

New Social Movements in Times of Conservatism and Austerity: Analysis of the political process of educational mobilisation in The Balearic Islands (2013-2015)

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ABSTRACT

During the 2011-2015 legislature, the education sector in The Balearic Islands was shaken by root-and-branch proposals for educational reform that combined draconian austerity policies and an ambitious plan that questioned the existing linguistic model. Efforts to push through these reforms led to the emergence of new collective actors and networks, and disputes that culminated in the calling of an open-ended strike in the education sector. This paper analyses the path of and reasons for the success of the social mobilisation against said reforms. At the theoretical level, the research is guided by the political process approach, which considers the ideas and structural factors driving collective action. Methodologically, the case study follows the process-tracing approach and is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with key actors and on document analysis. The findings show that frame-bridging, together with the combination of diverse collective action repertoires, played key roles in the social movement's success.

Keywords: education reform; collective action frames; social movement; repertoires of collective action; structure of political opportunities.

SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

After the outbreak of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), new social movements emerged to battle the austerity and privatisation policies applied to Education and Healthcare, among other fields. Between 2013 and 2015, The Balearic Islands underwent one of the busiest periods of social mobilisation in recent decades. In this Autonomous Community, there was fierce social mobilisation against cuts and the *Partido Popular's*¹ [Popular Party — PP] language policy. This mobilisation took many forms, with an open-ended strike in the Education sector being particularly prominent, followed by an unprecedented mass social mobilisation. This social movement gave rise to the emergence of new political actors and major procedural and political changes. It also sapped political

support for the PP government in The Balearic Islands, with the party suffering a major defeat in the 2015 regional elections.

This paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the social mobilisation against Conservative education policies in The Balearic Islands between 2013-2015. The case study sheds light on the keys to the emergence and impact of social movements in the realm of public policies. From a theoretical perspective, the research is based on the political process approach (Della Porta & Diani, 2011; McAdam et al., 1999; Tarrow, 2012), which incorporates elements of a structural nature, such as the context and the scope of political opportunities (Hay, 2002; Tarrow, 2012), and ideational and discursive factors, such as frames of collective action (Snow & Benford, 2000).

Methodologically, the case study is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with key actors, including high-

¹ For example, Pastor (2010) notes that in ideological terms the *Partido Popular* [Popular Party] combines neo-Liberal and neo-Conservative principles.

ranking officials from the Ministry of Education, leading opposition political parties, education inspectors, teachers' and students' unions, members of the association of Secondary School headmasters in Mallorca, Parent Association federations, leaders of interest groups and cultural entities, deans and educators from the University of The Balearic Islands [*Universitat de les Illes Balears* — UIB], and social movements such as the Platform for the Defence of Public Universities [*Plataforma Unitària en Defensa de la Universitat Pública* — PUDUP], the *Crida* platform, and the Teachers' Assembly. The selection of participants included in the sample was intentional (Patton, 2002). The analysis followed an iterative process in which pre-established and emergent codes were combined. Additionally, a documentary analysis of press releases, and news published in the press was conducted. The case study is based on the process-tracing method (Beach and Pedersen, 2013), which facilitated the systematisation and identification of key actors, stages, and events of the reform, as well as the analysis of the relationship between these elements.

Our findings show that forging links between discursive frames, and adopting new forms of communication through social networks, and combining innovative, disruptive repertoires, were all key to the success of the mobilisation. Below, we present the main results of the study, split by each stage of the conflict.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND SOCIAL MOBILISATION IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS

Educational mobilisation in The Balearic Islands was sparked by unpopular root-and-branch reforms that combined austerity policies and major changes to language teaching. In the early 2010s, the Central Government's austerity policies had a big impact on Regional Governments' educational policies. A Decree was passed to slash the public deficit (Decree 5/2012, of 1st June), resulting in a rise in teachers' working hours of teachers, greater job insecurity for temporary staff, and higher student-to-teacher ratios. The Balearic Government not only complied with these measures but expanded them. Consequently,

The Balearic Islands became one of the regions with the severest austerity policies in education.

Furthermore, the Conservative Government led by Bauzá departed from the regionalist line hitherto taken by the Balearic Popular Party. It chose to promote trilingualism in education through the Integrated Language Treatment Decree (TIL). This decree effectively reduced the presence of the Catalan language in classrooms and in so doing, aligned the Balearic Government's language policy with the views of the Spanish Central Government's Minister of Education, José Ignacio Wert (Melià, 2014), and with the principles of the national educational reform under Organic Law² 8/2013 for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE). According to some representatives of social movements defending public education, President José Ramón Bauzá provides the key to grasping the nature of the regional government's reform agenda and the kind of links forged between the Government's and civil society. Due to his national political projection and his eagerness to curry favour with the Central Government, President Bauzá leapt at the opportunity to "deepen austerity policies" and did his utmost to paint a picture of "the weakness of Catalan identity" in The Balearic Islands (interview expuni10, 21st April 2015).

The Emergence of a New Collective Actor: The Teachers' Assembly

In anticipation of the imminent passing of the TIL Decree, several sectoral mobilisations took place in March 2013, denouncing the Balearic Government linguistic and cost-cutting policies (STEI-i³, 03/09/2013). Towards the end of that month, a new collective actor emerged, the Teachers' Assembly. This assembly comprised

2 Translator's Note: In the Spanish political and legal system, *Leyes Orgánicas* (Organic Laws) are a specific category of legislation that has a special status. They are part of Spain's hierarchy of laws. Organic Laws can be seen as having features of Constitutional Law or Fundamental Law and rank higher than ordinary legislation.

3 Translator's Note: STEI-i = *Sindicat de Treballadors i Treballadores de l'Ensenyament de les Illes Balears* [Balearic Islands Education Workers Union]

some 50 spokesmen/women from the various schools (Guerrero, 2015). According to several activists, the attendees included teachers affiliated with unions and political parties, members of teaching renewal movements, and a group of teachers with no prior activist experience who chose to join the Teachers' Assembly to express their discontent (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015; interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015).

On the other side of the conflict, *Círculo Balear* pressured the government through the media to force the removal of Minister Bosch, whom they held responsible for delaying the TIL and not allowing the free choice of language (Guerrero, 2015). According to a *Círculo Balear* leader, Minister Bosch was “very reluctant to implement this trilingualism decree” (interview lidlob08, 20th April 2015). Minister Bosch would have favoured the inclusion of Article 20 in the TIL Decree, stressing schools' freedom in implementing the trilingual program and, thus, facilitating the approval and application of an alternative language project (interview platfap14, 22nd April 2015; interview asinsp15, 22nd April 2015). According to a senior official from the Ministry of Education, the pressures from the Conservative lobby triggered the dismissal of the Minister (interview exconsejed22, 21st April 2014).

Running Education with an Iron Fist

The change in the Ministry of Education marked the beginning of a new period of even greater tension and conflict. Unlike Bosch, who had a long track record in education, the new Minister, Joana Maria Camps, hailed from the General Labour Directorate and had experience in the real estate sector. According to a member of the Inspectors' Association, the new Minister was chosen to ensure implementation of the TIL Decree (interview asinsp16, 22nd April 2015).

Most of the schools acted within the framework of the School Council and took advantage of Article 20 to avoid fully implementing the TIL (Guerrero, 2015). In response, the Regional Secretary of Education, Guillem Estarellas, issued instructions that urged Directors to split teaching hours evenly between the two official languages (interview asdir18, 23rd April

2015) and to draw up a Linguistic Centre Project if the school did not already have one (Guerrero, 2015). The first instruction was “dictating a rule that tries to modify another rule of higher rank, which is a Decree” (interview asdir18, 23rd April 2015), while the second instruction breached the Organic Law of Education (LOE), which stipulates that School Councils are responsible for approving language teaching schemes. In response, the Association of Secondary School Directors in Mallorca and the teachers' union STEI-i filed a lawsuit to annul Secretary Estarellas' instructions. The teachers' unions (STEI-i, FE-CCOO, and FETE-UGT) would also file administrative appeals with the goal of halting and/or postponing the Decree's implementation (Guerrero, 2015, p. 54).

Faced with this situation, the Teachers' Assembly decided to hold meetings in educational centres. In some cases, these assemblies benefited from the dynamics and spaces established by the *Crida* Platform. Due to the escalation of the conflict, there was a proposal for an open-ended strike (interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015), which was agreed upon in the Assembly on 4th June 2013 (Guerrero, 2015). However, as an activist points out, this did not immediately have the support of the teachers' unions (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015; interview lidsindicato20, 24th April 2015). The decision to go on an open-ended strike stemmed from the build-up of discontent and frustration among the teaching staff. Discontent was explained by budget cuts, worsening working conditions, language policy, and government repression, while frustration stemmed from the fact that the government was still sticking to its plans despite two years of mobilisation against them. Faced with this scenario, teachers felt that some collective actions, such as one-day strikes, were ineffective in pressuring the government. Thus, activists pushed for more radical collective action strategies, reviving the traditional ones used by the Labour movement (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015).

From that point on, members of the Teachers' Assembly began researching and learning from the experiences of previous open-ended strikes. As one activist points out, the questions asked were ones such as: “What

did the Labour movement do in the '70s and '80s? What about the teachers? How did they organise? What were their strikes like?" Specifically, they drew inspiration from the strikes at the Port of Barcelona in the 1970s, the strikes of interim teachers in 1977, teacher strikes in 1980, and especially the teacher strike of 1988. They also spoke with former union leaders with experience in such strikes. In their accounts, they identified two key elements to explain the success of previous mobilisations: contact and proximity to the grassroots (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015).

The leadership of the teachers' unions did not initially support the proposal for an open-ended strike. According to a leader of the STEI-i union, based on their experience, some of their members believed that it was best to call for a sustained multi-day strike since it would let them manage the response and, at the same time, husband their forces and stop the mobilisation running out of steam (interview lidsindicato04, 20th April 2015; interview lidsindicato05, 20th April 2015). Their belief was that an open-ended strike would not be sustainable in the long run and would make reaching a settlement harder (interview lidsindicato05, 20th April 2015). These concerns were shared by FE-CCOO (interview lidsindicato19, 23rd April 2015) and FETE-UGT. The latter conducted internal consultations electronically and saw little social support for an open-ended strike (interview lidsindicato20, 24th April 2015).

The unions generally believed that people in the education community needed to grasp the goals and implications of industrial action if the strike was to be successful. Going on an open-ended strike was something that required deep deliberation (interview lidsindicato05, 20th April 2015). It was for these reasons that the unions did not initially endorse an open-ended strike. Instead, they put off a decision until the membership had been consulted in early September. As one of the shop-stewards interviewed pointed out, at the time the unions failed to fully realise social mobilisation's symbolic and emotional potential (interview lidsindicato19, 23rd April 2015).

By contrast, activists in the Teachers' Assembly felt they needed to create circumstances that would boost broad support for an open-ended strike. To achieve this, the Assembly began holding surveys in educational centres to gauge how likely it was that an open-ended strike would succeed. After evaluating the results, they gave the green light for an open-ended labour dispute (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015). For the Assembly, calling the strike had performative effects and served as a motivational framework for action (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015).

Once the decision to go on an open-ended strike was made, legal aspects needed to be resolved. For example, setting up a Strike Committee required at least 4,000 signatures from active teachers. This represented 40% of the teachers working in the public sector (Guerrero, 2015). The Teachers' Assembly received legal support from other unions, such as the *Coordinadora Obrera Sindical* [Workers Union Alliance] (COS) and the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* [National Confederation of Labour] (CNT) (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015).

Another key element was the setting up of a 'strike fund', conceived as an "economic and solidarity component" to make the open-ended strike viable (interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015). The strike fund had three goals: (1) to finance the costs of mobilisation propaganda; (2) to cover fines, etc. incurred by striking members; (3) to foster a solidarity-based movement. Finally, thanks to the success of the initiative, they were also able to cover some of the wages lost by the striking teachers (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015). Alliances with social entities such as the *Obra Cultural Balear* [Balearic Cultural Foundation] played a big role in setting up the strike fund since they put their financial and legal infrastructure at the disposal of the striking teachers (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April 2015; interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015; interview replatcult09, 25th April 2015). The Teachers' Assembly held a mass meeting at the Manacor Theatre on the 26th of June to announce the decision to go on an open-ended strike. The event was attended by about 300 people and had a

major media impact. In communication terms, the Teachers' Assembly featured intensive use of social networks — something that: had a big internal impact; helped mobilise teachers; publicised their main demands and thus shaped public opinion (interview expuni10, 21st April 2015).

In mid-July, the school administrations received negative reports on their Linguistic Centre Projects, along with a report prepared by the Education Inspectorate and instructions from the Regional Secretary of Education, which gave schools just five days to modify their plans (interview asdir18, 23rd April 2015; Guerrero, 2015). However, school councils and staff rejected the Ministry of Education's modification proposal (interview asdir18, 23rd April 2015). Most of the Junior Schools (59%) and High Schools (91%) found themselves in the same boat (Guerrero, 2015), and some of them decided to disobey the Ministry and not draw up a linguistic project (interview platcrid13, 22nd April 2015).

During this period, the school administrations were under great pressure and were even sanctioned to the point where some decided to resign (Guerrero, 2015; interview asdir18, 23rd April 2015). The cases against school headmasters further angered the educational community and encouraged yet more teachers to support the open-ended strike.

In early August, the Teachers' Assembly formally requested a meeting with the Ministry of Education to begin negotiations to end the dispute. Their list of demands is set out in see Table 2. The three main demands were to curtail budget cuts, ensure freedom of language and expression, and the repeal of the LOMCE (interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015).

The demands sparked heated debates in the Teachers' Assembly. Some activists wanted to whittle them down and focus on just a few (of a social or linguistic nature) that were both realistic and achievable. However, most of the teachers chose to create a broad, inclusive list that discursively let them channel much of the pent-up social discontent (interview acasdoc01, 23rd April

2015; interview acasdoc02, 23rd April 2015; interview acasdoc03, 24th April 2015).

Despite widespread discontent and many sectorial protests, no social movement had been able to unite the various struggles against the policies then being pursued by the Balearic government. By coming up with a broad set of demands, the Teachers' Assembly sought to catalyse social mobilisation and bring the various strands together (interview expuni10, 21st April 2015). The decision to build bridges spanning frames of meaning (or frame-bridging, see Snow, et al. 1986) let them aggregate the diverse demands and sources of social unrest — an approach that is the key to understanding the Assembly's remarkable ability to mobilise society.

Between late August and early September, massive events and assemblies were held again, and teachers from Menorca and Ibiza decided to join the open-ended strike as well (Guerrero, 2015). At the same time, the unions explored negotiation routes with the Ministry. A meeting held between both parties on the 2nd of September ended without an agreement, so the STEI-i union decided to go on an open-ended strike (Guerrero, 2015).

The Trigger for Mass Social Discontent: The Decree and Its Role in the Protest

The beginning of the 2013-2014 Academic Year was approaching and political activity was in full swing, with two simultaneous calls for an open-ended strike. On the 3rd of September, the STEI-i and CCOO unions made the first call, with the strike scheduled to begin on the 13th of September. Although they shared the same demands, the other unions in the sector, UGT and ANPE, chose not to join the open-ended strike (Diario de Mallorca, 04/09/2013). The unions making the call strategically decided to expand the open-ended strike to the private-concerted sector to further pressure the government (interview with lidsindicato07, 22nd April 2015). Two days later, the Teachers' Assembly formalised their own call for an open-ended strike starting on the 16th of September (Es Diari, 05/09/2013).

At the same time, the unions were engaged in a legal battle against the government's regulations, and they were particularly effective in the case of the TIL. The legal actions taken by the unions had an impact, leading the Superior Court of Justice of The Balearic Islands (TSJIB) to grant a precautionary injunction suspending the Decree due to formal errors in approving the instructions covering its application. The instructions drawn up by the Regional Secretary of Education were likewise suspended.

The Balearic government reacted to these injunctions by passing a Decree-Act requiring educational institutions to implement the TIL Decree, thus bypassing the TSJIB's precautionary injunctions (Guerrero, 2015). According to several interviewees, the high-handed approval of this Decree-Act fuelled even greater social unrest, which in any case had been building from the outset of the new legislature. The upshot was a wave of solidarity and social support for the teachers. It also swayed a large number of teachers who had been sitting on the fence over an open-ended strike (interview with asdir18, 23rd April 2015; interview with lidsindicato07, 22nd April 2015).

On the 12th of September, just four days before the scheduled start of the strike, all chances of avoiding industrial action had run out. The prospects of meaningful dialogue with the Education Sectorial Board were zero. Shortly thereafter, associations of parents and guardians gave their support for the teachers' struggle. This marked the beginning of a stormy academic year, characterised by the impending open-ended strike. Over three weeks, from the 16th of September to the 7th of October, all school teaching activities ground to a halt as staff threw themselves into frenzied political activities, organising advocacy actions and holding daily assemblies. Throughout this period, many large-scale demonstrations took place (Guerrero, 2015). The strike began with a 90% turn-out on its first day and was widely supported until the end (interview with lidsindicato07, 22nd April 2015). To prevent the well-known "free-rider" problem (see Moore, 1995), activists drew up strategies to get those teachers who were lukewarm about joining the collective action

to take the plunge (interview with acasdoc02, 23rd April 2015).

Alliances between social movements are crucial for maximising the impact of collective action and promoting social change (Beamish and Luebbers, 2009). In the case of the open-ended strike, the alliances forged between educational organisations and other collective actors, such as student organisations and associations of parents and guardians, played a key role in sustaining the strike over time. It also helped cut costs for those taking part. While the interests of families and teachers often do not align in the context of an indefinite teachers' strike (see Narodowski, Moschetti, and Alegre, 2016), in the case of the educational conflict in The Balearic Islands, the lack of dialogue and the cost-cutting policies of the Conservative government led families to run a support campaign for the striking teachers. The campaign was called "Empty Classrooms" and promoted students' non-attendance, letting the teachers maintain the open-ended strike (Guerrero, 2015; interview with platfap14, 22nd April 22, 2015). Moreover, support from public figures and renowned artists for the Strike Fund was remarkable, sparking a powerful solidarity movement (interview with asinsp15, 22nd April 2015; interview with asdir18, 23rd April 2015; interview with acasdoc01; interview with acasdoc03, 24th April 2015), which reached beyond regional administrative boundaries and swiftly spread to other Autonomous Communities (interview with replatcult09, 25th April 2015).

The rising social protest and the success of the open-ended strike put strong pressure on the Conservative party, leading to internal divisions. Mayors from the *Part Forana*⁴ who belonged to the Regionalist-Conservative sector of the PP, distanced themselves from the party's language policy. In many municipalities, symbolic motions rejecting the education reform were passed, often with the support or abstention of Conservative mayors and council members.

4 This is how most of the island of Mallorca is known outside the city of Palma. Outside the Capital, much of the island is rural in character.

These internal rifts also spilled over into the media, where some PP members made statements to pressure the Government into negotiating with the teachers. Despite the initial reluctance of the Ministry of Education to negotiate with the strike committees, the government eventually yielded four days before a scheduled mass demonstration. However, the government's proposal did not satisfy the strike committees (Guerrero, 2015).

The protests came to a head with a massive demonstration on the 29th of September under the slogan "Reject Imposition, Defend Education". Some 100,000 people took part in the demo and it was one of the largest protests in The Balearic Islands over recent decades. A few days after this mobilisation, the teachers decided to suspend the strike without calling it off. However, on the 6th of October, "parents' associations" and the teachers warned the Government that they would continue the industrial action.

Outcome: Staging the Pacification of the Conflict and Change of Government

In the aftermath of the open-ended strike, the STEI-i and ADIDE unions continued to successfully advocate for legal action. At the same time, the Teachers' Assembly took actions promoting non-approval of the PGA, a repertoire of collective action introduced by the *Crida* platform in previous academic years. These actions proved quite successful (in the case of public schools, nearly 70% of educational institutions supported them). Between October and November 2013, the unions and the Teachers' Assembly organised two strike calls, joining the actions carried out at the national level against the LOMCE. Several demonstrations were also held to protest against the implementation of the LOMCE and the TIL. Furthermore, at the end of November, the *Crida* Platform once again fostered sit-ins at educational institutions (Guerrero, 2015).

As the legislature drew to a close, the government tried to appear more open to dialogue, while it tried to split the social and political actors opposing the reform. To achieve this, partial agreements were negotiated based on the special interests of each actor. Some ne-

gotiations tried to exclude the strike committees but did not result in an agreement. Other negotiations, such as those with the employers of private-concerted schools, were successful (Guerrero, 2015). Nevertheless, relations between the government, opposition political parties, teacher unions, and social movements remained tense until the end of the legislature.

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 Academic Year, the government dismissed Minister Camps due to the annulment of the TIL Decree by the TSJIB. Once again, the legal battle waged by the teacher unions (alongside other actors) had a major impact. The court's ruling was unequivocal and made the Decree's implementation impossible. Núria Riera, who had served as the head of Public Administration, and was the Government spokeswoman, took over as the Minister of Education (La Vanguardia, 26/09/2014). With her, the Conservative party tried to restart dialogue with the Education community. The conflict came to a head during the regional elections on the 24th of May. In them, the Conservative Party lost power, and 37.3% of the votes it had won in the previous elections. By contrast, Left-wing forces, such as *Més* and *Podemos*, made a breakthrough and formed a coalition led by the PSIB (El Mundo, 25/05/2015). The new government sought to distance itself from the previous administration, bringing in various measures in the Education field at the outset of the legislature. These measures included: repealing The Symbols Act, boosting teaching and inspection staff, earmarking additional resources for Education, and cutting teacher substitution times. They also voiced opposition to the implementation of the LOMCE in The Balearic Islands.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

During the 2011-2015 legislature, the Popular Party made numerous changes to the Education system in The Balearic Islands. Major changes included severe public spending cuts and the reform of the linguistic model used in schools. Throughout this period, relations between the government and social actors (unions, social movements, etc.) worsened and quickly

shifted towards a “confrontation model” (see Verger et al., 2016). The educational policies of the Conservative government created conditions that spawned new social movements. In The Balearic Islands, austerity policies sparked sectoral social protests that, while expressing social discontent, had had little political impact up until then and that did little to mobilise society.

Nevertheless, the Teachers’ Assembly showed an ability to create frameworks that resonated with society as a whole, building bridges between different frames of interpretation (frame bridging) (Snow et al., 1986). This was strategic in uniting the struggles against the TIL and the LOMCE, and the defence of public services in a unified social mobilisation that was unprecedented in The Balearic Islands’ recent history.

Education is generally a salient issue (Benford and Snow, 2000) for the population, being one that all social sectors can identify with. In the context of the educational conflict covered in this paper, both the teachers (as sources) and their discourses (as contents) provided the Teachers’ Assembly with a “solid public image” that strengthened the narrative fidelity of their story (see Benford & Snow, 2000; Della Porta & Diani, 2011, p.114). Another key factor in understanding the success of the strikes is the communication strategy used to inform, persuade, and mobilise the public. The Teachers’ Assembly was aware that its existence as a social movement and the persistence of conflict depended on its presence in mass media and social networks. For this reason, the Assembly painstakingly worked on the communicative aspect — before, during, and after the open-ended strike.

The social conflict reached its climax with the calling of a sectoral open-ended strike, accompanied by

massive social mobilisation. The social movement had a procedural impact, placing its demands at the centre of the political debate and on the agenda of all Opposition parties, while also creating new political subjects and interlocutors in the educational field. It also helped wear away electoral support for the Balearic Popular Party, which crumbled in the regional elections of 2015. The upshot was a sea change in public policies. These changes included the repeal of the Co-existence Act and the Symbols Act, suspension of the trilingualism project, the end of budget cuts, and a rise in resources and teaching staff.

The success of the mobilisation can be put down to the convergence of a broad set of factors. The social movement was able to combine traditional collective action repertoires with more disruptive and innovative ones (see Tarrow, 2012; Verger, 2008). Despite the risks involved, the choice of an open-ended strike as a mobilisation repertoire was crucial. The capacity for symbolic production, a solid public image, and the credibility of their discourses (see Snow et al., 1986) allowed the teachers’ demands to garner broad social support and boost their mobilisation power. The government’s decision to impose reforms by force, without consensus or negotiation with the unions and the Teachers’ Assembly proved counter-productive, opening up political opportunities (see Hay, 2002; Tarrow, 2012). Such a high-handed approach helped legitimise protest and mobilise traditionally more apathetic social groups. Judicial rulings against the TIL further spurred this legitimisation and mobilisation. One can say that the mix of demonstrations and actions in the courts (such as those taken by the unions against the TIL Decree and the Co-existence and Symbols Acts) is the key to grasping the political impact and social reach of the protests discussed in this paper.

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