

## Student Protests in Neoliberal Times: A Global Overview (0046)

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We have recently witnessed the re-emergence of massive student protests opposing the process of privatization of higher education (hereafter, HE), demanding equal conditions of access and greater state involvement. Most of these protests have centred on the growing costs of post-secondary education for students and their families, which is related to the general shift from a state financing system to a system centred on individual student responsibility. The assumption is now that, given that education credentials increase individual incomes, HE should be treated as a consumer good. More broadly, this trend has been identified with a process of marketization of HE. Such a marketization has been characterized by one or more of the following measures: 1) introduction of a greater competition into the provision of student education; 2) supplementation of public sources of funding of universities with private sources, especially tuition fees, and 3) concession of greater institutional autonomy from government steering (Klemencic 2014).

In this article, we attempt to establish whether substantive increments in student mobilizations can effectively be detected, if these protests have grown in relation to the development of the global financial crisis, what are their topics and targets, and what is the spatial distribution of these events. To do so, we have collected data on protest events related to university students, drawing on the LexisNexis news dataset, between 2000 and 2015. Events were selected by introducing keywords (in English) that allowed to single out protests of students. The items retrieved were manually revised to discard those that did not fit with the definition of "student protest event", while the remaining items were codified and systematized. While this procedure does not consent to obtain an exact count of the prevalence of this sort of events for each country, it does permit the identification of relevant trends such as expansion, peaks and falls of activism, the topics and objects that mobilize students, the similarities and differences across regions, and the temporality of these components. In addition, the analysis of this dataset is supplemented with qualitative analysis on specific country cases, which serve to illustrate some of these trends. We argue that differences across countries and regions can be accounted for by different political configurations that have allowed –or impeded– the implementation of the aforementioned policy agenda.

As several authors have suggested, the outburst of the economic crisis in 2008 has represented a decisive watershed in the process of marketization: many governments across the world have adopted the neoliberal and pro-austerity agenda as a way out of the crisis. These measures have in fact accelerated the implementation of neoliberal reforms in countries where they previously did not exist. Although differences between countries continue to be pronounced, national HE systems are becoming more alike in the sense of being more market-oriented, even in countries with a strong state intervention tradition. Fighting back such a process, student protests arose and took place in several countries across the five continents ranging from South Korea and India in Asia, Chile and Mexico in America, Canada and US in North America, to South Africa and Nigeria in Africa, and Italy, UK, and Germany in Europe. Our analysis confirms that student protests have proliferated in recent years as a collective response to market-oriented reforms.

By contrast to the dominant research trend in social movement studies devoting little attention to the political economy of contemporary societies (della Porta 2015), we suggest that to better understand the rise, variety, and dynamic of these mobilizations we should put them in relation with the political and economic changes experimented by higher education systems over recent decades. Therefore, the political economy of HE is a key point of departure. Our contention is that the reappearance of students as political actors is related to the emergence of a range of distributional conflicts stemming from the implementation

of the neoliberal agenda in the field of higher education. In this respect, the explanations of the proliferation of recent student protests differs from the interpretations of the 1968 wave, which emphasized the emergence of cultural and post-materialistic grievances as major causes of mobilization (Rootes 2013).

#### REFERENCES:

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