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Despite significant advances in macro and micro level theories, explanation and prediction of urban unrest remains challenging. This dissertation contributes to ongoing efforts to improve understanding of urban unrest through specification of a novel model that utilizes meso-level mechanisms to link insights from existing theories. I show that, during times of structural constraints on state capacity, the ability of state actors to identify and avoid aggrieving sectors of the urban population with high underlying potential for mobilization plays a key role in connecting macro level causes to micro level outcomes and in explaining why some periods of structural constraints lead to urban unrest while others do not. To test my model, I engage in a comparative historical analysis of Argentina and Venezuela during the close of the twentieth century. This is supplemented with a quantitative evaluation of my model of urban unrest using large-n, cross national survey data of Latin American nations between the years of 1990 and 2012. Empirical data largely confirms several propositions generated from the model. I conclude with proposals for further refinement and expansion of this model of urban unrest.

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