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How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences

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The Impact of Micro and Macro-Level Effects of Crisis on Protest Behaviour

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Abstract

European nations have been negatively affected by the economic crisis that started in 2008 to very different degrees. The sudden rise in demonstrations particularly in those countries most hard hit by the crisis suggests that grievance theories – dismissed in favour of resource-based models since the 1970s – might have a role to play for explaining protest behaviour. While most previous studies have tested these theories at the individual or contextual level, it is likely that mechanisms at both levels are interrelated. To fill this lacuna, we examine the ways in which individual-level grievances interact with macro-level factors to impact on political action. We also examine the way in which hardship at the macro-level mediates subjective feelings of relative deprivation. In particular, we examine how the impact of individual subjective feelings of deprivation may be conditional upon the presence of contextual objective factors, both in terms of economic conditions and in terms of political (policy) measures. We find that, while individual-level feelings of relative deprivation have a direct effect on the propensity to have protested in the last year, this effect is also moderated by the economic factors such as higher unemployment rates, but also by the austerity policies enacted by national governments, as measured by cuts in social spending. These findings suggest that the interaction of the contextual and individual level should continue to be explored in future studies in order to further clarify the mechanisms underlying protest behaviour.

Keywords: Protest, participation, Western Europe

The Impact of Micro and Macro-Level Effects of Crisis on Protest Behaviour

Introduction

The economic crisis that started in 2008 has led to growing unemployment and shrinking economic growth across Europe and the rest of the world (De Grauwe and Ji 2013).

Almost ten years on, there is great variation in the economic conditions of different European nations. In some countries, such as Greece and Spain, unemployment is still well over 20%, whereas in others such as Germany and Switzerland it is under 5%. In some countries, such as the UK and Poland, GDP is growing a healthy rate of 2.6 and 3.4%, respectively, whereas in others, such as Italy the economy shrunk by 0.4% in 2014.

Particularly in those countries worst hit by economic recession and sky-rocketing unemployment, large protests took place as European governments were blamed for the deteriorating conditions (Giugni and Grasso 2015). This observation raises the question to what extent protest behaviour is linked to both micro- and macro-level deprivation.

Moreover, it also raises the question as to what is the relationship between objective material deprivation – at both the micro- and macro-level – vis-à-vis subjective feelings of an imbalance between expected standards of living and the realities of current economic condition as a result of the economic crisis. The literature on political participation has been divided between those emphasising the importance of resources – including political resources – for political involvement and those instead who see grievances as an important spur for action. Since the 1970s, objective material conditions and deprivation have largely been dismissed in the social movement literature as spurs for non-institutional political

actions (Useem 1998; Buechler 2004). Earlier scholars such as Smelser (1962), Gurr (1970) and, to some extent, Piven and Cloward (1977) had seen negative material conditions, expressed in grievances, as the precondition spurring individuals to contentious political action. However, the main strands of research on mobilisation emerging since then, including resource mobilization (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1973), political process (e.g. Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Kriesi et al. 1995), and new social movement theory (e.g. Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981) viewed material hardship as largely irrelevant or of importance only to the extent that social movements could frame it in ways to mobilise people to action.

The sudden rise of protest movements during the recent economic crisis has brought to the fore the question of whether grievance theories may play a role for explaining political mobilisation. A number of scholars have therefore started to re-examine the impact of grievances for protest behaviour (Giugni and Grasso 2015; Rüdiger and Karyotis 2013). However, most studies only examine the effect of these factors on political involvement from either an individual or a macro-level perspective, but do not consider the interaction of individual and contextual level factors (Kern et al. (2015) is a recent exception, but here change in economic conditions is examined and the focus is not protest specifically). This paper examines the interplay of micro-level grievances and macro-level factors. In particular, we argue that the impact of individual feelings of deprivation is conditional upon the presence of contextual factors, both in terms of economic conditions and in terms of government policies.

The high levels of variation in the current economic contexts of European nations as well as the differences in policy responses across national governments – in particular, in terms of intensity and severity of austerity policies – provide an excellent test case for

investigating the macro-micro interactions this proposition. While subjective perceptions of relative deprivation have been shown to be important for mobilisation to contentious political action (Klandermans et al. 2008; Gurr 1970), we argue that individuals also take cues from the general economic environment and that state policies will also have an impact on mobilisation. We maintain that the impact of feelings of relative deprivation on engagement in protest activities is moderated by the extent of the economic crisis (objective conditions) and by the kind of responses national governments give to it (austerity policies).

We analyse data from an original cross-national survey conducted in 2015 in the context of the LIVEWHAT project funded by the European Commission under the auspices of the 7th Framework Programme. We also include macro-level data on unemployment, GDP growth, social spending and tax wedge. We specify logistic multilevel models with random intercept coefficients to take into account the two-level nature of the data (country and individual). Our research suggests that studies of protest behaviour should examine how the role of micro-level hardship and deprivation interacts with contextual factors in order to understand the drivers of political action, particularly during times of crisis.

Previous Research

As citizens struggle to cope with the effects of the economic crisis, attention has been drawn to the potential social and political effects of the recession. One type of possible negative effect of economic hardship is the decline of political participation and civic engagement. If citizens need to struggle with working overtime to keep a job, searching for a new job, or more generally dealing with the array of difficulties thrown up by economic

hardship, they will have less time and resources to engage in political action. Perhaps more importantly, losing a job (or, for young people, not being able to find one) means the loss or absence of social networks and personal contacts which facilitate the spread of information and solidarity and motivate people to engage in collective, political action.

However, while the experience of economic difficulty can certainly be understood to drain resources from political participation, it may also be considered that tough economic conditions generate grievances which people may seek to redress through political participation, and, in particular, protest. Economic crises may provide the political space and motivations for the mobilisation of those seeking to criticise what are perceived to be unjust patterns of wealth distribution in advanced capitalist democracies and to draw attention to the fact that not all sections of society bear the costs of economic crisis evenly. For example, the rhetoric of the Occupy movement set the greedy, corrupt financial sector 1%, against the 99% of hard-working, law-abiding citizens.

The debate over whether hardship and deprivation lead to an increase or a decrease in protest participation has recently been revamped in the social movement literature. Popular in the 1970s, following Durkheim's classic thinking, strain and breakdown theories saw social movements (along with riots, panics, crowds, etc.) as one subtype of collective behaviour resulting from weakened or absent social controls (Buechler 2004: 47). For example, Blumer (1951) understood collective behavior as spontaneous group activity that emerged out of social unrest, or breakdown. Another variant in this tradition was the relative deprivation theory (Davies 1962; Geschwender 1968; Gurr 1970). Here the strain is understood at the social-psychological individual, not the societal, level, and pertains to comparisons either with some external reference group or oneself against past and future

selves (Buechler 2004: 49). Smelser (1962) linked strain and breakdown into a structural-functional macro-structural theory of collective behavior (ranging from panics, crazes, fads, riots, and revolutionary movements) by suggesting that it emerges out of structural conduciveness, structural strain, generalized beliefs, precipitating factors, mobilization of action and the breakdown of social control. Grievance theories see objective material deprivation as instrumental to social movement mobilisations (Buechler 2004; Useem 1998). Various feelings such as psychological strain, alienation and other negative emotions were understood to emerge from this, leading people to challenge the political order (Opp 1988). Relative deprivation and social breakdown theories are among the most popular accounts. Relative deprivation suggested that individuals who experience a gap between their expectations and their experienced reality will engage in collective action in order to reduce or eliminate this gap at the micro level. According to this line of reasoning, it was particularly a reversal in economic well-being that was likely to lead collective political action. Feelings of relative deprivation more broadly, however, could result from other types of comparisons, including one's past, one's parents' at their own age, another's present, one's future. Revolution (Davies 1962), civil strife (Gurr 1970), and also political violence (Feierabend et al. 1969) were linked to relative deprivation.

On the other hand, social breakdown theory focussed on the dissolution of social cohesion in society during periods of particular social change at the macro level. Kornhauser's (1959) mass society theory emphasized concerns over anomie and egoism present in Durkheim's classic work suggesting that due to the breakdown of mid-level groups and social anchors individuals would gravitate to collective behavior as one of the only few available sources of social belonging in modernity. Although their explanation

also includes political factors, Piven and Cloward (1977) found that the structural changes that came suddenly with the Great Depression eliminated routines and daily life systems leading to social unrest and protest. They emphasised the effect of economic change on the structures of daily life in particular, noting the more structural aspects of breakdown spurring action. Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976) had also noted the role of structural breakdown as factors explaining protest but still emphasised the importance of perceptions of illegitimate deprivation as leading to revolt. The “outrage” on the “moral assumptions” of what were “legitimate and illegitimate practices” “quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action” (Thompson 1971: 78-9).

While some elements of strain and breakdown theories persisted in the works of Goldstone (1986, 1991a, 1991b), Piven and Cloward (1977) Snow et al. (1998) and Useem (1980), among others, this type of explanation was called into question by a large number of scholars as it did not provide useful tools to explain and make sense of the new social movements emerging since the 1960s. For example, In this vein, Tilly et al. (1975) emphasized group solidarity as the key factor explaining collective action and also political violence as an extension of such tactics under specific political circumstances. More generally, resource mobilization theory emphasized the rationality of social movements as political challenges following the patterns of more institutional types of action (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978). Against the evidence for grievance based approaches at the macro-level, at the individual level, evidence tends to consistently support resource-based theories as epitomised in the classic “baseline” or SES model which placing variables such as education, occupation and income at the centre of the analysis participation (Verba et al. 1995).

The rise of resource mobilisation theory meant that the link between material deprivation and protest was further undermined. This theory emerged in the 1970s and quickly became predominant in the field. Many studies rejected a link between grievances and protest (Gamson 1975; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978; Snyder and Tilly 1972). The underlying argument was that grievances were constant over time and as such what mattered for mobilization were those things that varied, i.e. resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Political process theory (McAdam 1982) further challenged the link between hardship and protest by emphasising the relevance of political opportunities, endogenous resources and cognitive liberation. Concerning this last aspect, while still relying on psychological aspects, here the focus was on the realisation that political action could bring about social change. Drawing on Edelman (1971), this work emphasised the importance of individuals in groups seeing themselves as able to change society through protest. It was the social construction of oppression as unjust and able to be challenged that provided the opportunity for collective action. Without this subjective understanding, the status quo was likely to go unchallenged even in the face of higher resources (McAdam 1982: 34).

Therefore, while the social construction of grievances is generally seen as critical for protest mobilisation (Klandermans et al. 2008), objective material deprivation is seen as less important. Against this view, a number of studies in particular have posed a challenge in highlighting “objective” grievances as potentially relevant for mobilisation (Snow et al. (1998) McVeigh (2009). Snow et al.’s (1998) “disruption of the quotidian” framework emphasizes the role of events interfering with normal routines – in the tradition of Piven and Cloward (1977)– from national level events such as nuclear disasters to threats to the

neighbourhood. When economic hardship leads to changes in routines it becomes a quotidian disruption (Snow and Soule 2009). As such, movements are more likely to emerge when there is a dramatic deterioration of economic conditions without an equal decline in expectations. Tilly (1978) himself had noted how threats were more likely catalysts than opportunities since people are adaptive and will miss what is taken away from them whereas it takes a leap of faith and imagination of what could be to strive to achieve new gains.

Indeed, it could be contended that some elements of strain and breakdown theories survived in the ways in which we view social movements now. For example, the concept of opportunity in Tilly's (1978) mobilization model of collective action – defined as the increased vulnerability of other groups and governments to the actions of a challenger pursuing their interests – could be seen to link to strain and breakdown as facilitating conditions (Buechler 2004: 61). McAdam's (1982) political process model recognizes cognitive liberation as central for understanding the emergence of social movements. Nonetheless, long gone are the days when social movements were understood as deviant behavior resulting out of psychological strain and social breakdown. Current literature overwhelmingly sees movements and protest as “normalized”(Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001) and part of the standard repertoire of action available to democratic publics. More recent literature on unconventional political participation generally points to contemporary protesters as very similar to the general population but younger and more highly educated individuals(Grasso 2013; Norris et al. 2005; Schussman and Soule 2005; Saunders et al. 2012; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). In particular, younger people are understood to be more “biographically available” (McAdam 1986).

McVeigh's (2009: 43) power-devaluation thesis emphasises a broader link between hardship and collective action. Here decline in economic, political and status-based power, altering individuals' perceptions of their circumstances and providing opportunities to construct new frames for interpretation are seen to support mobilization. Through this framing and cognition actors perceive that they can make a difference by mobilising around grievances.

Governments are generally held accountable for economic performance and as such when the economic context deteriorates they are held responsible leading to protest action against them (Coleman 1990: 501). The level of unemployment is one of the most common measures of economic hardship. Kerbo and Shaffer (1986) found that that protest events in the New York Times between 1890 and 1940 were correlated with unemployment with peaks mapping on to each other. Jenkins et al. (2003) showed correlations between unemployment and black activism in the US, but protest was less when hardship was the highest. Snow et al. (2005) also found unemployment was positive associated with protest counts in the 1980s in sampled US cities, and other measures of deprivation were also linked to activism even when controlling for all factors. Opp (2000), too, found unemployment and low income correlated with discontent which associated with political engagement; those that were less unhappy with their position were less likely to participate. Myers and Caniglia (2004) showed a link between unemployment, poverty and the likelihood of inner-city riots in US cities in the 1960s.

On the other hand, other studies found a negative association between unemployment and labour militancy in the US (Isaac et al. 2006; Isaac and Christiansen 2002). Piven and Cloward (1992) suggested that with the "normalization of protest" and the

becoming mainstream of at least certain forms of collective action, relative deprivation and grievances would be less likely to have an impact especially when compared to resources at the organisational level. Other studies found no link between radical right violence and unemployment in Germany (Koopmans and Olzak 2004) or between unemployment the number of far right organisations (Van Dyke and Soule 2002).

Most recently, the current economic crisis has spurred further studies. Caren (2011) has found some evidence for grievance theory at the macro-level showing that recession in particular is linked to revolts. Laurence and Lim (2012) showed that the economic crisis has depressed volunteering in the US and UK. Most recently, Kern et al. (2015), using European Social Survey, data for 2002-2010 show evidence for a direct effect of unemployment change between 2009 and 2010 on a scale measure of non-institutionalised participation. However, they find no evidence for “double-deprivation theory” (Foster and Matheson 1995:1168): the expectation that in countries particularly hit by the crisis “the personal becomes political” so that those individuals who suffer personally become particularly motivated to become active.

To summarise, classic breakdown theories, focussing on grievances and relative deprivation as the origins for political protest, have been increasingly dismissed. Instead, mobilisation models which emphasise the importance of resources, political opportunities, the construction of political problems and ideological identification for the development of political solidarity and the organisational structures necessary for political action and mobilisation, have received more support. The main ideas behind this shift in focus are that: 1) while groups may be relatively deprived, they first need to realise, or perceive this, and also, 2) see themselves as able to mobilise and effect political change, generally through

membership of a political group. In the absence of the construction of grievances and relative deprivation as social or political problems which can be redressed through political action, and without the organisational structures, resources, and political opportunities necessary to mobilise and effect political change, the experience of economic hardship or other forms of disadvantage on their own are unlikely to lead to political participation. According to this line of argument, the experience of economic recession, and more specifically, the costs and pressures experienced by individuals suffering economic hardship, are more likely to push them to exit political engagement, rather than mobilise them to political action.

We build on this idea that grievances matter to the extent that they are socially constructed to develop the argument that the hardship and deprivation felt by individuals in times of crisis depends on certain aspects of the context. In this perspective, two kinds of contextual aspects should play a decisive role. On the one hand, the broader economic context is expected to matter. This brings us back to the discussion of “objective” conditions and grievances. While we agree with most scholars that objective grievances as such should not have an impact on the propensity to protest, whereas subjective perceptions of hardship may have it, we suggest that macro-level “facts” such as rising unemployment rates and a declining economy may moderate the effect of individual grievances. On the other hand, following Bermeo and Bartels (2014), we suggest that the policies implemented by national governments may also play such a moderating role. Bermeo and Bartels (2014) in particular argue that people react to austerity policies rather than directly to the economic repercussions of the crisis. This argument can be read in the light of political opportunity theory since we can include policies as an important component of political opportunities

(Meyer 2004). From this perspective, austerity policies may be conducive to protest directly as well as indirectly by influencing the relationship between individual feelings of deprivation and the propensity to engage in protest activities.

In sum, we expect micro-level feelings of relative deprivation to lead to engagement in protest activities to the extent that they are supported by macro-level external conditions in terms of poor economic conditions and in terms of austerity policies. The former can be seen for example in high unemployment rates or slow economic growth, while the latter are reflected in can be seen in particular in government cuts in social spending and an increase of taxation. Our effort is consistent with previous works that have stressed the importance of the micro-macro linkages for explaining protest behaviour (Opp 2009).

INSERT TABLE 1

INSERT TABLE 2

Data and Methods

We use data from an original cross-national survey (N=18,370) conducted in 2015 in the context of the LIVEWHAT project funded by the European Commission under the auspices of their 7th Framework Programme (grant agreement number 613237). The survey was conducted in each of the nine European countries included in the project: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. We also include macro-level data from the World Bank on unemployment and GDP growth as well as from the OECD on government social spending and tax wedges. Descriptive statistics for all the variables are presented in Table 1. Once all missing values are removed the final sample is 17,667 (Ns for each country are reported in Table 2).

Our dependent variable is a dichotomous variable measuring whether someone had participated in protests in the last 12 months. Since studies have shown that protest participation has distinct features to other types of political action that could reasonably be classed in the “unconventional” realm (Grasso 2014) we do not create scales of activities but rather focus on this “modal” expression (Tarrow 1996) of social movement activism – particularly as exhibited by the anti-austerity demonstrations taking place as a result of the crisis. Studies that construct scales for non-institutional participation (e.g. Kern et al. 2015) are problematic, particularly at the cross-national level since they confound very different types of political action. Some actions such as petitioning are in some countries even more popular than voting whereas other forms such as occupying are practiced in most European countries only by very tiny fractions of the population. Moreover, since we want to understand the impact of the economic context in 2014 on participation in 2015, we limited the indicator to participation in the last year. Table 2 shows the proportion of individuals that said they had demonstrated in the last twelve months in each country. As we can see, there is a reasonable degree of variation. Part of the variation appears to be related to the severity and extent of the crisis. Countries where the crisis had deeper effects such as Greece saw greater levels of protest activism.

Moreover, our key independent variable for subjective feelings of relative deprivation is retrospective to the last five years so that the deterioration of conditions relative to expectations should have at least begun to occur prior to protest participation in the last 12 months and as such the time-ordering of independent and dependent variables respects the requirements of causality. This question asks respondents whether they felt that the economic situation of their household was much better or much worse than it was five

years ago. We dichotomise this measure following previous research (Rüdig and Karyotis 2013) in a dummy for whether individuals felt the economic situation of their household had become worse. Table 2 also shows the proportion of individuals who said the economic situation had become worse in each country. There is a good amount of variation also in this respect.

Our key macroeconomic variables aim to examine both negative and positive indicators of economic context. On the one hand, high unemployment levels are perhaps the most pernicious consequence of the current economic crisis in Europe. Countries such as Greece and Spain, where unemployment is highest, are those that in general have suffered the most from the current economic crisis. On the other hand, we also examine GDP growth as this is perhaps the clearest measure that a country is doing well and is coming out of recession. Countries with positive and large GDP growth figures are understood to be out of recession and to have curbed the most pernicious effects of the economic crisis. Both variables are taken for 2014 in order to examine conditions prior to participation but not too far back in time.

On the policy side, we include two proxies of austerity policies: the government expenses for social policies (as a percentage of the GDP) and the tax wedge (as a percentage of labour cost). These two variables reflect the definition of austerity policies as reducing government spending, especially in the social realm, and increasing taxation, especially on labour. Again, both variables are taken for 2014.

We also include in our models the usual socio-demographic controls: age, gender, education level (low), occupation (manual) and employment status (whether the respondent is unemployed). We also include a number of controls for political attitudes and resources:

political interest, internal and external political efficacy, left-right values, libertarian-authoritarian values, and number of organisational memberships (distributions by country for all dependent and independent variables are provided in Table 2).

Our dependent variable is measured at the individual level but we have independent variables at both the individual and the country level. Moreover, we are interested in the interactions between these two levels since our argument refers to differences in how individual subjective feelings of deprivation relate to individuals' protest behaviour according to country-level economic and political context. For this reason, we specify multilevel models with random intercept coefficients to take into account the two-level nature of the data (country and individual). This model is useful to correct for the within-country dependence of observations (intra-class correlation) and adjusts both within and between parameter estimates in relation to the clustered nature of the data (Snijders and Bosker 1999). Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimate logistic multilevel models with a Gaussian link function.

Results

We specify six models reported in Table 3: the first is the empty model; model 2 includes only the individual-level control variables and the key individual-level independent variable measuring relative deprivation; model 3 adds to this the attitudinal variables and number of associational memberships (0-12); model 4 includes the first macro-level indicator, unemployment rate in 2014; model 5 GDP growth in 2014; model 6 social spending in 2014; model 7 tax wedge in 2014. Finally, model 8 includes all the four macro-level

variables (main effects) with their respective cross-level interactions with relative deprivation.

Model fit clearly improves between the second and third models in particular, as signalled by the reduction in Log Likelihood. There is also an improvement with the inclusion of the macro-level factors and their cross-level interactions with relative deprivation, particularly unemployment in model 4, and in model 8.

Across models 1-7 (model 8 includes cross-level interactions and therefore main effects in it should be disregarded) relative deprivation has a positive effect on protest participation; controls behave largely as expected. Moreover, education level does not have a significant effect once political interest is introduced in model 3. Having a manual occupation also has no effect, but being unemployed has a negative and significant effect across models. In other words, at the individual level there is very little evidence for grievance theory: rather, being unemployed reduces chances of demonstrating (this also goes against the predictions of biographical availability in some specifications). Also in line with the resources/SES and civic voluntarism model (Verba et al. 1995), having a greater political interest, having stronger internal and external efficacy (the direction of the items in the scale is negative so the effect of external efficacy is also positive), being more left-wing (relative to right-wing) and also being more libertarian (relative to more authoritarian) all have a significant and positive effect on demonstrating; as expected, organisational membership also has a strong positive effect.

What happens when we consider the macro-level economic factors? When unemployment is included in model 4, we can see that there is a positive and significant effect of this economic context variable on demonstrating. Individuals in countries with

higher unemployment are more likely to have engaged in protests in the last 12 months. At first glance, this provides some evidence for grievance theory: at the macro-level, countries with worse economic conditions are more likely to experience protest. However, the inclusion of this macro-level variable in model 4 does not remove the individual-level effect of relative deprivation found previously. Subjective feelings of relative deprivation still have an impact regardless of whether individuals are living in countries with high or low unemployment levels. This suggests that individuals examine their own household situation with respect to their expectations of where they should have been and this mechanism operates independently of wider comparisons, for example that their country is faring better, in terms of the unemployment rate, relative to other countries.

When GDP growth is included in model 5, there is a negative and significant direct effect of this economic context variable on protest. Individuals in countries with lower GDP growth are more likely to have engaged in protests in the last 12 months. Again, this might be seen as providing evidence for grievance theory: at the macro-level, countries with lower levels of economic growth are more likely to experience protest. However, the inclusion of this macro-level variable in model 5 does not remove the individual-level effects found previously. Subjective feelings of relative deprivation still have an impact regardless of whether individuals are living in countries with high or low GDP growth. Once more, this supports the idea that individuals primarily examine their own household situation with respect to their expectations of where they should have been and that comparisons with other countries that are experiencing better economic conditions do not explain away the effect of subjective feelings of relative deprivation.

Turning to macro-level political factors, we observe a similar pattern as for the economic context. When social spending is included in model 6, this has a positive effect on demonstration activities. At first counter-intuitive, this can be explained as follows, countries with higher social spending have more demanding citizens that might be more sensitive to declining standards of living since they have come to expect more from their governments. Again, the inclusion of this macro-level political factor does not erode the effect of relative deprivation, meaning that the latter still has an impact regardless of whether individuals are living in countries with strong or weak austerity policies.

When including tax wedge in model 7 there is a small but significant (at the 10 percent level) effect: the greater the tax wedge, the greater the protest. This is in line with Bermeo and Bartels' (2014) hypothesis that people react to austerity policies rather than directly to the negative effects of the economic crisis. At the same time, however, the inclusion of this macro-level factor once again does not change the effect of relative deprivation. In other words, the latter plays a role net of this measure of austerity policies.

Yet, the main goal of this research, developing on previous work in the literature, was to combine the individual and macro-level perspectives on protest mobilisation in times of crisis. To extend this framework, model 8 includes cross-level interactions between each of our macro-level variables and relative deprivation at the individual level. Our results show that in countries with higher unemployment rates, the effect of feelings of relative deprivation on participation is increased. So, for example, individuals who feel that their household conditions have deteriorated in the last five years in Greece or Spain are more likely to protest than individuals who have the same feelings in Germany or Switzerland. This makes perfect sense, and shows that individual-level subjective feelings

are moderated – or amplified – by the wider national economic context: individuals feeling that their conditions have deteriorated in the last five years in Greece or Spain are likely to have experienced worse deterioration than individuals in countries such as Germany and Switzerland that have had less negative experiences of the recent economic crisis. As such these results show that while relative deprivation at the individual level has a positive effect on protest participation regardless of the economic context, where the context is particularly negative with respect to unemployment the effect of deprivation is magnified.

To some extent, this conditional effect also exists with the political context and, more precisely, with government enacted austerity policies. Our results in model 8 also show that this also occurs in countries with higher social spending. In contrast, neither the GDP nor tax wedge, although they have a direct effect on protest participation, seem to play a moderating role in this respect.

INSERT TABLE 3

Conclusion

Our study shows the value of examining the cross-context conditionality of grievances for individual-level protest participation. At the individual level, subjective feelings of relative deprivation are found to matter for protest behaviour. As such, we find some evidence supporting Snow et al.'s (1998) thesis that the mismatch between current standard of living and expectations has some role to play for mobilising individuals, net of their objective economic position in society. However, these subjective feelings are not completely disjointed from both the economic and political context. On the one hand, certain macro-level economic factors condition the effect of these subjective feelings. Specifically, the

effect of the latter for protest behaviour is stronger in countries with higher unemployment. Higher unemployment at the national level leads individuals to be more likely to “listen” to their subjective feelings of relative deprivation – perhaps realising that this is not just their own, individualised private problem, but rather a generalised, national one shared by many others and therefore politicising their private lived experience, resulting in outward political action. This in turn suggests that individuals take cues from their wider economic environment that lead them to be more likely to act on their subjective feelings of deprivation at the household level by taking to the streets to protest government. Thus, the worse your wider economic context, the more likely you are to see your deteriorating financial situation in wider political terms and thus as a spur to action. It appears that experiencing in your own daily life deteriorating living standards within a wider context of negative economic conditions is thus particularly conducive to protest action. On the other hand, austerity policies implemented by national governments – most notably in terms of cuts in social spending – also moderate the effect of subjective feelings of deprivation on the propensity to engage in protest activities but this relies on seeing countries with higher social spending as those where citizens might be more demanding.

Our results thus emphasise the importance of examining the macro-level economic and political context policy actions alongside individual-level indicators of deprivation, resources, attitudes and networks for understanding the wider drivers of protest action, particularly in tough economic times. We would argue that, furthermore, these results can be interpreted in terms of political opportunity theory. While, at first glance, grievance theory and opportunity theory appear to oppose each other – or at least this is how this has often been depicted in the literature (but see Buechler 2004) – the moderating effects we

found between individual-level relative deprivation and macro-level factors in our view support the idea that the political context matters. Although this analysis focused on Europe, our findings may well be generalizable to other contexts. Studies tend to be divided between those examining individual-level influences on protest behaviour and those examining macro-level relations. Following the path opened by others both in the political participation and in the social movements research traditions (Opp 2009), we encourage further research across countries and disciplines to examine the interaction of these factors. Our findings suggest that, besides looking for direct effects of the macro-level on protest, greater attention needs to be paid to the interaction of the micro and macro-level context – both with respect to economic and political macro-factors – for understanding the decision to become politically active, particularly in times of economic crisis.

Table 1: Variable descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Protest participation	17667	0.11105	0.31421	0	1
Relative deprivation	17667	0.45407	0.4979	0	1
Age	17667	44.8188	14.812	18	88
Gender (male)	17667	0.47207	0.49923	0	1
Education level (less than upper secondary)	17667	0.24062	0.42747	0	1
Occupation (manual)	17667	0.23773	0.42571	0	1
Unemployed	17667	0.11722	0.3217	0	1
Political interest	17667	0.64312	0.47909	0	1
Internal political efficacy	17667	0.49393	0.39755	0	1
External political efficacy	17667	0.47929	0.35868	0	1
Left-right values	17667	5.23925	1.8427	0	10
Libertarian-authoritarian values	17667	4.46535	1.87859	0	10
Organisational memberships	17667	1.25324	2.38321	0	12
Unemployment rate 2014	17667	11.9268	7.75242	4.5	26.5
GDP growth 2014	17667	1.52581	1.1247	-0.4	3.4
Social spending 2014	17667	25.2003	3.87812	19.4	31.9
Tax wedge 2014	17667	39.834	8.46629	22.25	49.3
Relative deprivation X unemployment	17667	6.61206	9.23666	0	26.5
Relative deprivation X GDP growth	17667	0.58034	0.99368	-0.4	3.4
Relative deprivation X social spending	17667	11.5517	12.9198	0	31.9
Relative deprivation X tax wedge	17667	18.3915	20.8147	0	49.3

Table 2: Variable distributions, by country

	All	France	Germany	Greece	Italy	Poland	Spain	Sweden	Switz.	UK
N	17,667	1,934	1,967	2,030	1,978	1,947	1,988	1,916	1,969	1,938
Protest participation (%)	10.5	14.4	6.7	22.0	11.3	5.9	17.2	7.3	5.9	4.0
Relative deprivation (%)	45.7	51.9	27.4	84.5	56.4	43.2	55.1	22.5	34.6	34.1
Age (mean)	44.8	48.1	44.3	45.1	47.1	44.2	45.1	45.3	45.9	47.4
Male (%)	48.9	50.3	48.1	49.0	48.0	48.0	49.0	50.3	49.0	48.5
Education (low) (%)	27.6	27.3	17.0	36.7	45.6	14.5	48.1	21.2	15.9	22.4
Manual occupation (%)	25.1	25.4	20.6	23.8	24.6	32.6	25.5	28.2	23.6	21.5
Unemployed (%)	12.0	9.1	4.3	30.2	16.4	11.0	19.7	6.4	6.5	5.0
Political interest (%)	62.9	56.6	65.2	62.1	58.0	73.2	56.1	64.3	57.4	73.2
Internal political efficacy 0-1 (mean)	.48	.40	.52	.48	.46	.50	.42	.41	.47	.63
External political efficacy 0-1 (mean)	.48	.39	.46	.36	.57	.64	.50	.45	.44	.48
Left-right values 0-10 (mean)	5.3	5.5	5.2	4.8	5.4	5.0	4.7	5.5	5.4	5.8
Libertarian-authoritarian 0-10 (mean)	4.5	4.8	4.1	4.7	4.9	5.4	3.8	3.7	4.5	4.6
Organisational memberships (0-12) (mean)	1.2	1.1	.6	1.7	1.9	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.3	.8
Unemployment rate 2014 (%)	11.8	10.3	5.0	26.5	12.7	9.0	24.4	8.0	4.5	6.1
GDP growth 2014 (%)	1.5	0.2	1.6	0.8	-0.4	3.4	1.4	2.3	1.9	2.6
Social spending 2014 (%)	25.2	31.9	25.8	24	28.6	20.6	26.8	28.1	19.4	21.7
Tax wedge 2014 (%)	39.8	48.4	49.3	40.4	48.2	35.6	40.7	42.5	22.3	31.1

Table 3: Multi-level logistic regression models predicting protest participation (last 12 months)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Intercept	-2.22	-1.96	-1.57	-2.36	-0.94	-3.89	-3.12	-2.13
<i>Micro- level</i>	(0.20)***	(0.21) ***	(0.26)***	(0.28)***	(0.29)**	(1.19)**	(0.91)***	(0.94)*
Relative deprivation		0.13	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	-1.47
		(0.05) *	(0.06)**	(0.06)**	(0.06)**	(0.06)**	(0.06)**	(0.67)*
Age		-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
		(0.00) ***	(0.00)***	(0.00)***	(0.00)***	(0.00)***	(0.00)***	(0.00)***
Gender (male)		0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		(0.05)**	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Education level (less than upper secondary)		-0.29	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08
		(0.06) ***	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Occupation (manual)		-0.01	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Unemployed		-0.16	-0.25	-0.25	-0.25	-0.24	-0.24	-0.26
		(0.07)*	(0.08)**	(0.08)**	(0.08)**	(0.08)**	(0.08)**	(0.08)**
Political interest			0.76	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.76
			(0.07)***	(0.07)***	(0.07)***	(0.07)***	(0.07)***	(0.07)***
Internal political efficacy			0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.77
			(0.08)***	(0.08)***	(0.08)***	(0.08)***	(0.08)***	(0.08)***
External political efficacy			-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18
			(0.08)*	(0.08)*	(0.08)*	(0.08)*	(0.08)*	(0.08)*
Left-right values (0-10)			-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18
			(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***
Libertarian-authoritarian values (0-10)			-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18	-0.18
			(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***	(0.02)***
Organisational memberships (0-12)			0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.16
			(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***

Macro-level

Unemployment rate 2014					0.07			0.04
					(0.02)***			(0.01)***
GDP growth 2014					-0.41			-0.22
					(0.14)**			(0.11)*
Social spending 2014						0.09		0.00
						(0.05)*		(0.05)
Tax wedge 2014							0.04	0.01
							(0.02)+	(0.02)
Cross-level interactions								
Relative deprivationXunemployment								0.02
								(0.01)**
Relative deprivationXGDP growth								0.08
								(0.08)
Relative deprivationXsocial spending								0.07
								(0.03)*
Relative deprivationXtax wedge								-0.01
								(0.01)

<i>N groups</i>	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
<i>N individuals</i>	17,667	17,667	17,667	17,667	17,667	17,667	17,667	17,667
<i>Sigma u</i>	0.59	0.58	0.64	0.38	0.45	0.54	0.55	0.23
<i>Rho</i>	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.02
<i>Log Likelihood</i>	-5,877.57	-5850.34	-5,121.28	-5,116.73	-5,118.22	-5,119.65	-5,119.94	-5,106.46

Standard errors in parentheses
 +p <0.10, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

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