

# Collective responses in Latin America and Ireland to neoliberalization in a time of crisis: Where are the pots and pans?

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# Introduction

- Seeks to assess nature, extent and depth of popular response in Ireland to the current financial crisis and its possible political impact in the medium to long term.
- Uses Silva's (2009) framework on popular responses in Latin America to that region's debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s.

# Silva (2009)

- Uses Polanyi's (1949) theory of "double movement":
  - imposition of market society disrupts people's ability to fulfil vital needs;
  - multiple social groups seek protection from the state to insulate them from market forces;
- Need to assess if there is sufficient:
  - *motivation* for a double movement to occur
    - i.e. the imposition of market society, leading to economic crisis and causing stark socioeconomic inequalities.
  - *capacity* among anti-neoliberal forces to force change away from neoliberal precepts. .

# Silva (2009) - Motivation

Factors	Indicators
Long-term market society project	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First stage reforms: balanced budgets, restrictive monetary policies, liberalization policies in finance, investment, trade and agriculture, emphasis on foreign private investment, privatization, labour reforms;</li> <li>2. Second stage reforms: privatization, decentralization, retraction of universal access to services, expansion of powers of finance ministers and central banks etc.</li> <li>3. Political reforms: insulating economics from politics.</li> </ol>
Stark political and socioeconomic exclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased levels of unemployment, informality, underemployment, inequality and poverty with lower incomes per capita.</li> <li>2. political exclusion: reduction of institutional channels for popular sector demands; use of facilities to stifle debate and expedite reform; weakened legislature; consensus among major parties in favour of neoliberalism; dismissal of the legitimacy of popular sector grievances, claims and demands; betrayal of election and other promises by political parties.</li> </ol>
Economic volatility and crisis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wide swings in growth.</li> <li>2. State and government seeming incapable of fulfilling its economic and welfare functions;</li> <li>3. Persistence “with procyclical, deflationary economic policies” which reinforce “the logic of the market”</li> </ol>

# Silva (2009) - Capacity

Factors	Indicators
1. Associational political space,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Existence of a democratic system of government.</li></ul>
2. Constructing associational power and forging collective power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating new organizations and recasting existing ones;</li><li>• Coalition building across new, recast and traditional movement organizations and across clusters of power;</li><li>• Issue framing and brokerage mechanisms to link protest groups;</li></ul>
3. Reformist thrust to major protest groups or significant armed conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocacy for reform of neoliberalism not the replacement of capitalism.</li></ul>

# Silva (2009) Latin America

- Argues that there was an attempt to impose market society in the region in 1980s/90s
- This caused a “double movement” in some Latin American countries leading to end of neoliberalism;
  - Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela
- Did not happen in Chile and Peru as one or the other, or both, conditions were not met;
- Do the conditions exist in Ireland? If so what prospects for a turn away from neoliberalism?

# Ireland: Motivation

- Ireland displays some indicators that satisfy Silva's conditions for a "double movement" to occur.
- A "long term market society project" is taking place, from the 1980s, to the 2008 crisis and right through to the present.
- There has been economic volatility and there is evidence of social and political exclusion.
  - Less extreme in form than in Latin America or even in Spain and Greece,
  - May not be sufficient to provoke a determined counter-reaction from popular sectors that may force a change of course.
- Such a reaction would at any rate be dependent on capacity of popular sectors to launch and sustain such a reaction.

# Ireland: Capacity

- There have been a wide range of national and local protest in Ireland over the last six years
  - these have not coalesced into a determined, united counter movement;
- Trade unions key mobilizing role:
  - has adopted a largely defensive strategy which limits its capacity for narrative and alliance building with others.
- Contemporary Irish civil society “passive”:
  - dominance by state and market – co-option, funding pressures etc.
  - Limits its ability to represent popular sectors, form narratives and build alliances.
- Indigenous Irish pro-neoliberal forces remain far stronger than contending forces:
  - Powerful international allies (troika, corporations);
  - Internalization of neoliberalism and free market ideology by Irish society;
  - Largely right wing media makes it difficult for progressive groups to popularise ideas about alternatives to austerity.
- Course of events in Ireland will depend much on those overseas, especially in Europe, both at elite and grassroots level.



# Ireland

Factors	Ireland 2007-2013
1. Long-term market society project creating stark political and socioeconomic exclusion (Yes/No)	No. Market economy with significant, but lessening, political and socioeconomic inclusion.
1. Economic volatility and crisis (Yes/No)	Yes. Less so in latter years but with potential for more.
1. Associational political space, favourable/not-favourable	Favourable, democratic regime but with some closing down of associational space.
1. Reformist thrust to major protest groups (Yes/No)	Yes, insofar as protest exists but anti austerity not the same frame as reforming neoliberalism – life for all
1. Issue framing and brokerage mechanisms to link protest groups (Yes/No)	No. There have been attempts at this but mostly unsuccessful.
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>To be continued</b>

# Conclusions: Learning from Latin America? (Tentative!)

- Develop reformist agendas framed in clearer anti neoliberal terms but bringing together popular and middle class demands;
  - Need for Irish left to work in a complementary rather than antagonistic way and to organise popular campaigns that unite rather than divide.
- Irish NGOs need to avoid mediating or filtering popular protest and framing demands in sectoral and micro fashion.
- Irish academics have to take more seriously the challenge of contributing to public discourse.
- Irish citizens have to challenge the assumption of stoicism and passivity that has so far characterised their response to crisis.
- Need to link with European campaigns, longer term issues (water);
  - Framing water liberalization in context of environmentalism and anti-neoliberalism;
- Eurozone still volatile: long time frame
- International

**THANK YOU!**