisions within the MUD. The Capriles line not only ended up accepting the December defeat, but also, in January, began to coordinate joint strategies in the area of security with the Maduro government. The two politicians even shook hands – something unexpected and unprecedented. However, while Capriles showed himself willing to accept Maduro’s victory and to cooperate with him in some domains, López – a hardliner – was determined not to wait until the next elections to beat Maduro. As noted by Alejandro Velasco, Professor of History at New York University and a Venezuela specialist, “while the electoral lapse served as an incentive to moderation among some [Capriles’s line], it also catalyzed the frustration of radical sectors already primed to distrust both the government and the moderate opposition [López’s line]” (Velasco, 2014b). This deepened division was clearly reflected in the fact that Capriles never gave his assent to the February demonstrations and did not support López in *La Salida*.

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\(^5\) By June 2013, a full audit had already revealed 99.98 percent consistency between the electronic results produced by the voting machines and the paper receipts produced by the same machines. Moreover, in September a final audit implemented by the CNE had confirmed that there were no voting incidents that could have affected the electoral outcome. The fingerprint audit identified 10,726 votes that were potentially duplicitous, a fraction that could have not altered the election results (see the electoral report by The Carter Center, 2014).
The 2014 cycle

Venezuelans are far from being strangers to contentious politics. However, when it comes to protest, the year of 2014 had no precedents in the country’s recent history. As Velasco (2015) noted, the events of 2014 are remarkable even against a history of over fifteen years of coups, counter-coups, devastating strikes, media wars, and street demonstrations and protests characterized by the deep divisions between Chávez’s supporters and opponents. This assertion is backed by hard data. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS), a center monitoring protest events throughout the country on a daily basis, recorded 9,286 protests in 2014 (an average of 26 protest events per day). This represents a 111 percent increase relative to the previous year. If these data are disaggregated further, it can be observed that the bulk of these events took place during the first part of the year, the period in which La Salida unfolded, and particularly in the months of February and March: 6,369 events were recorded for the first semester of 2014 (an average of 35 protest events per day) (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Moreover, in terms of repression and violence, this cycle was equally atypical. Bearing in mind Venezuela’s recent history, the levels of violence observed in the streets are only comparable to the Caracazo that took place in 1989 and to the 2002 Coup. David Smilde, professor of social relations at Tulane University and a Venezuela expert, reported from Caracas in March, while the events were still unfolding, that there had not been a single day in the past month and a half without a protest. He described the situation as “the biggest conflict, the biggest sort of convulsion in Venezuela for about 10 years.”

Everything started in the most unexpected place in Venezuela: Margarita Island. On February 2nd, a small group of opposition demonstrators protested against the Maduro government and its links to Cuba in front of the 5-star Hotel Venetur, where the Cuban baseball team was staying to play the “Serie del Caribe” (El Nacional, 2014). Although their demonstration seemed to be quite contained, the government detained seven of the demonstrators, claiming that they had attacked some players. Two days later, students from the Experimental University in San Cristobal, in the western border state of Táchira, began protesting against the sexual assault of a female classmate. The protest was repressed, and several students were detained. In response, students from other universities around the country, starting in Merida – the largest student center in Western Venezuela – took to the

6 Interview in Worldview (WBEZ).
7 Two members of the opposition party Voluntad Popular, led by Leopoldo López, were among the detained.
streets to call for the release of all of these detainees. These protests were also repressed and further detentions were made.

López and Machado took advantage of this momentum. They capitalized on the wave of protest – set in motion by the student movement – and called for new demonstrations under the banner of “La Salida” (which in Spanish means both “exit” and “solution”). The opposition asked for nothing less than Maduro’s resignation. The mobilizing efforts of López-Machado, plus the anger generated by the violent response of the government to the previous protest events, helped the wave grow bigger and spread all over the country. On February 12th, Venezuela’s National Youth Day, the protest wave reached its peak. Thousands of Maduro’s opponents met in Plaza Venezuela, in downtown Caracas, to call for the release of all the detainees and to express their open and radical rejection of the government. At the same
time, in another eighteen cities people took to the streets. The slogans were explicitly anti-government: “And we don’t feel like having a dictatorship like that of Cuba” (Y no nos da la gana, una dictadura igualita a la cubana) and “It will fall, it will fall, this government will fall” (Y va a caer, y va a caer, este gobierno va a caer). What started as a peaceful protest ended in vandalism and violence. The death toll surpassed 40, and thousands were arrested.

These events raise many questions about contentious politics in Venezuela. However, despite a huge number of newspaper articles, op-eds, and blogs dealing with different aspects of this wave, little scholarly work has been done to answer these questions to date. My aim in this chapter is therefore to provide a balanced account of these events and to offer some initial analyses to make sense of this complex contentious event. The chapter deals
with some of the elemental questions that students of contentious politics typically pose and uses some of its conceptual tools in order to improve the understanding of what has been one of the most disruptive political events to hit Venezuela. To do so, I build on a large amount of primary and secondary material published in newspapers and blogs, data collected by various organizations, and personal interviews with activists and scholars.

Like other chapters in this volume, this chapter deals with contentious politics in times of crisis. However, it has the particularity of dealing with collective reactions to the advancement of a socialist project that developed during the so-called neoliberal era in Latin America, while the focus of the other chapters is mostly on protest behavior against features of late neoliberalism. Building on Kerbo (1982), della Porta notes in the introduction to this volume that protest that develops in times of crisis (as compared to protest in times of abundance) is triggered more by threats than by opportunities. This is what we actually observed in Venezuela: an important sector of society mobilizing against a socialist regime that they see as threatening, a political project from which they feel excluded and under which they feel their “everyday life is challenged.”

The structure of the chapter is defined by the three main questions it addresses. In the next section, Why did people take to the streets?, I explore the main grievances that the media cited as driving people into the streets and argue that as the events unfolded there was a shift from social and economic claims that affect the bulk of Venezuelan society, to claims for political and civic liberties that affect a more restricted subgroup of the population. In the third section, Who took to the streets?, I advance some ideas to solve the puzzle of why those who are likely to be most affected by the current social and economic crisis in Venezuela were precisely those who mobilized the least. In the fourth section, Why did violence erupt within an otherwise peaceful wave of protest?, I focus on trying to understand Maduro’s repressive response, while making clear that violence did not result only from a desperate government obsessed with maintaining its hold on power no matter the cost, but also from the various actors involved and claimed victims from different sides.

### 4.2 Why did people take to the streets?

Multiple grievances seem to have been at the base of the 2014 mobilizations in Venezuela. Among a heterogeneous and sometimes very wide list of grievances, insecurity, mainly in the cities, and declining economic performance
– reflected mostly in high levels of inflation and a shortage of first necessity items – can be identified as the most salient. However, these grievances spurred some initial demonstrations that amounted to a protest ultimately focused on the lack of legitimacy of Maduro’s government and aiming, as the La Salida slogan indicated, at nothing less than making him resign. With this shift in focus, I suggest that two important transformations took place: (i) what began as a student protest where the main protagonist was the student movement became a wider middle-class protest organized by the radical sector of the MUD, led by López and Machado; (ii) what began as a protest demanding that the government take measures to improve security became a protest over civil and political rights against the government. As we will see in the next section, it is arguable that this shift had an important impact on the social composition of those who participated in the protests.

The main grievances before the shift

Insecurity
The recognition of an urgent need to address the country’s acute security problem is one of the few issues on which the government and the opposition had agreed. Following the highly mediatized murder in January 2014 of ex-Miss Venezuela Mónica Spear and her husband while driving back into Caracas after their December holiday, Maduro and Capriles agreed to work together to fight insecurity. The opposition leader openly said, “Let’s put aside the differences we have in politics and unite as one force to win the fight against violence” (cited in Vargas, 2014).8

The insecurity problem clearly goes far beyond the more visible case of Spear. Although it is not easy to come by reliable statistics, data from both national and international institutions show that, to take one indicator, homicide levels are comparably high and have been increasing recently (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4). A 2013 UNODC global study on homicide shows that Venezuela is the only country in South America with a consistently increasing homicide rate since the mid-1990s (UNODC 2014, 33). According to this institution’s data, the year before the protests erupted, Venezuela ranked as the 5th most dangerous country in the world. The Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV), a Caracas-based NGO made up of researchers from seven universities in the country, estimated that the country closed

8 It was on this occasion that Maduro and Capriles shook hands, fueling the divide that already existed within the opposition and pushing López and Machado to call on people to take to the streets.
the year 2013 with almost 25,000 killings and a murder rate of 79 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Although this violence is mostly concentrated in big cities, in 2013 the increase was steeper in small and medium-size cities (OVV, 2013). Along with these alarmingly high levels of violence, impunity is also worrying: according to Martinez (2014), only 8 percent of the homicides are solved in the country, and many are not even investigated.

This situation, as would be expected, translates into deep feelings of poor personal security. According to Gallup survey data, during the year before the protest events, Venezuelans reported the lowest levels of personal security in the world. In their Law and Order Index, which is built on survey responses to item questions of confidence in local police, feelings of personal safety, and self-reported incidence of theft, Venezuela scored 41 (on a
0 to 100 scale, where 100 represents the highest level of personal security).\(^9\)
Only 19 percent of Venezuelan adults felt safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they lived, only 26 percent expressed confidence in the police, and 22 percent reported that money had been stolen from them or another household member in the last twelve months.

Not surprisingly, then, security was a central issue at stake in one of the first events that gave rise to the cycle of protest under analysis. Students

\(^9\) Just to have a point of reference, Colombia, a country facing a civil war, scored 60 and Mexico, a country facing acute drug-related violence and where the sense of insecurity has been substantially increasing in the last years, scored 59. The score by World Region for Europe in the same year was 77.
protesting in Táchira over a case of sexual harassment against a female colleague framed the incident as an indicator of the generally poor level of personal security. Although to the best of my knowledge there are no on-site surveys to document the salience of insecurity as a driver to participation among protestors, several narratives, images, and interviews with demonstrators reveal that insecurity, at least at the very beginning of the cycle (in fact, before La Salida was formally launched), was one of the main issues protestors voiced. However, as the protests broke out only a short while after Maduro took office, there is little evidence as to whether the security situation worsened after his election (compare to the time when Chávez was in office).10

Rampant inflation and severe shortages

The opposition, as well as many of what Velasco (2014b) calls the “middle-of-the-road chavistas” (i.e. people whose support for the government is based more on performance than on ideology), have long and openly complained about the country’s economic performance. The central issues in this regard have been rampant inflation and shortages of staple goods. According to both World Bank and Trading Economics measures, with inflation numbers close to 50 in the year when the protests began, Venezuela stood as the country with the world’s highest level of inflation, followed by Sudan, with 29.9. This number is not only alarmingly high in itself, but represents a sharp increase compared to 2012, when inflation stood around 14, and the highest peak reached in the last decade (see Figure 4.5).

In addition to soaring consumer prices, Venezuelans have been experiencing constant shortages of staple goods. In an attempt to slow inflation, the government has set prices for many goods, and this has led to even higher levels of scarcity. In today’s Venezuela, those who are obliged to purchase goods at controlled prices (mostly the popular sectors) have to wait in long lines in supermarkets several times a week (to buy one product a day), always provided, of course, that the desired goods are available (Smilde, 2015).

In a country that earned 800bn USD in oil revenues in the twelve years after 2000, it is hard to understand this economic situation. This paradox has contributed in no small way to encouraging protestors to take to the streets and call for change. The words of opposition leader Capriles capture well the outrage poor economic performance generates among many Venezuelans:

10 A survey conducted by Datanalisis in March 2014, which was shared confidentially by one of my interviewees, shows a considerable decline in insecurity since Maduro took office.
“You don’t have soap to wash. A country with the biggest bonanza in history and today we have the highest inflation in the world and shortages everywhere” (cited in Usborne, 2015).

While opposition leaders claim that economic problems show the limits and consequences of the state-led economic model pioneered by Chávez, Maduro describes the soaring inflation as the result of an “economic war” led by the opposition and supported by ideological adversaries in Washington. As in the case of insecurity, it is hard to tell whether the situation has worsened during Maduro’s initial months in office. However, the demonstrators in the events leading to the 12F (12 February) and the La Salida protestors made reference to poor economic performance as a central grievance and a reason legitimizing their call for Maduro to resign.
The shift towards civic and political liberties and Maduro’s legitimacy

While most citizens remain upset with food shortages and inflation rates, many of the opposition protestors have focused instead on civil liberties. (Gill, 2014: 3)

Rone (in this volume) shows us how the contentious events in 2013 in Bulgaria that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Borisov shifted from poorer people’s concerns to what the author refers to as issues of the “young, beautiful, and successful.” Although the starting point in Venezuela was the student movement, while in Bulgaria it was the point of arrival, both cycles experienced a shift from a set of grievances that concerned the popular sectors to one that was the concern, mainly, of the middle classes.

As researchers from the OVCS put it in their annual report, “In 2014 we registered a protest wave that began in February with young university students demanding security and rejecting the high levels of criminality and insecurity in the universities. In the subsequent weeks the demands expanded to other actors and other rights such as food security, political participation, right to life, personal freedoms and freedom of expression” (OVCS, 2015; italics added by the author). As the contentious events unfolded, with increased government repression and tighter media control, the initial concerns merged into a more general discourse against the Maduro government, questioning its legitimacy rather than demanding appropriate responses to economic or security problems. This is not to say that the López-Machado agenda was at odds with that of the student movement. More than conflicting interests, there is an important overlap between these two groups;11 in fact, demographically speaking, the student movement is heavily dominated by middle- and upper-class people. However, while the student movement initially highlighted issues of citizen security, this and other claims related to economic performance were overshadowed by the La Salida discourse.

This shift from the more concrete social and economic issues that aggravated Venezuelans to a more general and perhaps diffuse anti-government demonstration resulted from, to a large extent, the workings of the López-Machado opposition wing. In this reframing, the demonstrations became

11 See “Mérida Manifesto” released on March 2014 by the Junta Patriótica Estudiantil y Popular (JPEP). In this document the emphasis on individual liberties over issues of social or economic equality becomes evident. Straightforwardly, the document closes with three blunt words: “Liberty or Nothing.”
mostly about civil and political liberties, with two issues at the forefront: the right to protest, and freedom of the press. The former, resulting from the repressive measures that the government took since the very first manifestations in western Venezuela, played a central role in the escalation from scattered and small protests in some cities to an almost nationwide demonstration. For many, these initial detentions made manifest that in Venezuela, people’s right to voice and demand for change in the streets is highly restricted.

The latter issue, freedom of the press, has been a central issue in Venezuelan politics for many years, at least since Chávez took office in 1999. While in power, Chávez established an overt battle against the private media – a strong enemy of his government – a struggle that, in his view, was a necessary part of the Revolution. Although the situation has been misrepresented and overemphasized in several international media outlets, it is a fact that Chávez maintained tight control of several newspapers and TV and radio stations. However, during Maduro’s initial months, things worsened even more. As Munoz (in Smilde et al., 2014) put it in an event called “Venezuela after Chávez” held at Brown University, while “Chávez largely played a cat and mouse game with media without killing them off, he never impeded freedom of press as his successors have done.” Not only has Maduro’s administration sold off important media outlets for opposition voices to groups sympathetic to the government, such as Globovision and Cadena, it has also stimulated self-censorship through threats coming from the Consejo Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones.12

These restrictions to the freedom of the press were made apparent during the 2014 protest cycle, something that in turn fueled the events further. Not only during La Salida were groups of journalists seen protesting over their situation (e.g. the fact that there was no paper on which to print their newspapers), but the government also placed serious obstacles in the way of the media to stop them from broadcasting these events. Due to censorship and/or self-censorship, no local media covered the demonstrations (or at least the violence involved) during the initial weeks. While CNN and Colombia’s NTN24 covered the evolution of the events for a while, these outlets were eventually taken off the air and their journalists expelled from the country (Martínez, 2014; Munoz in Smilde et al., 2014).

To be sure, 12F put Maduro’s legitimacy seriously into question. However, it is worth noting that by the time the demonstrations took off, Maduro had considerable support within the governing coalition, and large numbers of

12 Although regularly and openly attacked, these outlets functioned during Chávez’s times.
Venezuelans stood by him. As mentioned above, only two months before the peak of the cycle, his party was the clear winner in the municipal elections of December 2013 – with a substantially wider margin than in the presidential elections that had taken him to power eight months before. In light of this, the overshadowing of social and economic issues, and the centrality of Maduro’s legitimacy in the La Salida discourse, are likely to have prevented the demonstrations from growing bigger and becoming more diverse in terms of the profile of the participants. Many Venezuelans, especially from the popular sectors (see next section) and in line with their historical tendencies in terms of political behavior (Velasco, 2010; 2015) were not persuaded to mobilize against a government that had just ratified its power democratically and in campaigns in which their major concerns were losing predominance.

4.3 Who took to the streets?

There are many misleading portrayals of those who protested in Venezuela during the first semester of 2014. Perhaps the government itself was the main contributor to these misrepresentations, but the opposition certainly played its part too. Similar to the way in which the PT in Brazil tended to consider protestors as right-wing (see Mendes, in this volume), President Maduro rushed to characterize people protesting as “fascists” who wanted to kill him, and to describe what was going on as a coup d’état harnessed by a minority (La Prensa, 2014). At the same time, the opposition depicted these protests as representing the will of the Venezuelan people at large, a view broadly disseminated by the international media.

Both depictions are misleading. 12F was neither a demonstration orchestrated by a “fascist minority,” nor an “encompassing protest” (Shalev, 2014) or “cross-class movement” (Velasco, 2015). At the onset of the 12F cycle, we observed mainly university students taking to the streets and developing a protest agenda against insecurity and repression. As the events unfolded leading to 12F, we observed the most radical sectors of the MUD, led by López-Machado, tapping into the student movement, capitalizing on these manifestations of discontent and putting forward a protest agenda to make Maduro resign.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no on-site protest surveys to help us identify more accurately the profile of the average protestor. However, qualitative evidence suggests that the social base of the contentious events remained largely, although not exclusively, confined to middle-class sectors.
identified with the opposition. While not direct evidence of who participated, the spatial distribution of the protests in Caracas is telling in terms of class participation in the events. Given the areas of the Venezuelan capital where the protests concentrated, it is safe to say that the profile of the people was upper and middle class: for example, barricades were heavily relegated to upper-class parts of the city (Interview VZ4). Moreover, this seems not to be the case for Caracas alone, but for the country as a whole: protests took place in the 15 or 20 most affluent municipalities of Venezuela.13

To be sure, the fact that there were no protests in barrios or in less affluent municipalities does not necessarily mean that popular sectors did not participate. However, area specialists and analysts claim that, beyond the geographical distribution of the events, the protests in themselves did not attract the popular sectors of the country. Based on her research on (and from) the barrios, Rebecca Hanson (2014b), a Venezuela specialist from the University of Georgia, wrote, “For people […] on this side of the town [barrios], these protests have little to do with resolving their problems, and many believe that they will only make things worse.” In the same vein, Mariano Fraschini (2014: 12) stated: “The neighborhoods where the popular sectors live were not seduced by the opposition protests and, despite a difficult socioeconomic context, the Chavista masses were still loyal to the government.”

Why did people from the popular sectors largely stay out of the protests?

Conditions were ripe for a cross-class mass movement to challenge a government showing major signs of weakness (see Velasco, 2015). If we consider the grievances protestors initially voiced and the media widely advertised – extreme inflation rates, shortages in necessary goods, and rampant insecurity – the fact that the poorer sectors of the Venezuelan

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13 Interview with David Smilde in CCTC-America, July 2, 2013. Note, however, that Uzcátegui (2014) contradicts this view and argues that this middle-class bias is peculiar to Caracas, since many popular sectors joined the protests in other states. In addition, López and Watts (2014) claim that the poor neighborhoods did mobilize, citing the example of Petare in western Caracas. However, despite the suggestive title (“Venezuela’s poor join protests as turmoil grips Chávez’s revolution”) and a quote from a resident of Petare, the article does not present any further evidence of this. A report by Bajak (2014), showing how members of the student movement took the “risk” of visiting poor neighborhoods to persuade residents to join the protest via canvassing methods, reveals that the movement was aware of this disconnection and the lack of participation by people from these neighborhoods. For example, student leader Alfredo Graffe of Simon Bolívar University said in an interview that the movement held more than a dozen informational meetings in working-class districts from late February.
society stayed out and kept their barrios clean and quiet is puzzling. In fact, activists from the movement do not understand why this happened and regret it: “It was frustrating to see that despite the economic situation more people from the barrios did not join,” recognized one of my interviewees (Interview VZ3). Although the country’s social and economic crisis is likely to affect (although to different degrees) every Venezuelan regardless of how wealthy they are, it is likely to hit the poor especially hard (Neuman, 2014). Then, why is that the poorer sectors, including thousands of disenchanted and disaffected Chavistas, did not take to the streets?

Answering this question is not an easy task. This is particularly so if we consider that, unlike what some analysts have suggested (see Rodrigues in Smilde et al., 2014), popular sectors in Venezuela are all but averse to protesting. While Venezuelans have long protested and demonstrated, since 1999 the street has become a key site of political struggle (Velasco, 2014a). The OVCS data clearly show that contentious politics was far from dormant during the years before the 2014 wave: over 5,000 and 4,000 protests were registered in 2012 and 2013 respectively (OVCS, 2012; 2013). Barrio residents are no exception: they have protested massively. This sector, perhaps more than any other in Venezuelan society, has shown that they are willing to voice their grievances as many times as they deem it necessary. However, they tend to do so differently from what we observed in the 2014 cycle: they do not usually protest against the government, but rather demand responses on specific/concrete issues before the government (Interview VZ4).

Thus, the absence of these sectors in the 2014 protests can hardly be explained by their rejection of protest as a means to challenge demands, let alone by the blind loyalty of the poorer sectors to a government that has given them so much. These sectors have fought for a long time to get what they got and continue to fight to preserve it (Interview VZ4).

Building on available analysis, I propose two reasons that might help us solve this puzzle:

14 For example, Smilde (2015) explains how a shortage of staple goods is likely to affect the poor more than the better off: “in contemporary Venezuela you can get a good variety of food if you have enough money, either by purchasing non-standard goods whose prices are not controlled, or by purchasing basic goods on the black market. But if you are poor, you are highly dependent on purchasing basic goods at their controlled prices. Obtaining them, if they are available at all, requires waiting in lines during multiple supermarket visits per week: today chicken, tomorrow laundry soap, the next day milk.”

15 One alternative explanation that has been put forward mainly by the opposition is that people from the popular sectors did not mobilize out of fear of the violence coming from the colectivos that, allegedly, are in charge of suppressing dissent in Chavista circles (see Bajak, 2014;
Despite pressing economic and social conditions affecting all sectors of society, concerns that were not within the interest of the popular sectors dominated the protests.

It is one thing to mobilize for social and economic rights; it is another to mobilize in the name of civil and political liberties, such as freedom of protest (connected to the issue of repression) and freedom of speech (highlighting issues of censorship and self-censorship). Although inflation and insecurity were the backdrop of the protests, and the main driving force (especially the latter) of the initial demonstrations in the western state of Táchira, for 12F the opposition put the emphasis on civil and political liberties and framed the demonstration as one questioning the legitimacy of the Maduro government.

Although civic and political rights are certainly important and legitimate reasons to take to the streets, these issues are less likely to mobilize popular sectors in Venezuela. While in 2013 most of the protest events focused on issues related to labor, insecurity, shortages, and education and only 6 percent on “political rights” (OVCS, 2013), in 2014 political demonstrations (specifically against the Maduro government) constituted the bulk of the events (4,833, or 52 percent of the total) (see Table 4.1). These issues were further away from the interests of the popular sectors and proved less appealing as a mobilizing force. In the words of María Pilar García-Guadilla, Professor in the Department of Urban Planning at the Universidad Simón Bolívar (Caracas, Venezuela), “popular sectors did not feel represented in either pro- or anti-Maduro agendas […] [they] had nothing to gain since the claims that were finally brought to the fore were not scarcity, insecurity, and high inflation.”

One student and activist seems clear about this limitation in the framing of the events: “it did not capitalize on the economic situation, something what would have allowed to do something stronger” (Interview VZ3).

By highlighting civil and political concerns over broader social and economic ones in the launching of La Salida, opposition leaders showed once again that they do not know how to connect their interests with those of the middle classes (Interview VZ4). In fact, as Smilde noted, it is hard to identify any effort from the opposition to bridge the gap between the middle and upper classes on the one side, and the popular sector on the other.17

Corrales, 2014). This hypothesis was also mentioned in Interview VZ3. The role of the colectivos during this cycle will be discussed in the section dealing with the eruption of violence.

16 Interview by Alejandro Velasco (2014a).
17 Interview in CCTC-America, July 2, 2013.
It is one thing to urge the government to respond and demand changes, another very different thing to call on it to resign.

Many Venezuelans from the popular sectors are indeed unhappy with the country’s state of affairs and especially with how things have unfolded during the Maduro era. In fact, they have protested demanding the government to take measures on several occasions. However, asking the government to resign is something totally different. Popular sectors in Venezuela tend to respect democratically elected governments and conceive attempts to oust them via non-institutional means as illegitimate and anti-democratic (Velasco in Smilde et al., 2014). Research on the interactions between protest and electoral politics in Venezuela shows that, since the fall of Venezuela’s last dictatorship in 1958, movements seeking to overthrow elected governments via non-institutional politics (including guerrilla movements) have failed to capture popular support (Velasco, 2010). Shortly after Maduro was elected and his party received electoral support, the La Salida demonstrations clearly dismissed the vote as a primary locus of popular expression, making popular sectors less likely to join.

Without ignoring the problems the country is facing, popular sectors are on average better off today than before Chávez came to power, and therefore most of them support Chavismo politically. This is especially important in

Table 4.1 Breakdown of the central claims in 2014 protest events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Claim</th>
<th>Number of events</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Against government</td>
<td>4,833</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor rights</td>
<td>1,414</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and basic services</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,285</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OVCS

Note that this holds even for the case of Hugo Chávez in the early 1990s, when he failed to gain popular support in a coup seeking to oust an elected government that was highly unpopular in the barrios. Even during the 1989 Caracazo events, barrio residents massively took to the streets not to seek the overthrow of the government but to manifest strong opposition to neoliberal reforms. For instance, in Caracas, residents of the barrios now enjoy improved government-run water, electrical, communication (including landlines and Internet), and transport (including a lowcost cable car to go up and down the hills) services (Neuman, 2014). This reality opens room for a “dependence hypothesis,” namely that people from the barrios do not protest against
a country where political affiliation seems to be the central variable shaping political behavior.\textsuperscript{20} For many, being Chavista is more about a political ideology in which they find refuge than about loyalty based on (economic) performance (Fraschini, 2014: 13). Moreover, among “middle-of-the-road Chavistas” (Velasco, 2014b) many do not hold the government accountable for the most pressing problems the country is facing (e.g. crime).\textsuperscript{21} With this state of affairs, it becomes apparent that people politically affiliated with Chavismo are not likely to join a protest against the government that has the main objective of making the president resign.

\textit{La Salida}’s framing (and aim) was perhaps successful from the point of view of capturing the attention of the media, but weak in terms of mobilizing more people.\textsuperscript{22} Setting Maduro’s ouster as the central objective of the demonstrations was too ambitious and lacked a shared and inclusive vision (Gonzalez, 2015). It was not clear whether and which other more short- and mid-term objectives, perhaps more concrete, accompanied the overarching objective of pushing Maduro to resign. As a student activist put it, the framing “created confusion about the objectives of the movement, they were not clearly presented, in case they actually existed” (Interview VZ3). Another interviewee, involved in the organization of 12F, felt that \textit{La Salida}’s logic was widely misunderstood: “many people did not understand it well and leaders did little to explain it well. It was presented as a ‘vote vs. street’ thing, while in reality it implied a series of coordinated steps leading to the exit of Maduro” (Interview VZ2).\textsuperscript{23} In sum, the framing of the protest as \textit{La

the government not (only) because they are grateful, but also because they might feel that their well-being depends on the government, as it is the state which provides most of the economic goods and services in those areas. As Bajak (2014) suggests, the poor sectors in Venezuela are more worried about losing their pensions, subsidies, and basic services in the scenario of the opposition seizing power.

\textsuperscript{20} In fact, in Hanson’s preliminary findings of a study using survey data, political affiliation is the only variable that yields statistically significant results in shaping political behavior. This work is still unpublished. These preliminary findings were shared during a personal conversation.

\textsuperscript{21} This assertion also seems to find statistical support in Hanson’s preliminary findings.

\textsuperscript{22} Note that \textit{La Salida} was not appealing only to the popular sectors, it also created further divisions with the MUD. One of my interviewees closely linked to the organizers told me that in a meeting they held on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of February to organize and call for the 12F, many members of the MUD decided to step back as they felt that it was largely a “Lopez and Machado thing” and they “did not buy into \textit{La Salida} discourse. In fact, there were important political actors, such as Antonio Ledezma – mayor of Caracas from 2008-2015 – who were aware of the potential limitations of this and tried to change it and keep the MUD united on this” (Interview VZ2).

\textsuperscript{23} See Annex 1 for a flyer that gives an account of the “coordinated steps” my interviewee refers to. This is material produced by the movement and shared with me by an interviewee.
Salida lacked the capacity to unify people, something that has been found as central for a successful campaign (Ackerman and Merriman, 2014).

The emphasis on civil and political liberties and the harsh anti-government discourse of the opposition did not resonate with popular sectors. The absence of the popular sectors in the streets, however, should not be seen as a sign of unanimous support for the government or of a passive attitude towards it. It is important to highlight that the fact that 12F was mostly middle class does not imply that it was small in numbers. One key achievement of the “Bolivarian Revolution” has been to lift many out of poverty (according to World Bank data, the percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines dropped from 48.7 in 1999 to 25.4 in 2012) and to expand the Venezuelan middle class. Therefore, stating that the protest cycle was largely a middle-class phenomenon is not to say that it was “a protest of the rich minority,” as the government implied. The class transformation that the country has gone through in the last years problematizes in important ways the association poor = Chavista, rich = opposition (Interview VZ1). As a matter of fact, the protests seemed to have had wide support: in a survey carried out by the Venezuelan Institute for Data Analysis (IVAD) in late March 2014, 71.4 percent of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the student movement and, when asked whether they agreed with the opposition continuing to organize marches and protests, 55.3 percent of the respondents answered “yes.”

Thus, the protests were limited not in the sense of attracting only a minority of the Venezuelans, but in the sense of remaining circumscribed to the middle and upper sectors of society and, thus, failing to incorporate an importantly aggrieved sector. All in all, one can still argue that the fact that the protest wave was not backed by the popular sectors is likely to have contributed to the campaign’s failure in achieving its main objective: to unseat Maduro.

4.4 Why did violence erupt in an otherwise peaceful protest?

One of the features making this cycle of protest unprecedented in an otherwise highly active and contentious society was, in fact, protest-related violence. According to data presented by the Public Ministry, 3,306

24 With the information available, it is hard to judge whether there might be any bias in the results. However, the survey had national coverage, involved 1,200 respondents, and had a sample error between 1.03 and 2.37 percent. A summary of the results can be accessed here: www.scribd.com/doc/216528368/IVAD-Nacional-2014-Abril-Resumen-pdf.
protestors were detained, 973 injured, and 42 killed in the short period between February and June. While the government was blamed for having privileged harsh repression as a way of policing the manifestations, the opposition was accused of having incited protestors to turn to violence.25 Although the protests were initially peaceful and the main performances were nonviolent, including demonstrations, sit-ins, and hunger strikes (Gonzalez, 2015), violence quickly erupted and took the stage. Being at the core of the media, violence rapidly overshadowed this peaceful scenario. While the protests were unfolding in Venezuela, images of the country falling into chaos and of the harsh street violence were witnessed by the world almost in real time via, mostly, social media. A homemade YouTube video called “What’s going on in Venezuela in a nutshell,”26 full of images from an Instagram page (Venezuela Lucha) and devoted almost exclusively to documenting this violence, soon became very popular.27

Although these images let the world know about the violence that was taking place in the country, it did little to clarify and explain where this violence was coming from and who was being affected. Indeed, it gave a largely one-sided version of the events, portraying the government as the sole perpetrator and the pacifist protestors as the victims. In this regard, David Smilde (2014b) wrote: “The ongoing unrest in Venezuela has been portrayed abroad as a conflict between Venezuelan citizens and an increasingly desperate government that has resorted to massive human rights abuses to maintain its hold on power. That depiction both oversimplifies and distorts the issues at play.” In this section I aim to provide some preliminary analyses of the government’s violent response to help overcome this oversimplification and to correct for this distortion.

To be sure, the 2014 cycle of protest made apparent how violent and out of control contentious politics can get in Venezuela. For many people, it made manifest the authoritarian character of Venezuelan democracy in its attempt to repress dissent (see della Porta, in this volume). In fact, it was government repression that actually made the initial small-scale protests

25 In fact, Leopoldo López, one main of the organizers of La Salida and the National Coordinator of the opposition political party Voluntad Popular, has been in prison since February 2014 on charges including incitement to riot and violence during the 12F mass demonstration. The López case has kept both the opposition on the streets (both in Venezuela and beyond its borders) and Venezuela in the pages of international newspapers until the time of drafting this chapter. López has now been described in some international media outlets as “Latin America’s most prominent political prisoner.”

26 The video can be accessed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFS6cP9auDc.

27 Link to the Instagram page: http://websta.me/n/venezuelalucha.
in the state of Táchira progressively grow bigger. As the government started to detain peaceful and lawful protestors, more people took to the streets demanding their release. Initially, only fellow students protested over the way in which the government responded, calling for the release of their companions. As time went by, mothers of students joined the protests in solidarity. The government reaction was to repress even more strongly and to detain more individuals. Similarly to what we observed in Brazil’s 2013 contentious events, protests escalated when the mainly peaceful forms of direct action were met with repression by the state forces (see Mendes, in this volume). In fact, it was repression that set the stage for the 12F and subsequent protest, giving rise to what became one of the central claims of La Salida: opposition against the restriction of democratic spaces in Venezuela, as people became increasingly concerned about the opportunities for political freedom in Venezuelan society.

The government’s repressive response is puzzling. Previous experiences of street demonstrations in Venezuela provide good grounds to believe that Chávez would not have responded like Maduro did. If they are so similar ideologically, how is that Maduro responded in a way that Chávez would hardly have done? Why did Maduro make use of harsh repression when he himself saw how successful Chávez was in dealing with protest without use of violence? One possible response to these questions is that Maduro did not really want things to unfold as they did and that, rather than aiming for a repressive response, he was simply incapable of controlling the security apparatuses (Interview VZ1). There might be some truth to this, especially if we see the protests as an opportunity for Maduro to show that his administration is tough on crime and takes security seriously. However, the reforms he had undertaken since he took office cast some doubt on this hypothesis, which implies some passivity on his part. If one looks at Maduro’s recent reforms in the security sector and the role played by the main actors who have taken up the task of policing protests during this cycle, the National Bolivarian Police (PNB) and the National Guard, it hard to believe that he passively allowed things to happen.

Maduro rolled back a decisive process of national reform of the police set in motion by Chávez back in 2008, when he created the PNB in order to curb heavy-handed police tactics, limit its use of coercion and, in this way, overcome the widespread negative image of the police as “uniformed criminals.”28 While Chávez’s reform had a clear civilian character and

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28 As a result of this reform, every PNB officer is trained at the National Police University in human rights and the progressive use of force, and other bodies were created in parallel to
promoted a non-repressive model of citizen security, Maduro moved in the direction of increasing the involvement of the National Guard (the military) in policing matters and deploying it in popular sectors of Caracas (Hanson, 2013). In the words of Zubillaga and Antillano (2013), two local university professors, while the Chávez government invested significant resources in non-repressive and alternative security policies, “renewed emphasis on militarized approaches like the Plan Patria Segura [set in motion by Maduro in 2013] is undermining what gains have been made.”

Although PNB officers are trained (and have the legal mandate) to control demonstrations, even when they turn violent, the National Guard was the protagonist in policing the 2014 cycle of protest. It is unclear whether Maduro explicitly ordered the National Guard to take action during the 2014 protest. However, the provision was already in place months before this with the implementation of the Plan Patria Segura, which put the military in the streets to combat crime along with the PNB. Back in May of 2013, Maduro was explicit about this when he stated: “This is a special plan to protect the people of Venezuela; our militia, army, and National Guard will be on the streets.”

Moreover, as Hanson (2014c) found by interviewing PBN officers, the PBN considered the Guard to be the right actor to police these events. As the demonstrations became overtly violent, they felt too restricted and too weak to face them, and thus supported the Guard’s actions. This situation was reinforced by the fact that many Venezuelans see the National Guard as more capable of and effective in dealing with criminal activity and public disruption than is the PBN. “To many residents, weary of being terrorized by armed gangs,” says Ritter (2013), “seeing troops on the streets is a welcome projection of government power.”

The fact that it was the National Guard and not the PNB that mainly controlled the protests helps explain, at least in part, the outbreak of repression and violence coming from the state. While the PNB are trained to monitor the PNB and receive denunciations in cases of abuse (See Hanson, 2014c; Hanson and Smilde, 2013).
restrict their use of violence, as mentioned above, and, when it is needed, to use it in a differential and progressive way, the National Guard has scant training in this regard, and their acts are not regulated by any other body or oversight mechanisms (Hanson, 2014c). Thus, the militarization of protest policing in the Maduro times is a central element to understanding why violence erupted in this cycle in a way that we did not see in the Chávez era and that we would hardly expect from him. More convincing than the “incapacity-passivity hypothesis” is one explanation that, bearing in mind Maduro’s active role in the reforms, takes into account the fact that he does not have the same support among the military (and the government) that Chávez had and thus left the National Guard more space and made some reforms look friendlier (Interviews VZ1 and VZ4). The reforms that Maduro rolled back are clearly reforms that went against the interests of the military and that perhaps only someone like Chávez could sustain.

What about the colectivos?
There is a third actor to take into account when looking at the violence that erupted in the 2014 cycle: the colectivos. Long before the Chávez era, in poor neighborhoods in Caracas and especially in the western barrios (later spreading to other cities in the country), residents organized into armed groups to fill a security void left by the liberal state, and to protect their communities from drug trafficking and state-sanctioned violence.31 Although the colectivos’ view on the state (which was their enemy when they first emerged) changed substantially during the Chávez era, the relationship has always been highly contentious and full of contradictions. Although the colectivos became perhaps Chávez’s most radical support base and pledged their loyalty to him, they have maintained autonomy from the state (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 3-6).32 In spite of this complexity in their relationship, it has been easily assumed that the colectivos are pro-government armed groups always ready to defend any Chavista government, a belief that stems from their active defense of Chávez in the 2002 coup and their self-promotion as defenders of the Revolution. Thus, they have been portrayed as one of the main instigators of anti-opposition and anti-protestor violence during this latter cycle. In fact, as Smilde pointed out in an interview, the

31 Note that the colectivos have several functions that go beyond policing and security provision, such as promoting social and cultural events in neighborhoods. The colectivos point to their bookshops, study groups, summer camps for children, and coffee mornings for pensioners as genuine services to their communities.

32 To explore these tensions further, see Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, chap. 3.
colectivos were blamed for every act of violence committed by any non-uniformed person and/or by anyone riding a motorcycle.\textsuperscript{33}

The opposition, the international media,\textsuperscript{34} and human rights organizations (e.g. Human Rights Watch) have all supported the view that during the protests the colectivos made extensive use of violence to defend Maduro’s government and operated in coordination and collaboration with the PNB and the National Guard. López himself described the colectivos as “paramilitary groups armed by the government and protected by officials in uniform” (Wallis, 2014). Although colectivo members openly declared that they were “not part of this game that they [the opposition] are playing to create a coup” (Wallis, 2014), there is qualitative evidence that the colectivos played their part in policing and dispersing the protests. Not only did PNB officers affirm the colectivos’ role in policing the protests in some areas of Caracas (Hanson, 2014a), but several barrio residents mentioned that they were directly or indirectly discouraged by the colectivos from taking part in the events. More concretely, they played at least two roles: trying to dissolve the so-called guarimbas,\textsuperscript{35} and attempting to deter barrio residents from participating in the demonstrations.

However, it is definitely misleading to infer from this that they were a central instigator of violence – or even worse, the main perpetrators of violence – and that they acted in coordination and cooperation with the government. Colectivos did try to instill fear in some barrios and probably discouraged some people from taking part in the demonstrations. It is true that they have a lot of power in some areas of the city, but it is an exaggeration to state that they control the entire barrios (Interview VZ4). Given their limited power, the repression of the colectivos could explain only a very small portion of the violence we observed in the cycle, as well as the fact that people from the barrios did not show up at the events. The opposition, especially the López and Machado wing, tends to overemphasize both the power of the colectivos and their links to the government.

\textsuperscript{34} See, for example, The Huffington Post, 2014 and Medium, 2014.
\textsuperscript{35} In the effort to spread the protest throughout the city and expand beyond the main squares and the centers, protestors installed guarimbas, i.e. road blocks/barricades, in and around mostly middle-class residential neighborhoods in order to disrupt daily lives. This performance, which was condemned even by the mainstream opposition, proved to be deadly to all sides. Not only did people die by accidentally crashing into them or from the wires strung at the level of bike riders’ heads (targeting the colectivos that mobilize on motorcycles), but people were shot while trying to remove them. For more on the guarimbas, see León, 2014; Silva and Rangel, 2014.
Analyzing the outbreak of violence from the perspective of governmental reforms, state actors, and alleged pro-government actors does not assume, in any way, that violence came only from the side of the government. Although evidence on who did what to whom is not definitive in any sense (there is debate even on the total number of deaths), it is clear that violence came from both sides (of the struggle as well as of the political spectrum) and claimed deaths from several sectors, including opposition activists, government supporters, members of the security forces, and bystanders. Even a well-known colectivo leader was killed; in fact, he was the first fatal victim: during the first day of the protest, Juan “Juancho” Montoya was shot dead. According to the Washington Office of Latin America’s blog “Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights,” of the 35 deaths they had recorded by the end of April, three were directly attributable to security forces, six to accidents caused by/in barricades, four to accidents occurring during the course of the protest, and 22 to unidentified gunmen. From the 22 cases for which the perpetrator was not identified, seven were opposition activists, four were government supporters, seven were members of the security forces, and four were non-participants (Smilde, 2014a).36

Finally, to close this section, it is worth noting that state-sanctioned violence did not go fully unnoticed. In fact, Maduro took actions in order to punish officials from his government, including high-level ones, and openly recognized that “there was a group of officers from the Sebin [Venezuela’s intelligence agency, Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional] that did not comply with the orders.” In addition to the seventeen officials who were arrested and charged for the excessive use of force during the first days of the events, Manuel Beltran, the Director of Sebin (Various Venezuelan HR Experts, 2014) was also taken into custody and removed from his post.

4.5 Conclusion

Getting things right about political events in Venezuela is particularly challenging. Not only is it difficult to get reliable data, but the high level of polarization that has characterized politics in the country during the last

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years makes it hard to assess the reliability of what is found in the media, both national and international. By considering a diverse array of sources and giving voice directly to actors involved in the cycle, I hope this chapter accomplished its objective: to provide a balanced account of the contentious events that shook Venezuela in the first half of 2014 and to provide some preliminary analyses that will, hopefully, stimulate scholarly work on the topic.

To be sure, the chapter did not cover all aspects relevant to the protest cycle in consideration. Central issues, such as the role of *colectivos*, the use of social media, or the role of outsiders and international actors, were only mentioned in passing, and clearly played an important enough role to deserve an individual section in this chapter. However, it made an effort to provide preliminary answers to some of the main questions that students of social movements commonly ask in order to make sense of complex contentious events. I hope this will be a springboard for future research that develops new theoretical insights, more clearly testable prepositions, and a more systematic empirical treatment to the event. This is to be considered only a first, although important, step.

**List of interviews**

- **VZ1** August 27, 2015
- **VZ2** September 15, 2015
- **VZ3** September 18, 2015
- **VA4** October 9, 2015

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