

Chapter 2

Violent Social Mobilization: A Model for Analysis from the Perspective of Contentious Politics*

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Abstract: Analyzing contemporary political phenomena through the mechanisms of contentious politics offers a valuable opportunity to understand current dynamics by exploring the links between contention and democracy. This article presents an intermediate-level analytical framework grounded in the most salient characteristics of violent social mobilization, conceived as a specific manifestation of contentious politics. Drawing on recent case studies from countries such as the United States, Chile, and Colombia, the model's applicability is validated. The diagrams also identify the relationship between the concept of violent social mobilization and its practical implementation across different contexts.

Keywords: Conflict; democracy; social mobilization; contentious politics; social protest; violence

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Introduction

As Della (2015) and Walter (2022) have shown empirically, the weakening of social protection and the State's diminished capacity to respond over recent decades have contributed to rising inequality and precarity. This situation has not only intensified social fragmentation in identity terms—since it is difficult to build a national discourse when people's lived realities are profoundly unequal—but has also driven more particularistic and local mobilizations, albeit with shared demands, in different parts of the world.

Additionally, it is important to emphasize that some protest movements radicalized during the COVID-19 pandemic, producing significant outbreaks of violence. In recent years, violent social mobilizations have been recorded in countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [ACLED], 2020b).

While each of these experiences has its singularities—such as extreme inequality in Brazil and Haiti, the persistence of illegal armed groups in Colombia, or institutional fracture in Nicaragua and Venezuela—it is also possible to identify, beyond those particularities, certain common traits that enable mid-range analyses. This implies moving beyond approaches that focus exclusively on the specifics of each case, without necessarily resorting to systemic or structural explanatory frameworks.

In this sense, it is pertinent to analyze violent social mobilization through the mechanisms of political contention, paying special attention to organizational strategies, the factors that promote or inhibit recourse to violence, and their group-level effects. This perspective offers a valuable opportunity to understand the most

recent dynamics of global politics, as it recognizes the role of contention in political phenomena and, consequently, facilitates the exploration of its links to democracy.

This article proposes an analytical framework to address cases of violent social mobilization, understood as a specific manifestation of contentious politics. It also offers some considerations on the importance of this perspective for more effectively interpreting the challenges posed by experiences of violence in contemporary mobilizations.

Like any analytical proposal, this framework operates with specific objectives and is not free of limitations. Its scope is deliberately intermediate, because it focuses on analyzing the strategic possibilities deployed within the framework of violent political contention. In this regard, the factors that promote and inhibit the use of violence become particularly relevant.

The utility of this analytical framework, therefore, does not lie in its capacity to explain the structural conditions that precede or precipitate violence, nor in its ability to synthesize its sociopolitical consequences, since such aspects fall outside its purpose. Likewise, as an intermediate-level analysis, it does not aim to explain in detail the conditions that lead individuals to join various violent dynamics.

To understand these phenomena with greater rigor, the first part presents the salient characteristics of contemporary violent social mobilizations. This is based on empirical findings from recent work (ACLED, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Della, 2015; Walter, 2022). This analysis enables the identification of the specific institutional and ideological context in which violence develops. The second section offers an analytical discussion of the results, which allows us to understand the exercise of violence within mobilizations as a destabilizing factor for the established political order.

On the basis of this analysis, the third part proposes a model—oriented to research in political and international studies—grounded in the contentious politics framework (Tilly, 2017). This model focuses on the following aspects:

- the political situation or background;
- the role of actors;
- the options or courses of action.

This proposal seeks to contribute to understanding the density and complexity of violent social mobilization, without overlooking its fundamentally ambiguous nature (Tilly, 2022b).

The article develops following an inductive method. It begins with an analysis of the empirical material, which leads to an analytical discussion, and culminates

in a structured synthesis presented as a schematic. As a tool for political analysis, this proposal facilitates the identification and isolation of three crucial aspects in any violent social mobilization: (i) the most relevant details of the process; (ii) the moments considered triggers of action; and (iii) the links between actors and institutions.

This model constitutes a significant contribution both methodologically and theoretically-conceptually for those interested in untangling the configuration of a political phenomenon as complex as violent social mobilizations.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Beyond the relevance of normative theories that promote conflict resolution through consensus, social cohesion, and legal mechanisms (civil and criminal), it is essential to consider less normative perspectives. These, unlike the former, attribute an undeniable political value to conflict. A clear example is conflict theory.

The conflictivist perspective offers notable advantages:

- a broad view of the nature of violent interactions, covering both individual and collective levels;
- consideration of all forms of violence, from overtly voluntary actions to those that are more subtle or less intentional;
- recognition of a multiplicity of violent actors, deployed along a continuum from insurgency to institutional actors (Giner, 2001).

Consequently, this perspective also takes into account security, policing, and military mechanisms that may resort to repression to guarantee order.

It is essential to reflect on violent social mobilization within a political context, without ignoring its practical value for both state actors and those who challenge them. Based on the studies of Auyero (2007) and Tilly (2010, 2017, 2022b) and on social mobilization, the relationship between mobilization and violence is understood by how their meanings are configured over time and space. Hence, to understand it, it is indispensable to analyze it always in its context.

Thus, first, violent social mobilization is understood as a form of social interaction in which diverse social actors—both individual and collective—participate in activities that may be planned or spontaneous, and in which intentional harm occurs (Giner, 2001; Tilly, 2022b).

Second, it is important to note that actions undertaken during mobilization—such as negotiation, strategy modification, elections, disruptions, and improvisation—are, on the one hand, conditioned by the norms, values, and

scripts of participants and, on the other hand, decisive in transforming both the confrontation and the representations of the actors in dispute. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize that these representations are not static; rather, they change as a result of coordination among actors and of the responses that arise in the course of their interaction (Tilly, 2022a).

To better understand the roles of institutions, the economic context, and social relations in the outbreak and intensity of the most recent violent social mobilizations, this research relied on a comparative analysis across contexts. From case studies with empirical evidence, it was possible to identify the individual resources associated with political protest, the role of institutions and organizations, and perceptions of citizen dissatisfaction (Quaranta, 2015; Vráblíková, 2014).

It is worth noting that the review of empirically dissimilar cases—in terms of their motivations and scenarios—shows that the particular conditions of each (that is, the various situations of disintegration or imbalance of each political system) are not decisive for the proposed analytical framework. This is because the objective is not to address the structural or systemic aspects of violent interactions.

For the search and selection of information, an initial state-of-the-art on paradigmatic studies of contemporary social mobilization was prepared (Álvarez et al., 2011; Antentas & Vivas, 2009; Blumenkranz et al., 2011; Hessel, 2010; Jacson, 2012; Montgomery, 2011; Roitman, 2012). Second, a documentary investigation focused on recent empirical findings was conducted, using reports and databases from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED). These provide updated information on locations, dates, actors, and characteristics of protest events and political violence globally. The research focused on mobilizations in the United States between 2019 and 2021—especially the Black Lives Matter (BLM), Proud Boys, QAnon, and Boogaloo movements—as well as on citizen protests in Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia during the same period.

The purpose of this research is to propose an analytical and interpretive framework for identifying connections between violent social mobilization and its empirical manifestations. For this reason, the state of the art is limited to presenting the central arguments of the debate, avoiding an exhaustive review of the phenomenon of contemporary social mobilization, since that would exceed the purposes and scope of this chapter.

Results: Cases of Violent Social Mobilization

To define violent social mobilization, we start with Touraine (2006), who emphasizes the conflictive character inherent to any social mobilization. According to Touraine,

it is a form of action that demands organized collective participation and the existence of common objectives that confront those of other social actors.

Now, because “the forms, [actors] and demands of social movements vary and are subject to a process of historical evolution” (Tilly, 2010, p. 294), it is necessary to consider internationalization—both of practices and discourses—contemporary democratic challenges and changing characteristics of actors, such as their growing professionalization. Movements like Los Indignados (Álvarez et al., 2011; Hessel, 2010; Roitman, 2012), Resistencia Global (Antentas & Vivas, 2009), Occupy World Street (Blumenkranz et al., 2011; Jackson, 2012; Montgomery, 2011) and 15-M, among others, are paradigmatic of this new context, whose distinctive traits can be seen as a key link to the most recent mobilizations.

To narrow the scope of this study, the analysis focused on collective actions in which participants, to achieve their objectives, deliberately act against other people, either by threatening, attacking, or inflicting physical harm (Jackman, 2002).

BLM, initiated in 2013, stands out as one of the most influential social movements of recent years. Its impact was unexpected, not only because of its magnitude but also because it addressed issues that transcended U.S. borders and were successfully replicated in other countries. Within this analysis, its importance lies in the fact that its mobilizations were triggered by acts of violence that, in turn, precipitated violent reactions in various U.S. cities, such as Seattle or Portland (ACLED, 2020a; Shepherd & Bailey, 2020).

In the last phase of this movement, which began in 2020, tensions intensified between locally mobilized groups organized in networks and the institutional agents of Donald Trump’s government. The mobilizations of that period not only revealed the government’s incapacity and lack of willingness to address social demands and subsequent waves of protest, but also evidenced the strengthening of various networks of movements calling for justice for a specific incident: the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed man, at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin. Floyd was asphyxiated by Chauvin, who knelt on his neck for more than nine minutes, ignoring his repeated pleas for help (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). The lack of empathetic responses from various government agencies also contributed to the escalation of the mobilizations.

Moreover, the BLM case exposes a deep division in contemporary U.S. society. Institutionalized violence, exemplified by police brutality toward vulnerable Afro-descendant populations, is not perceived as a public problem demanding a response from political institutions, nor does it arouse a feeling of solidarity among other marginalized groups, such as the white poor often labeled “white trash.”

This increasingly radicalized violence has its foundations, on the one hand, in a legal framework that proves insensitive to the implications of an individualism that fosters insulated spaces for violence whose social costs tend to be invisible. On the other hand, it lies in the particular way racialized multiculturalism is experienced in U.S. society. The most tragic examples of this dynamic are seen in clashes—and in their media coverage—between unarmed Black citizens and armed white police officers.

Another significant case is the protests in Chile that began in October 2019, also relevant for understanding recourse to violence in recent social mobilizations (Palacios-Valladares, 2020). The violent confrontation between mobilized citizens—coming from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds—and the Carabineros police has been interpreted as an expression of the overflow of structural inequalities, especially in access to health care, education, and the pension system, among others, within a neoliberal framework (Molina, 2019). Likewise, these mobilizations have been understood as a critique of Pinochet's dictatorship, the consequences of which remain evident in Chile, as evidenced, for example, by the constitution written during that period.

The Colombian case is also illustrative. Faced with a State whose legitimacy was questioned from its beginnings—due to its stance on implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement—and with limited support from political allies, diverse civil actors converged in a mass mobilization to oppose reforms proposed by the government in 2019. The violent protests that occurred during the national strikes of 2019–2021—initially triggered by rejection of a proposed tax reform—were particularly complex because they involved both state agents and organized civilian actors. Among the most visible groups were rural indigenous populations and urban students, especially in Cali, who repeatedly clashed with law enforcement.

One of the most violent episodes was recorded in the country's southwest, where a confrontation occurred among members of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), armed civilian groups, and police forces. This event highlighted the complex overlap among paramilitary violence, vandalism, and organized violence within the framework of social protest (Garzón & Sánchez, 2021). Added to this was the tenuous relationship between the government and movement leaders, marked by mutual refusal to recognize the legitimacy of opposing stances. This led to radicalization of the protests and intensified repression, accentuated by the growing militarization of the conflict.

Another important case was the violent mobilization associated with institutional rupture in Bolivia, triggered in 2016 when President Evo Morales decided to ignore the results of a referendum and run for re-election. As a result,

the electoral process began to lose legitimacy, and in 2019, social protests spread across the country, becoming increasingly violent (Miranda, 2019). Morales's resignation, the interregnum of Jeanine Áñez—a period during which elections were postponed on several occasions—and Áñez's eventual reappearance on the political scene called the country's democratic stability into question. This environment, in turn, gave rise to new violent mobilizations, some directed against high-profile political figures, including the president himself.

Another representative example of recent violent social movements has been registered in the United States, driven by the activity of groups such as the Proud Boys, QAnon, and Boogaloo. These far-right groupings—some of which emerged as a reaction to BLM have engaged in violent clashes with their opponents (Biscontini, 2021). Although their members had already formed networks and participated in violent acts in various U.S. cities—such as Charlottesville—their visibility increased markedly in January 2021 when they led violent episodes in response to the results of the November 2020 presidential election, in which Trump failed to win re-election (Weiner, 2021). After these events, their discourse radicalized further, incorporating pseudo-religious arguments linked to conspiracy theories. According to their supporters, the elections that resulted in President Joe Biden's victory lacked legitimacy and were branded as fraudulent.

Criticism of institutions has not only manifested in discourse but has also spurred explicit calls for coordinated action against people, groups, and institutions, widely disseminated through social media. The culminating point was the assault on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, when armed civilians linked to the movements mentioned above stormed the building with the clear objective of thwarting the inauguration of the new president. That event had tragic consequences, including five deaths (Duignan, 2022).

These movements counted on the support of certain sectors of the political class, including some Republican senators with extreme positions (such as Taylor Greene). To better understand these violent demonstrations, it is important to consider the ambiguous stance Donald Trump adopted during his administration. His refusal to condemn many of the acts that preceded the Capitol assault was interpreted by many as a form of tacit solidarity or support for these groups. Moreover, the scale of the violence forced social media to impose limits on inciting speech, which, in the first quarter of 2021, facilitated coordinated actions across various cities nationwide.

It is important to stress that the radicalization of several protest movements occurred during the pandemic. Lockdown measures decreed by various

governments, the overload experienced by health personnel, and the economic losses suffered by broad sectors of the world population have served as triggers for social mobilizations across diverse regions. In particular, riots with violent expressions intensified between 2019 and 2021 (ACLED, 2021). According to ACLED data (2021), the pandemic drastically altered the pattern of violence in social disturbances. Before the health crisis, clashes between civilian actors predominated; however, after that point, state forces became the main targets of violence in approximately 75 % of cases.

Analytical Discussion

In addition to individual motivations, factors traditionally considered to explain participation in protests include participants' socialization, their socioeconomic status, the political context, and the involvement of individuals not necessarily aligned with a specific ideology (Andrain & Apter, 1995; Orum, 1974). These factors are a crucial starting point for analyzing recent mobilizations and, from there, identifying the new traits that characterize violent social mobilization.

Within social mobilizations, violent demonstrations have tended to direct their actions against the State, which has become their main target. This violence constitutes a form of radicalized critique, reflecting a growing distrust of political institutions, which are perceived as follows:

- anti-democratic;
- opposed to citizens' interests;
- indifferent to civil society's demands;
- obsolete;
- complicit in international conspiracies.

According to Kostelka and Rovny (2019), this vision of the State—conceived as an entity at which protest is aimed—demonstrates that violent social movements are not necessarily identified with left-wing politics.

Regarding justifications based on conspiracy theories, the sense of threat stands as the principal trigger of calls for social mobilization that devolve into violent acts. While perceived threat is usually linked to internal institutions, in cases motivated by these theories, an external actor is also identified, whose influence is indirect and diffuse.

Another relevant aspect of recent violent mobilizations is the political context in which they occurred. In some cases, violent episodes occurred before or

after national elections; in others, they arose as reactions to unpopular political announcements or controversial reforms. Empirical studies, such as that by Giugni and Grasso (2019), emphasize the importance of analyzing the links between these moments of crisis and the configuration of participants' networks during mobilizations. In this sense, electoral participation is not incompatible with social mobilization, even when the latter takes violent forms.

To properly understand and characterize these episodes of violence, the temporal factor is decisive in at least two senses. First, it is essential to analyze the interaction between each country's temporal dynamics of political agenda and the development of social mobilizations. Second, it is necessary to consider the chronology of events, since this permits identification of evolution, ruptures, and transformations of the processes in question.

Although most of the mobilizations analyzed had a national scope, they did not manifest homogeneously. The pandemic, in particular, transformed the use of public space and revealed the interactions among traditional public space, private spaces, and virtual platforms—each with different reach and dynamics—which began to operate as interrelated political arenas (Leitner et al., 2008). Thus, demonstrations did not only take place on the streets of major cities, but also spread to private places—such as residential buildings—and were replicated through virtual actions on social media. This multi-sited expansion of demonstrations enabled the consolidation of denser networks among protesters and the coordination of a greater diversity of social profiles.

Moreover, this singular context revealed an unusual capacity for adaptation in social demonstrations, something uncommon in previous scenarios. For example, protest calls acquired a high-immediacy dynamic, allowing demonstrators to react in real time both to attempts at appeasement or co-optation by political actors and to repressive strategies by the security forces.

In the contemporary context, the media play a fundamental role in shaping political events and exert significant influence on the development of violent social mobilizations (Lance & Segerberg, 2013). First, these media—especially digital platforms such as Twitter and Facebook—have been essential for organizing and disseminating calls, thereby facilitating network formation (Bailo & Vromen, 2017). Second, mass media capable of reaching national audiences have actively contributed to constructing narratives around protests, shaping public perception of their evolution, the actors involved, and the disputed issues (Herkenrath & Knol, 2011; Lee, 2014). Finally, media have not only served as platforms for visibility but

also become strategic actors, both in containing violence and in amplifying it by reproducing polarizing discourse or inciting confrontation.

In recent mobilizations—such as the protests in Colombia or the rise of the supremacist movement in the United States—a multi-scalar coordination of collective actions is observed, structured through local, regional, and national networks. Although this type of configuration is not entirely new, its particularity in these contexts lies in the overlap and interconnection of those scales (Giugni & Grasso, 2019). Local networks not only established links with regional networks that share similar demands but also connected with national networks, often through the strategic use of digital platforms. This coordination enabled greater visibility of actions carried out in peripheral territories that have historically been marginalized from political and media centers.

These mobilizations have also fostered the emergence of new actors with diverse social affiliations (Leitner et al., 2008). On the one hand, the inclusion of previously marginalized participants in the political sphere is evident—as is the case with new generations in countries such as Chile and Colombia—who now participate actively in deliberation and protest processes. On the other hand, actors with nontraditional trajectories and radical discourses have emerged—such as the Proud Boys, QAnon, and the Boogaloo movement—whose actions are characterized by an explicit rejection of dialogue as a mechanism for conflict resolution and by confrontational rhetoric that destabilizes established institutional frameworks.

Plurality is a distinguishing trait of contemporary social mobilizations, including those that resort to violence. In a context marked by distrust of state institutions and amplified by the connective and diffusive capacity of social media, the coordination of shared demands has been facilitated, even when they arise from adverse realities. Sometimes violence is not due to a unified collective identity nor to a homogeneous social position. Instead, it channels a heterogeneous set of demands linked to gender issues, racial or class inequalities, and structural problems associated with exclusion and socioeconomic inequality in each country (Leitner et al., 2008).

Regarding the balance of power between mobilized actors and political authorities, it has been observed that the State's institutional position was fragile or in decline. Faced with perceived threats, decision-makers were forced to operate with a considerably reduced margin for action. In some cases, this pressure led them to adopt confrontational strategies that, although intended to reestablish order, carried high social and political costs in the event of failure (Goldstone &

Tilly, 2001). The Chilean case illustrates how, amid the escalation of the conflict, expressions of violence not only exceeded institutional containment mechanisms but also enabled the emergence of new social demands that put Sebastián Piñera's government into a crisis and a situation of retrenchment.

It should be noted that episodes of violent social mobilization are not always directed against the government. The relationship between movements and decision-makers can oscillate between direct confrontation and certain degrees of closeness or affinity. In this regard, to better understand the dynamics of these mobilizations, it is necessary to recognize that, beyond expressing generalized weariness, violent acts often target specific institutions. Whether political entities—such as electoral bodies in Bolivia—or social infrastructures—such as the public transportation system in Chile—these institutions tend to become visible and less controversial targets, positioning themselves as strategic catalysts for violent action.

To fully grasp this panorama, it is important to highlight that the role of security forces varies significantly depending on the context in which violent demonstrations unfold. Rahtz (2016) points out that, in the United States, for example, historical tensions between police forces and Black communities are the epicenter of a deep social fissure whose specificity complicates any direct comparison with other social realities. Moreover, police actions are not homogeneous across sociogeographic spaces. This disparity is a determining factor in shaping protest dynamics and the degree of violence they may reach.

A Model to Interpret and Analyze Contentious Politics

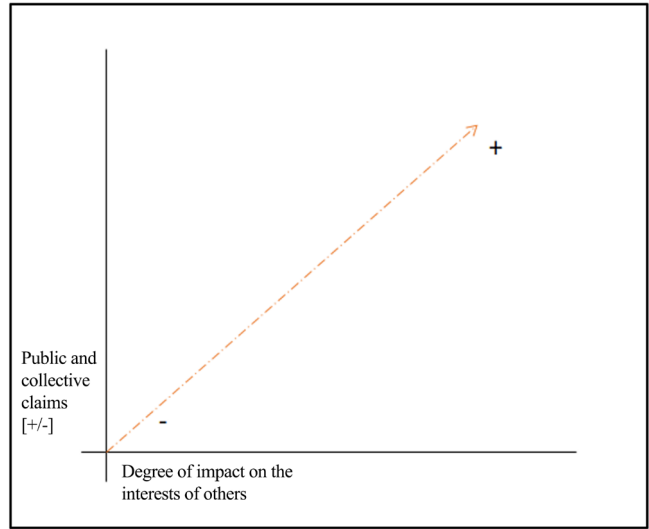
This section proposes a diagram based on three interrelated axes: (i) the political context or background; (ii) the role of the actors involved; and (iii) the options or courses of action available. Along these axes, a series of charts is introduced that synthesizes key information to elucidate their interaction, thereby facilitating a comprehensive, analytical reading of violent social mobilization processes.

The model is framed within a perspective that conceives mobilizations as contentious phenomena, that is, “mechanisms and processes operating at multiple levels are explanatory devices or tools that elaborate hypothesized relationships” (Lichbach, 2010, p. 545).

There is, of course, nonviolent contentious politics as well as violent contentious politics. Although both overlap in practice and interact at different levels, this analysis focuses on the mechanisms, actors, and effects associated with the violent dimension of social mobilization. It is important to emphasize that, even in its most

violent expression, these mobilizations remain forms of political contention—in the sense proposed by Tilly (2017)—since participants come into conflict with the interests of institutional or social actors. Furthermore, this type of contention retains its political nature insofar as claims, whether made by governments, individuals, or organizations involved, are publicly and collectively voiced. In this regard, the degree of violence tends to intensify as the impact on third parties' interests increases. That is, as the effect on specific actors—institutional or social—becomes more severe, the severity of the conflict also increases (see Figure 1).

Figura 1. *Expression of the Severity of Violent Social Mobilization within the Framework of Contentious Politics*

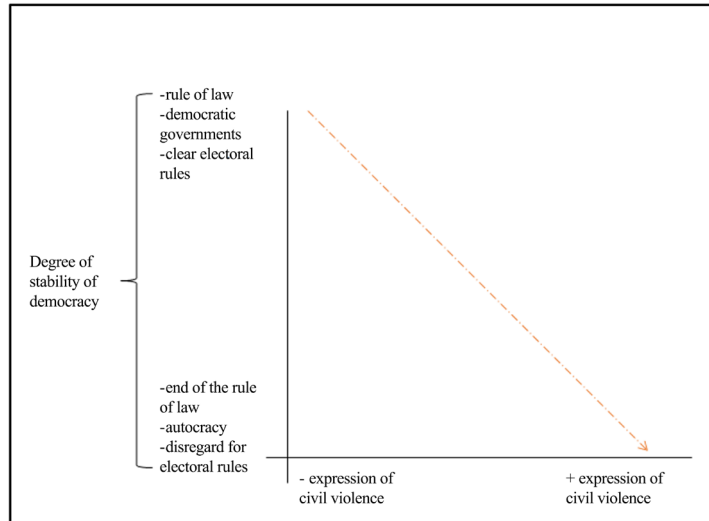


Source. Own elaboration.

This correlation should be interpreted in light of Tilly (2017), who argues that state weakness favors the proliferation of interpersonal violence among the population. Conversely, when the government exercises strong and legitimate authority, such violence tends to decrease significantly.

On the other hand, according to Walter (2022), the fragility inherent to democracies—characterized by weakness of the rule of law, the presence of autocratic governments or disregard for electoral rules, among other factors— also increases the risk that cycles of civil violence will break out (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Relationship between Democracy and Violence*



Source. Own elaboration.

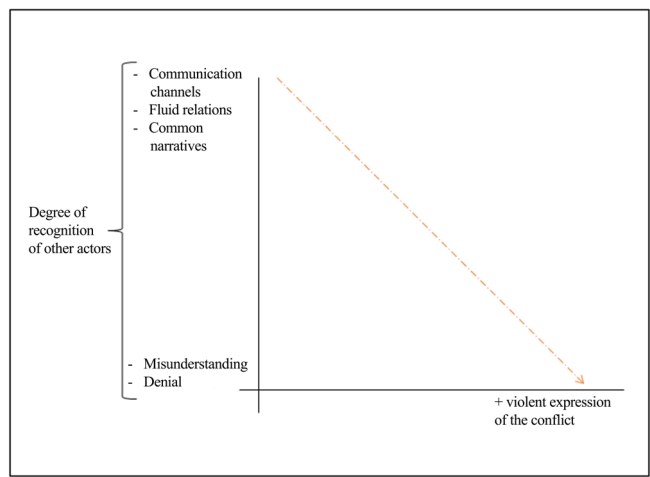
As a framework for analyzing contentious events, the proposed scheme identifies transactions between governmental agents (strong or weak) and other political actors, whether they act within institutional structures or from outside as opponents. Therefore, the model must consider disputes over public policy understood broadly, since these constitute the core of any contentious politics claims.

In contentious politics, the classification of actors involved is central to defining and understanding violence. Following Tilly's approach, these actors may be grouped into different categories: governmental agents, traditional political actors, opposition forces, non-mobilized citizens and other external actors.

According to Tilly (2017), the government has the faculty to recognize and legitimize —or, conversely, to delegitimize— the participation of certain actors in political contention. However, within such contention, recognition does not operate unidirectionally but is constructed among actors in conflict. In this sense, the greater the degree of mutual recognition, the lower the probability that cycles of violence will be triggered (see Figure 3).

To the extent that denial or incomprehension of the other predominates, symbolic boundaries that separate an “us” from a “them” are reinforced. This dynamic hampers the construction of shared narratives, restricts communication channels, and weakens the possibility of establishing links between different actors. As a result, the likelihood of violent episodes increases.

Figure 3. Relationship between Recognition and Violence



Source. Own elaboration.

According to Tilly (2017), in contentious episodes, certain individuals—*political entrepreneurs*—may exert significant influence over mobilized collectives or the State, thereby directly shaping the forms that collective violence takes. These actors can influence its intensity, territorial distribution, and modes of expression. Their relevance lies in their active participation in coordinating mobilization actions, which, in that sense, can expand or restrict the margins of recognition and facilitate connections among different groups and networks involved in contention (see Figure 4).

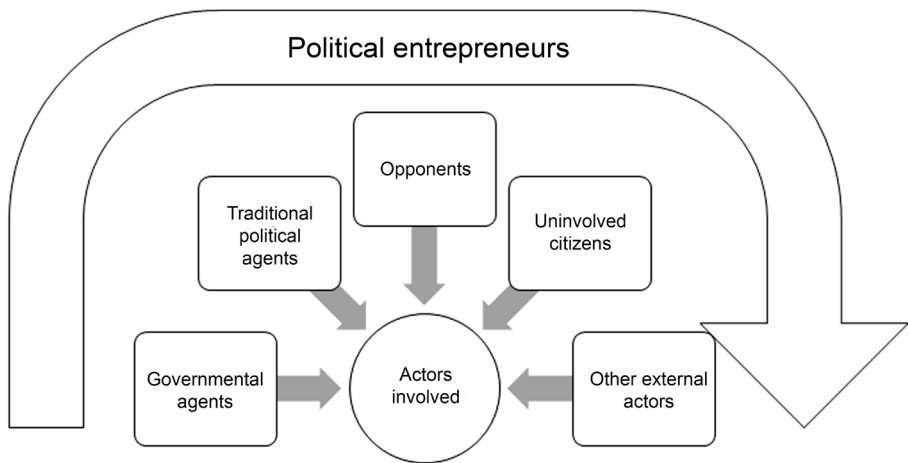
However, the exercise of violence is not reducible exclusively to factors linked to recognition or denial. During mobilizations, violent experiences may arise in response to interventions by multiple participants whose motivations and modes of action do not always align with the logic of reciprocal legitimization (Tilly, 2017). In this regard, it is necessary to consider the presence of *specialists in violence*, both inside and outside the state apparatus.

According to Tilly (2017),

collective violence rises with the extent that organizations specializing in deployment of coercive means—armies, police forces, coordinated banditry, pirate confederations, mercenary enterprises, protection rackets, and the like—increase in size, geographic scope, resources, and coherence. (p. 284)

Evidently, some of these organizations are involved in violent social mobilizations.

Figure 4. *Political Entrepreneurs*



Source. Taken from Tilly (2017).

From the elements identified in the empirical analyses, it can be stated that violence arises not only when organizations expand territorially but also when they begin to interfere with one another. This happens, for example, when they share the same physical space and undesired encounters occur, or when their agendas overlap around disputed issues. As Lichbach (2010) warns, local interactions among actors specialized in the use of violence are also one of the—often involuntary—causes of violent cycles, whether in revolutionary or counterrevolutionary contexts.

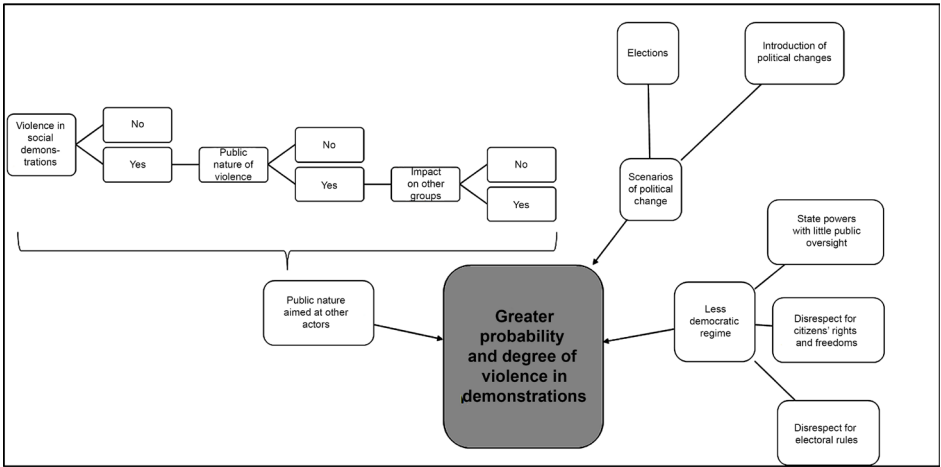
Following Demetriou (2012), it can be argued that processes of violence in recent mobilizations can be decomposed into a series of action mechanisms that are activated at specific moments and places. This perspective is fundamental for analyzing the functioning of action networks among the various actors involved.

For example, direct action networks—with local and regional reach—and indirect networks—which operate mainly through digital platforms—have been identified. Both types of networks acquire significant analytical relevance for the study of violence escalation, especially in cases where temporal synchronies and convergences in the trajectories of actions deployed simultaneously in virtual and physical spaces are recorded.

Thus, the formation of simultaneous networks operating in the same space—whether virtual or physical—favors the escalation of violence. These networks tend to incentivize participation in violent acts and increase the risk of higher-intensity attacks. In general terms, Figure 5 synthesizes the central axes to understand the

factors that trigger violence and explain the increase in its severity in contemporary social demonstrations.

Figure 5. *Analytical Framework: Factors that Trigger Violence and Increase Its Severity in Violent Social Mobilizations*



Source. Own elaboration.

Conclusions

Traditionally, violent events have been analyzed from a microsociological perspective, focusing on the web of links among independent actors (McAdam, 1986; Walgrave et al., 2021). Likewise, protest studies have developed from an interdisciplinary perspective combining elements of sociology and psychology, focusing on identifying the motives of contention: grievances between actors, identities in dispute, and emotions at play (Duncan, 2018; Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). However, the analysis proposed here argues that, although these factors are relevant, focusing exclusively on them risks making invisible other structural elements and cross-cutting dynamics that underlie different types of violent demonstrations, even when they exhibit very diverse characteristics.

This perspective, in contrast, privileges a comparative reading of the broader context (Quaranta, 2015; Vráblíková, 2014). The objective is to elucidate the roles

of institutions, the economic and political panorama, and broader social structures in triggering and intensifying violent social mobilizations.

From this comparative reading, diagrams were developed that enabled an analytical interpretation of the phenomenon, leading to the proposed model. These diagrams are valuable tools for identifying connections between the notion of violent social mobilization and its empirical application in different contexts. They also facilitate the development of more precise analyses focused on the key aspects that structure this type of demonstration.

The application of this model, however, does not imply ignoring the ambiguous nature of violence in the political sphere. This ambiguity manifests, for example, in: (i) the constant dispute over the notion of legitimate force in different political systems (as partially illustrated in this chapter); (ii) the existence of a continuum between permitted actions, negligence and harm perpetrated by governmental agents; and (iii) the active or passive participation of these agents in interactions that involve intentional harm (Tilly, 2022b).

In this respect, the analytical framework developed does not aim to offer a univocal view. On the contrary, it seeks to highlight the need to consider decisive factors—strategic, triggering, agency-related, and interactional—that allow for an understanding of the conflict inherent to the political event.

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