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Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings

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The evolution and dynamics of land squatting in Montevideo, Uruguay

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Abstract

This article combines statistical analysis and qualitative research to understand the evolution and dynamics of urban land squatting by poor people in Montevideo, Uruguay. With an original data set of 257 land occupations over a period of 58 years (from 1947 to 2004), as well as with 80 interviews with squatters leaders, state officials and politicians among other sources, this article explores the influence of electoral politics on the appearance of new land invasions. In so doing, it challenges the assumption that socioeconomic factors or grievances are the only causes triggering land squatting. For that, it first unveils the heterogeneity behind the commonly used term of land squatting. Different types of occupation tend to emerge under different circumstances. The article sides with a broad set of literature pointing at the role of politics among Latin American squatter settlements, exploring this relationship for a new understudied case, Uruguay. It also seeks to contribute to an increasing body of literature pointing at the relevance of political opportunities in understanding collective action in Latin America.

INTRODUCTION

The explosion of squatting in Montevideo took place later than in other metropolises of the region. Although some land invasions, dubbed *cantegriles*, existed in Montevideo before squatting peaked in the 1990s, the Uruguayan capital developed differently than other Latin American cities. Despite already starting to show signs of urban socio-economic inequality in the 1980s (Portes 1989), Montevideo was more egalitarian than other cities of the continent, both economically and spatially.

A traveller who has not visited Montevideo in the last twenty years will find the growth of its urban informality amazing. The capital city of a country once characterized as both egalitarian and relatively well-off in comparison to the rest of Latin America, is today much closer to the ideal type of a fragmented Latin American metropolis. Between 1984 and 1994 the number of houses in squatter settlements tripled (INTEC 1995). The population living in squatter settlements has grown to almost 145,000 in a city of less than a million and a half inhabitants (INE 2006). And the number of informal settlements has risen to more than 400. These figures become more puzzling considering the city has had a stagnated population for decades. The informal city has grown without population growth. Contrary to most Latin American squatters, these are not rural urban migrants. They are previously urban dwellers expelled from the city center and searching for their right to the city by invading plots in the periphery of Montevideo.

Public opinion and academic studies have reasonably blamed the emergence of this informal city on the problems of Uruguay in the last few years: labor informality, unemployment, and growth without poverty reduction, among others, coupled with (and many would say caused by) structural adjustment policies. However, this purely economic perspective has some problems. It leaves different types of variation unexplained: variation in the type of settlement – from accretion to organized and sudden land seizures, - variation in the type of neighbourhood organizations and strategies to reach the state and, the most important here, variation over time during equally hard times, for example.

It is my contention that electoral politics mediated the relationship between hardship and squatting. This is probably true for the whole period of analysis (1947-2004) but I believe it is especially so for the period after the end of dictatorship in 1984. Democratization is, together with neoliberalism and globalization, one of the most important processes explaining the recent wave of mobilization in Latin America, according to Johnston and Almeida (2006) in their compilation of studies on various types of social movements. Besides the effect of the opening of the political system that generally causes movements to mushroom (Hipsher 1997), the democratization process in Uruguay brought with it a time of crude electoral competition, especially for the urban poor, in a context of structural adjustment.

The fierce competition finished with the end of 175 years of electoral dominance by the traditional *Colorado* and *Blanco* Parties, when the leftist coalition, the *Frente Amplio*, won the national government in 2004. That dominance had already been challenged in 1990 when the leftist coalition won the Montevideo city government for the first time in history. As Luna (2007) explains in detail, the triumph of the *Frente Amplio* required a process of constituency diversification and expansion. One of the

toughest tasks in that process was the “penetration of traditional party strongholds in Montevideo’s periphery” which was facilitated through the decentralization process that the leftist coalition put into action once it won the municipal government in 1990.

With a research design that combines statistical analysis with ethnographic research, I empirically analyze the whole cycle of land invasions from its beginnings in the 1940s until current days. I point to the different types of land occupations and the differential processes behind their emergence and dynamics. For that I engage with two broader debates weaving them into the Montevideo squatters’ case. The first regards the role of political opportunities in triggering collective action. The second one relates to the relationship between squatters and politics in Latin America.

My findings suggest the conditions under which accretion invasions emerged are somehow different to the ones that made planned invasions happen. Both were affected by harsh times. Without need of housing, low salaries, poverty, it was very unlikely for people to invade land to live. Yet hardship only got activated at certain times. Accretion invasions appear early in the mid XX century as a product of migration to the city in the search of unfound opportunities. They continued growing in a very precarious manner even under dictatorship, to peak, like planned invasions, in the 1990s decade. They have been more likely in post electoral years when governments were more permissive towards the needy, paying favors or conducting constituency service. Yet, their relation to the state has been one of tolerance but in the invisibility. Stable political networks are not present and there are no neighborhood organizations that pressure the state for services. Planned invasions are newer, despite very few exceptions in the 1960s. The majority occurred after democratization in a context of liberalization and structural adjustment that left many urban workers without the stability of the past. This was also a context of great political competition for the urban poor. Planned invasions behaved more proactively, suddenly seizing land and demanding the state for services either directly or through political networks. They were more common in electoral years when electoral competition made tolerance and negotiation easier.

The article first engages with the literature on political opportunities and squatters and politics in Latin America, briefly contextualizing the Montevideo case. After a methods section in which the selected multi-method strategy is described, it shows two stories of two types of settlements to understand the differential mechanisms behind the emergence of new informal neighborhoods. It finally goes into a statistical model to test these differences more parsimoniously and ends with some concluding remarks on political brokerage as key to understand the relationship between squatters and the state.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

That political context matters for the emergence, development, and impact of social movements is, as Meyer (2004) points out, at the core of the political opportunity perspective. More specifically, political opportunities are dimensions of the political system that suggest that effective action is possible and thereby encourage people to engage in contentious politics (Tarrow 1998; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). The theory appeared initially to counter the idea that people rebel or mobilize because of their

perceived hardships (Gurr 1974). It also wanted to prove that movement's politics were not apart from institutional politics. This perspective gave rise to a lot of very interesting empirical studies, mainly in the US and Europe, but it has more recently been used to explain collective action elsewhere, including Latin America.

Although studies of social movements in Latin America proliferated in the 1980s, stimulated by widespread mobilization throughout recently democratizing societies, the reigning paradigm of those studies focused on identities and autonomous capacities of the movements, not on their relationships with formal politics (Holston 1991; Evers 1985; Touraine 1987; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; OXHORN 1995; Caldeira 1990). More recently, however, the political opportunities framework has become increasingly popular among scholars studying collective action in Latin America (Strawn 2005; Schneider 1995; Almeida 2003, 2008; Hipsher 1998, 1997; Auyero 2000, 2007; Inclan 2008, 2009).

Some of these latter studies have explicitly used the empirical cases of Latin America to expand the political opportunities ideas to authoritarian (Almeida 2003) or democratizing contexts (Hipsher 1997), generating new theoretical ideas and scope conditions for the political opportunities theory. Others have distanced themselves from the framework as it is because they found it inappropriate to explain reality in Latin America. According to authors such as Davis (1999) and Auyero (2007) the idea of having politics on one side and mobilization on the other does not accurately describe a region where politicians and activists intertwine.

In this study I seek to contribute to this ongoing discussion on the role of political opportunities in triggering mobilization in Latin America. I do so in part siding with the relatively few multivariate studies of events testing political opportunities vis-à-vis other theories of collective action in the region. Considering alternative hypothesis and including them in the same models is crucial to test how robust the effect of specific political opportunities, in my case electoral politics, is. Yet I also try to understand the dynamics behind the coefficients or the patterns that the multivariate models throw. This is something that the very developers of the political opportunities framework have encouraged us to do realizing, after being harshly criticized (Goodwin and Jasper 1999), that structural patterns of mobilization only tell us part of the story (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). They encourage us to look at the mechanisms through which specific political opportunities translate into different types of collective action. I specifically look into the role of local squatter leaders as brokers embedded in political networks.

SQUATTERS AND POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

Looking at political opportunities and squatters seems particularly relevant in Latin America, where the relationship between squatter settlements and the state and politics has received much more attention than in other parts of the world, in part because this relationship has been much stronger than anywhere else. Scholars of the Middle East, for example, have pointed at how Latin American squatters relate to the state in unprecedented ways considering their region where depolitization and invisibility are precisely at the root of squatters' survival (Alsayyad 1993; 2003, Bayat 1997; 2004).

David Collier's (1976) work in Lima persuasively unveils how intertwined *squatters* and *oligarchs* are, how extensively though often silently the Peruvian elite has been involved in the formation of the dozens of settlements that make Lima one of the most informal cities of the region. Also for the case of Lima, perhaps the most studied city when it comes to urban informality, Dietz (1998) studies political participation both formal (vote) and informal (community participation), in six poor Lima neighborhoods over a 20 year time span. And Stokes (1991) divides settlements in clientelistic and rebel, depending precisely on their relationship to the state. Other examples of this line of inquiry include Cornelius (1974, 1977), Roberts (1973), Portes and Walton (1976), Handelman (1975), Castells (1983) Eckstein (1988), Hipsher (1998, 1997), Schneider (1995), Burgwal (1995), Gay (1994, 1990, 2001), Auyero (2000), and more recently Özler (2003a), and Dosh (2010).

Some of them have even explicitly used the political opportunities and mobilization framework to analyze this relationship. Hipsher (1998) and Schneider (1995) do so for the Chilean squatters and Roberts and Portes (2006) briefly do so for Uruguayans squatters as well based on a study conducted by Kaztman and collaborators (Kaztman, Filgueira and Errandonea 2005). Yet there is no previous study of squatting as protest events. Most studies are case studies, narrative histories of mobilization, or comparative studies of different types of informal and formal political participation. The clearest antecedent of the analysis presented here is Collier's (1976) already mentioned study of settlement formation in Lima. There, Collier analyzes variation in settlements' foundation in different political contexts. He provides great historical explanations, with details on squatter policy. He does not, however, model his data statistically in the way proposed here.

Montevideo squatters and Latin American mobilization at the turn of the century

The 1990s combined throughout Latin American two conditions triggering mobilization: a) neoliberal reforms in b) recently democratized societies (Johnston and Almeida 2006; Roberts and Portes 2006). Hence, we witnessed the flourishing of indigenous rights movements in several countries, great activity by the MST (Movement of Rural Landless Workers) in Brazil, the emergence of the unemployed *piquetero* movement in Argentina as well as other forms of austerity and anti-privatization protests there and elsewhere (like the gas and water anti privatization protests in Bolivia), the mushrooming of NGOs, and many other forms of mobilization. Some of them had transnational ties to organizations and movements outside Latin America.

Although Montevideo's squatters were not protesting against economic policy, they were clearly part of its consequences and as we will see, some of them implied collective and contentious action. During the 1990s, Montevideo squatters suffered a quantitative and qualitative change. On the one hand they peaked in number. On the other, they became increasingly planned. Structural conditions, such as persistent de-industrialization, poverty, rising rent, state-retrenchment, low real wages and so forth, are conceivably behind these changes (Amarante and Caffera 2003; Alvarez Rivadulla 2000; Kaztman and Retamoso 2005). Yet, the picture remains incomplete if we do not look at how politics mediated between people in need of housing and services and land seizures.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Uruguay during 2006 and 2007 as well as on a previous one in 1998-99 and a more recent follow up during the last national elections in 2009. It is part of a multi-method project that combines statistical analysis and qualitative data including ethnographic fieldwork in some settlements. These two types of data are intertwined not only in the analysis but in the construction of data sets. Part of the quantitative data was obtained from qualitative fieldwork. Case selection for interviews was in turn oriented by the emergent quantitative data.

I constructed a data set of land invasion events with information such as date of settlement, type of settlement (planned versus by accretion) and property of the occupied plot. Because land invasions are *elusive* forms of collective action in the sense that they rarely leave traces in newspapers or other types of archives, collecting data was a complicated endeavor. Government agencies are interested in mapping them and gathering population and vulnerability data but not necessarily on their history. For that, I relied on a multiplicity of sources such as official data from Ministry of Housing, the Montevideo Municipality and the National Statistics Bureau, oral histories with old time squatters, local archives from the local governments, NGO's reports, interviews with present and past professionals and authorities working at the municipal and local governments, interviews with present and past city councilors, minutes of the City Council and Congress, few newspaper clips, and some student monographs.

Combining and crosschecking all these sources I was able to assemble a data set with the exact (year) or approximate date of origin ("the 90s", "between 1985 and 1986") of 382 out of 427 land occupations. For the models presented in this paper I use only the 257 settlements for which I have the exact year of settlement. Data covers 58 years from 1947 (year of the first land invasion I could track) to 2004 (year of the last land invasion I could track by the time of my fieldwork).

With that data set, I generated another one with *number of total land invasions by year, number of planned land invasions by year, and number of accretion land invasions by year* (dependent variables in the models presented below). The data set was completed with a series of variables that I thought would be good predictors, based on the theory, such as some indicators of hardships and political opportunities. As an indicator of hardship I have used average yearly *real wages* of workers. Thanks to the work of economic historians, a time series of real wages, or wages adjusted for inflation to make them comparable across time, is available for Uruguay from 1870 until 2002 (Historia Económica 2008).¹ The scatter plot showing the bivariate relationship between real wages and the number of yearly land occupations shows a triangular shape with a widespread number of land invasions at low values of real

¹ Historically, real wages are a better measure of quality of life, especially for the lower classes, than the more artifactual GDP per capita (Aghion and Williamson 1999). Other series of relevant indicators of hardship such as poverty rates, number of evictions or housing prices are only available since the late 1980s and this is why they are not appropriate for longer term historic analysis. However, real wages correlates strongly with other possible measures of grievances such as yearly number of renters' evictions ($r = -.87$).

wages and a low occurrence of invasions at higher values of real wages. This is consonant with the theory suggesting that hardship (real wages) might be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the occurrence of land invasions. This usually suggests an interactive relationship between one or more pair of variables.

I use three variables to test the effect of specific political opportunities on the number of land invasions. First, I use a dummy for electoral years, coded 1 if that year was electoral and 0 otherwise. The use of election times as a political opportunities indicator is pretty conventional. Other studies have suggested a relationship between electoral competition and squatters' mobilization (Schneider 1995; Özler 2003). Since elections are held in November in Uruguay, parties and individual politicians have that entire year to campaign, and therefore this dummy captures what happens before elections. Second, I use another dummy variable, post electoral year, coded with the same rationale, to capture a different type of political opening or opportunity: the one that happens once the winning party is in power (e.g., incoming government paying favors or doing constituency service). Finally, I have included a variable that accounts for the period in which the *Frente Amplio* has been in power in the city (1 if yes, 0 for the other years). Based on theory as well as on fieldwork, I expect both of these dummies to be positively related to the number of land invasions.

I have also included a one year *lagged number of invasions* in the models for two connected reasons. On the one hand, this is a customary practice in time series analysis because data points are not independent as regression models assume: what happened the year before probably influences what happens on a certain year. If, at an extreme, the dependent variable were entirely predicted from last year's values, one would have no evidence that the exogenous variables were causing anything to happen the current year. The other reason is more theoretical. This lag captures a diffusion process. Once a group of people invade land, they open the possibility for others to do it as well. Thus, I expect this lag to be positively related to the number of land invasions.

Finally, to test the type of interactive or conditional effect of grievances and political opportunities suggested before, I have included two *interactive terms* in the model. They are interactions (multiplications) of real wages with the electoral year dummy and with the post electoral year dummy. The signs and significance of the coefficients of these interactive effects do not mean much in themselves (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2005; Braumoeler 2004). As explained below, their interpretation requires a more nuanced analysis.² I estimated the yearly number of land invasions using Poisson regression, which is appropriate for use with count data, where the use of the linear regression model usually results in inefficient, inconsistent and biased estimates (Minkoff 1995, 1997; Barron 1992;

² In general, predictors are not correlated among each other. The only problematic correlation is that of the lagged dependent variable and the 1990 and beyond dummy ($r=.72$). Yet, when I run the models without the lagged variable, the effect of the 1990 and beyond dummy remains, which indicates that multicollinearity is not taking away the effect of any variable vis-à-vis another one.

King 1988; Long and Freese 2006).³ Since the unit of analysis is the year, there are 55 observations (1947-2002).⁴

The qualitative fieldwork served not only to fill some of the missing gaps in the time series but also, and mainly to understand how squatting developed, what were the mechanisms that made squatting happened and how these varied throughout time. I selected a group of 25 squatter neighborhoods and tried to reconstruct their histories using oral histories as well as available documents. Neighborhoods were selected to represent and understand variation in times and types of settlements controlling for spatial location. Oral histories were conducted also trying to get a multiplicity of perspectives to better understand the origins of each settlement. I interviewed old time residents (leaders and non leaders), local and municipal authorities and professionals, a city mayor for two periods then Housing Minister, past and current City Councilors, leaders of the Cooperative Housing Movement and in general every character that appeared in the interviews with old time residents, to crosscheck information and learn their side of the story.

DIFFERENT TYPES, DIFFERENT PROCESSES

When looking at the evolution of land squatting in Montevideo over time, at least three striking features appear: late start in relation to the rural-urban migration process, steady growth during the military regime, a very notorious peak in 1990 followed by a decade of high numbers of land invasions, and a decline since the end of the 1990s. Yet, as illustrated by figures 1 and 2, different types of land occupations have different patterns of growth over time.

I have divided squatter settlements in Montevideo in two types according to how the process of land occupation occurred. Accretion invasions start gradually, as individual (or family) action, without collective organization. Spatially, they are very different from planned invasions, much more crowded and without streets or any other sign of urban planning. Planned invasions start as collective action with organization. A group seizes an empty plot and starts building houses, streets, public and common spaces and demanding services and legalization to the state. There is yet a third type, the minority of the cases, which I have not considered here for the analysis. These settlements start as the individual action of an entrepreneur, who might have some political contacts, and who illegally subdivides a plot and sells it to people with low resources. The most common type of land invasion in Montevideo has been accretion (57% of those I could find information about). Yet about 1 out of 3 invasions have been planned (and 11% have been a product of land subdivision and sale).

³ The choice of Poisson over negative binomial comes after running negative binomial models, and comparing them. The negative binomial model is a generalization of the Poisson model that corrects for overdispersion. When data is overdispersed, the Poisson model gives spuriously small standard errors. In none of the cases was the additional "alpha" parameter (the one that accounts for overdispersion) in the negative binomial models significant.

⁴ The real wages series ends in 2002

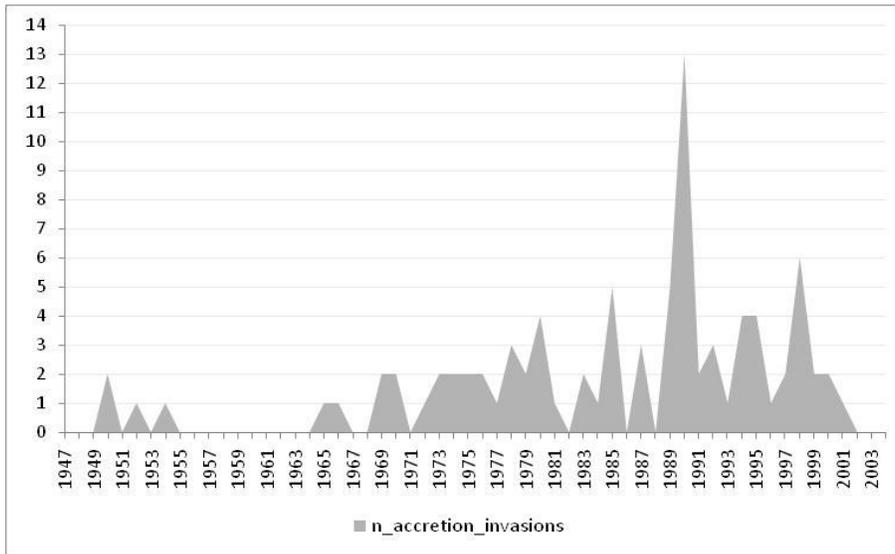


Figure 1 Number of Accretion Land Invasions. Montevideo 1947-2004

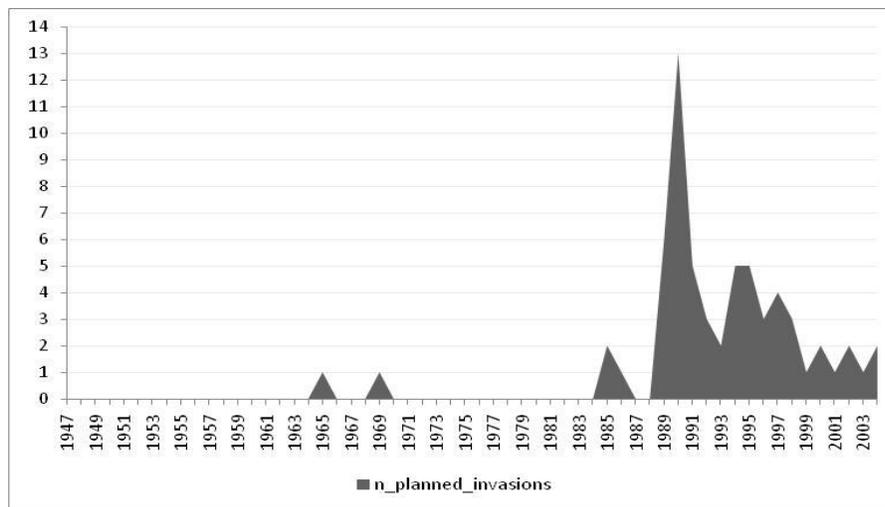


Figure 2 Number of Planned Land Invasions. Montevideo 1947-2004.

Accretion invasions were the first to emerge. The first one I could track dates from 1947. They were constituted mainly by migrants to the city searching for the job opportunities that the industrialization for imports substitution promised. Known locally as *cantegriles*, they represent the most deprived areas of the city, with very precarious housing, almost no services, very little employment mainly in scavenging. Accretion invasions were rare events until the 1970s but they grew steadily since then peaking in the 1990s like planned invasions.

Planned invasions have occurred in democracy, with only one exception of a land seizure organized by a church group during dictatorship (it does not appear on figure 2 because I do not have an exact date for it, although I know it started somewhere in between 1977-78). A few occurred before dictatorship and the bulk of them occurred in the period between 1989 and 2000. It was only when this wave of mobilization dissipated and the parties took once more their central role channeling and co-opting civil society demands (Canel 1992), that many working class city dwellers adopted the strategy of land squatting in an organized way. These squatters were demographically different from the accretion ones, they were more educated, worked on more formal jobs (INTEC 1995) and some, especially the leaders, had experience in participation in unions, political parties or the Cooperative Housing Movement, which they transferred into the organization of the land seizures.

Neighborhood stories better illustrate these differences:

A story of an accretion invasion

The settlement Acosta y Lara takes its name from the main street in front of it. The neighborhood is located in a thin stretch of land in between that street and a polluted stream (see figure 3). Crammed with houses, the only open space is the irregular narrow passages that go through it. Unlike most accretion invasions in Montevideo, houses are poor but built with solid materials, thanks to the recent help of a local NGO. Yet their quality depends on their location. Walking towards the end of the neighborhood bordering the stream, the landscape becomes denser and poorer. Garbage is everywhere with dogs and horses eating from it, and a putrefactive smell becomes more penetrating.



Figure 3Aerial Picture of the squatter settlement Acosta y Lara, formed by accretion (by Google Earth)

A group of 4 or 5 shacks were there by the end of the 1950s but most arrived slowly during the 60s decade. Many were migrants from other areas of Uruguay, coming to the capital. José, 48, current neighborhood president and a temporary construction worker, moved to this neighborhood with his parents when he was very little. They used to live in a formal working class peripheral neighborhood in Montevideo, but – he remembers - they could not pay the rent because they did not have regular jobs. His grandparents had been among the first comers, and they settled somewhere in 1956-57. At the beginning people worked selling sand from the stream's bank for construction, until the sand was over. There was no neighborhood association then. As José describes it:

There was no organization, no structure. Nobody told you this is your plot. There was no limit. So people would come and fence in the parcel they wanted. Some took too much. Many people from the interior of the country started to come. A family would come and then that family told other families “come to Montevideo. At least here you don't have to pay rent, you live in a shack, and there are some jobs” (...) My grandparents came with a plastic tent and then, I remember that they built a house with mud, reeds and cane, all from the swamp that used to be here. (...) People cooked with fire (...) They found their way to survive.

When asked which organization or person helped them the most, José can only mention the NGO. No politician helped them to get services or anything for the neighborhood. “They come but politicians are politicians” - he says, referring to their only sporadic visits in times of election. In fact, even though they had been there for half a century they still do not have basic services. Relationship with the state has not been easy. Because they are located close to one of the most affluent areas of the city, there had been pressures for relocation. During the dictatorship, some of the settlers were relocated and their houses bulldozed.

“It is difficult to work together” –José adds referring to collective action problems that had made it difficult to improve the neighborhood. Although there have always been some neighbors willing to work for the neighborhood, in general associations have been very fragile. The first broker that appeared connecting them to the state has been a NGO. Through it, they are entering into the upgrading and legalization program (funded by the Inter American Development Bank and the national government). It is still to be seen how successful the state and the newly created neighborhood association are in this process. It becomes an empirical question if this intervention can undo the legacy of an accretion land settlement.

A story of a planned invasion

Villa Libre (Freedom Village) was founded in December 1995, that is during the first year of the second period of the *Frente Amplio* in the city government, and the first year of the return of the traditional *Colorado* party to the national office (after a period of the also traditional *Blanco* Party). *Colorados*, especially the most populist factions of the party, traditionally had the majority of the votes of the popular sectors of the capital. Strong clientelistic ties were created and recreated through party clubs located throughout the city (Rama 1971). In fact, back in the 1960s, Colorado party brokers had helped plan and urbanize one of the biggest squatter settlements of the city, not far from where *Villa Libre* is located. But like most people in this area of the city, once a thriving working class neighborhood full of

industries, now impoverished, the leaders of that early planned neighborhood now vote the Frente Amplio or have been displaced as leaders by younger left leaning leaders. (See Mieres 1988; Mieres 1994; Luna 2006, 2007; and Alvarez-Rivadulla forthcoming, for more on this process of change in the popular vote).

Going back to *Villa Libre*, a group of about 20 young and middle aged people had been meeting for about a month at a soup kitchen in *El Cerro* neighborhood to plan a land seizure. They did not all know each other from before but they all learned about the plot through friends, job colleagues or acquaintances. Some were from a group of young anarchist militants and those did know each other. But more than anything what connected them was their common need for housing. They started by exploring different possibilities of plots to invade. Since most of them were from *El Cerro* neighborhood, they looked there.

After some failed attempts in which they were evicted by the police and also by the municipal government, they decided to confront local authorities. The group became stronger, choosing some representatives in charge of talking to authorities but deciding everything in assemblies. Julio, one of the representatives, was chosen because he had previous experience in a land invasion, “he had contacts, and he knew how to move himself and whom to talk to” – as another settler told me. They started to fight with the local government. Residents remember different sectors of the leftist municipal government fighting for the decision to evict them or not. The fact that most of the invaders were leftist militants (in particular from the same faction as the local authorities) was an asset, according to one of them:

When the local government came and saw some of us here, they said ‘Wow, you were here?’ It was as if they came with a position and when they saw there were people from their political sector, they changed.

In the end the local government assigned them another plot in which they allowed them to stay and build. Early times were tough because they had to clean the plot, smooth it, and start building everything. They planned streets and blocks, with the hope that one day they would become legalized, that is, they would receive their property titles and urban services and, in the end, become an ordinary city neighborhood. Old residents remember this as a time of great solidarity and mobilization. Not everybody was allowed to join. Newcomers could not have incomes superior to 3 minimum salaries. They had a deadline to build something with solid materials (“because we didn’t want to be a *cantegril*”). In an assembly they decided they did not want anybody from the military, strike breakers, or thieves. They quickly got services such as water and light by directly asking the relevant state agencies, and often also asking the local council for help. They brought services for the whole area that the nearby settlements had never managed to get. They were always distrustful of politicians. But like most leaders of planned invasions, they were pragmatic and savvy regarding clientelistic ties.

We used to go to the City Council or wherever and we talked to everybody, *blancos*, *colorados*, *frenteampelistas*. If someone opened the doors to us and offered something, we were there (...) Here in the local government, many times we went and told them “ok, you are closing us the doors, we go somewhere else.

After the first two years, participation started to decline, but the urban trace of that early organization is still there, as evident in figure 4. Roads and a plot for a public plaza were planned originally and have

been maintained. The settlement and its neighbor *Nuevo Cauceglia*, also in the picture, got water and light relatively soon. Very recently, they also got a school close to the neighborhood, which was something they had always asked for via petitions and also via road blockades as a way to protest. A new elementary school and a kinder have recently been built and connected to the neighborhood through a new road (see the upper left corner of the picture). *Villa Libre* and neighboring settlements are entering also into the upgrading and legalization program. There, the policy would find leaders and neighborhood associations with a longer history.



Figure 4 Aerial Picture of the squatter settlement Villa Libre, a planned invasion, (and neighboring Nuevo Cauceglia) (by Google Earth).

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITES AND SETTLEMENT FORMATION

To more formally assess these differences between types of settlements Table 1 presents the results of Poisson regressions predicting the number of land invasions per year.

Table 1: Poisson Regression Estimates of the Influence of selected predictors on the Number of Land Occupations per year for different types of occupations, Montevideo 1947-2002

	Total	Planned	Accretion
Real wages	-0.011** (0.004)	0.003 (0.012)	-0.011* (0.006)
Election year dummy	1.970** (0.728)	6.329** (2.191)	0.719 (1.104)
Year after election year dummy	2.976*** (0.677)	5.178** (1.790)	3.472** (1.043)
Real Wages*Election Year	-0.013* (0.006)	-0.046* (0.018)	-0.003 (0.009)
Real Wages*Year after election year	-0.022*** (0.006)	-0.039* (0.016)	-0.027** (0.010)
Left in power in the city	1.409*** (0.178)	2.346*** (0.458)	0.800* (0.315)
Lag (N total invasions t-1)	0.007 (0.010)	0.029 (0.018)	-0.001 (0.019)
Constant	2.056*** (0.492)	-2.221 (1.637)	1.451* (0.700)
N	55	55	55
LR Chi2	294.78	132.03	67.75
P > Chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R-squared	0.573	0.6023	0.309

Standard errors in parentheses /*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

In the three models, most variables are significant and with their signs in the expected direction. There are interesting commonalities and some even more attractive differences. Starting with the commonalities, land invasions were more common in the period in which the *Frente Amplio* was in power in the city, controlling for all the other factors, including the level of hardship (real wages). This was clear in the earlier graphs as well. Yet, it becomes also important to know that that effect seems to have stopped once the *Frente Amplio* consolidated its power in the city. As evident in the story of *Villa Libre*, already starting its second administration, the first reaction of the municipal government was to evict that occupation. Squatters later negotiated with local authorities and they ended up staying and

getting help from the state. Yet, the management of land invasions on the part of the leftist government had started to change.

During the 1989 campaign and the first *Frente Amplio* administration, different mechanisms had made land invasions more likely. First, hope on the part of squatters that a leftist government would be benevolent towards the homeless poor. Second, the direct promotion of land invasions by a minority of radical leftist politicians and local leaders guided by the idea of land redistribution. Third, direct promotion by local leaders of various parties and factions in search of political capital and respect in a context of great competition for the urban poor votes. And fourth, a divided government with a traditional party in national office and the leftist party in the city's office. Some politically savvy squatter leaders made use of this rupture to ask some things to national agencies and some things to the municipal government. Yet, this was not a long lasting effect; it was just a short time window of opportunity.

Perhaps because of the responsibility or the learning gained in the 20 years in charge of the city government, or perhaps because of the leverage gained by winning also the national government for the second time now, the leftist administration is working hard to avoid new land invasions, even if that disappoints part of its constituency. As one of the former local authorities of the *Cerro* local council told me when I asked him about a settlement eviction in 2004, very close to elections: "We made many mistakes. It's impossible to govern without experience. Governing means knowing, understanding, and we used to make many stupid mistakes."

Another commonality showed on table 1 is that the lagged dependent variable is not significant for any of the models. Apparently, the number of invasions at t-1 did not affect the number of invasions the following year. Yet, this does not rule out all possibilities of diffusion. There is no evidence of diffusion of squatting experiences year to year, but perhaps our yearly measures do not account for shorter term diffusion processes occurring say, month to month. The qualitative work actually gave me some evidence of this diffusion processes.

Yet, some of the predictors behave differently depending on the type of land invasions we consider. Annual real wages, my measure of hardship or grievances, is significant for accretion invasions but not for planned invasions. Yet, this coefficient, because it is interacted with measures of political opportunity (electoral year and post-electoral year) cannot be interpreted just looking at the table.⁵ It becomes necessary to look at the predicted counts and marginal effects. Figure 5 and 6 show a more intuitive understanding of the effect of real wages on the number of planned and accretion land invasions respectively. They show the predicted count of land invasions for different types of years (electoral, post-electoral and other) for different levels of real wages (leaving the other variables constant).

⁵ The coefficient for, say real wages does not represent the average effect of yearly real wages on the number of land invasions. It only indicates the effect of real wages when both the post electoral dummy and the electoral dummy are 0 that is to say in between election years. As Kam and Franzese (2007) remind us, each variable involved in the interaction terms of interactive models has multiple effects, depending on the values of the other interactive variables, not a single, constant effect.

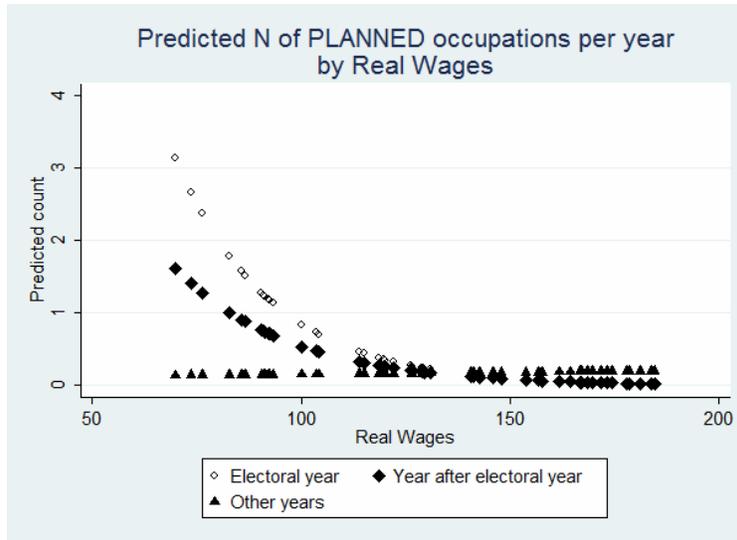


Figure 5 Predicted Number of PLANNED occupations per year by real wages and year type

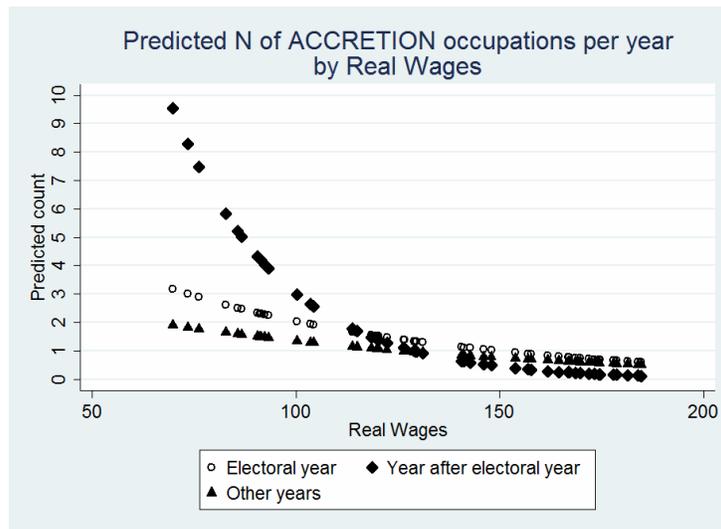


Figure 6 Predicted Number of ACCRETION occupations per year by real wages and year type

In general, for either type, the expected number of invasions was greater in the studied period as the yearly real wages went down. When people were better off there was less need to occupy land. Clearly hardship did have an effect on the likelihood of land invasions happening. Yet that effect was conditional on specific political opportunities. The effect of low real wages was different depending on the electoral cycle as well as on the type of invasion. In ordinary years, that is years of no election coming or not recent election, even if it was a harsh economic year, land invasions were not likely.

When elections were coming, planned invasions were more likely, whereas after elections accretion invasions were more common. Post electoral years also had a positive effect on the number of planned invasions (*Villa Libre* is an example) but that effect is not significant (on the verge to reach the 95% significance threshold, though).

These differences make sense in the context of the broader qualitative fieldwork. Planned invasions resemble more a proactive social movement that appears when contention is higher (electoral campaign) rather than when contention is over. Accretion invasions tend to be more reactive.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this article I have argued for the relationship of squatters and politics. In Uruguay, like in other places in Latin America, that relationship is strong and it has made it possible for many squatters to get state attention in the form of public services, through the brokerage of local squatter leaders often embedded in political networks. Political parties have been the brokers between society and the state in Uruguay throughout its history (Panizza and Pérez Piera 1988). Yet the relationship and the types of intermediation vary depending on the actors and have also varied over time.

It is likely that without this statist tradition squatters, at least some of them, would not expect so much from the state. According to Alsayyad (1993) making claims to the state and being politicized is part of the “squatting culture” in Latin America, not only of Uruguay. By contrast, in the Middle East squatters tend to resort to strategies outside politics such as, depending on the particular context, complete political invisibility, tribal networks, or religious law to legalize land.

As we saw, variation in the type of settlement is huge in Montevideo. Accretion invasions resemble more to what Alsayyad describes as the Middle Eastern squatters or squatters in more repressive regimes or in places without state provided welfare systems. They tend to be invisible to the state. That is probably why the dictatorship tolerated them. They did not represent a threat. Some politicians come and go during elections bringing blankets or some food but there are not permanent political networks active in the neighborhood. This reflects on the abandonment they suffer from the state. The fact that they have been more likely after elections, during the honey moon period of governments in which repression is probably less likely, shows their reactive character. As the vignette on the *Acosta y Lara* settlement shows, it is difficult for them to organize. Life conditions are extremely deprived. And there is no collective history in the land occupation. There is a multiplicity of histories that come together in an interstitial and destitute space of the city.

Planned land invasions are a different phenomenon. They fit more the idea of a social movement, even if they are fragmented and they were never able to form umbrella organizations such as the MST in rural Brazil or The Landless People's Movement in South Africa. They not only behave contentiously going against private property but they believe their actions are contentious when they occupy a plot. They frame their claims in terms of rights to housing and although they do not say it like Harvey (2003) would, they fight for their right to the city. Everything they do shows their desire to belong. They want to be connected to services. They build their roads and blocks as if they were a regular neighborhood in the

hope of being legalized one day. They do not want to be seen as accretion invasions. “We are not a *cantegri*” they often say. The secrecy and the planning of the first stage of formation quickly transforms into negotiation with the state, both directly and through political networks. Those networks are key mechanisms in transforming electoral political opportunities into collective action, via constituency service, clientelism or all the grays in between (Alvarez-Rivadulla forthcoming).

Others have pointed at the role of political party brokers among popular sectors in Latin America. Javier Auyero, for example has emphasized the role of *peronist* party brokers in mobilizing seemingly spontaneous actions such as looting (Auyero and Moran 2007; Auyero 2007). Squatter leaders in the more organized land invasions act as brokers that link squatters with the state. Sometimes they do it directly and sometimes they resource to their political ties, which are sometimes from different political parties. The nineties was a time in which having only one patron was not as useful as having many patrons. National and municipal governments belonged to different parties. Squatters needed both.

In this article I do argue for the role of political opportunities in generating collective action. But I do so with two important caveats. First, I emphasize the interactive role of grievances with political opportunities. Because they wanted to quarrel with the engrained idea that relative deprivation was the cause of (irrational) mobilization, exponents of resource mobilization first and political opportunities later downplayed the role of hardships or grievances completely. In a beautifully provocative statement in 1974, Tilly wrote:

Grievances are fundamental to rebellion as oxygen is fundamental to combustion. But just as fluctuations in the oxygen content of the air account for little of the distribution of fire in the workaday world, fluctuations in grievances are not a major cause of the presence or absence of rebellion. For that, the political means of acting on grievances which people have at their disposal matter a good deal more (Tilly 1974).

He is here assuming grievances as if they were constant. They are not. As we saw, when hardships are lower, new land invasions are less likely. Hardship and grievances interact with political opportunities.

The second and last caveat that I would like to make is that studying political opportunities as structural variables in quantitative models without looking into the on the ground mechanisms that make them possible do not tell us much about specific contexts and that we lose a lot of richness in that process. At the same time, and although many only qualitative works have showed us a lot about how mobilization works, the lack of some quantitative data often leaves us without knowing how widespread the phenomenon is. Multi-method research covers for both problems and I believe there is a lot to be done in this vein both within the contentious politics literature as well as beyond it.

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