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**How Civil Society Actors Responded to the Economic Crisis:  
The Interaction of Material Deprivation and Perceptions of Political  
Opportunity Structures**

**MARCO GIUGNI**

University of Geneva

**MARIA GRASSO**

University of Sheffield

We examine the relationship between material deprivation and different types of responses to crises by civil society actors. We are interested in understanding whether material deprivation has an effect on civil society reactions to the crisis and whether political opportunity factors contribute to this relationship. In particular, we wish to ascertain if the effect of material deprivation is moderated by perceptions of political stability, on the one hand, and of the effectiveness of government, on the other. Our results show that the effect of material deprivation on various aspects of responses to the crisis varies depending on the perceptions of the political environment. This suggests that perceptions of political stability and government effectiveness feed into the interpretation of present conditions. Therefore, perceptions of political stability and government effectiveness act as signals leading material deprivation to become politicized as a grievance.

**Keywords:** Economic Crisis, Europe, Eurozone, Great Recession, Civil Society Actors, Material Deprivation, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, Political Opportunity Structures, Political Claims Making, Public Opinion, Political

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Participation, Public Perception, Social Movements, Protest Behavior, Resource Mobilization Theory.

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Temple, Luke, Grasso, Maria, Buraczynska, Barbara, Karampampas, Sotirios, and English, Patrick. 2016. "Neoliberal Narrative in Times of Economic Crisis: A Political Claims Analysis of the UK Press, 2007-2014." *Politics & Policy* 44.3. [INSERT WEB ADDRESS WHEN AVAILABLE.](#)

English, Patrick, Grasso, Maria, Buraczynska, Barbara, Karampampas, Sotirios, and Temple, Luke. "Convergence on Crisis? Comparing Labour and Conservative Party Framing of the Economic Crisis, 2008-2014." *Politics & Policy* 44.3. [INSERT WEB ADDRESS WHEN AVAILABLE.](#)

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Analizamos la relación entre la privación material y diferentes tipos de reacción a una crisis por parte de diferentes actores de la sociedad civil. Nuestro interés es entender si la privación material tiene un efecto en la reacción a una crisis por parte de la sociedad civil y también si el factor de oportunidades políticas contribuye a esta relación. Específicamente, buscamos establecer si el efecto de la privación material es moderado por percepciones de estabilidad política, y de igual manera, determinar el efecto de la efectividad de un gobierno. Nuestros resultados muestran que el efecto de la privación material en distintos aspectos de la reacción de la sociedad civil varía en función a la percepción de la eficacia de un gobierno. Esto sugiere que las percepciones de estabilidad política y la efectividad de un gobierno son tomadas en cuenta para interpretar las condiciones actuales. Por lo tanto, las percepciones de estabilidad política y eficacia de gobierno actúan como señales que conducen a la politización de la privación material como una injusticia.

This article examines the ways in which civil society actors responded to the economic crisis that started in 2008. We are particularly interested in ascertaining if and to what extent aggregate levels of material deprivation produced by the crisis may or may not lead civil society actors to react publicly and to do so in certain specific ways, targeting specific actors, and focusing on specific issues. Theoretically, we engage in the long-standing debate in the social movement literature about the role of grievances—as

expressed here through aggregate-level measures of deprivation—for social movements and protest behavior. Has the economic crisis brought grievances back into social movement theory? More generally, are grievances more important than both resource mobilization theory and political opportunity theory have assumed? To answer these questions, we examine the impact of a number of measures of economic crisis, austerity policies, and hardship on the responses by civil society actors.

Most importantly, we would like to relate the debate about the role of grievances to a discussion of the relationship between grievances and perceptions of political opportunity structures. The latter form a long-standing tradition in social movement research (see Kriesi 2004; Meyer 2004). Political opportunity theorists argue that protest behavior is channeled in important ways by the political-institutional context. In this vein, not only the “objective” aspects of such a context are important—which has formed the bulk of works in this research tradition—but also how people perceive them. In this perspective, it is not so much the level of relative or absolute deprivation that matters, but it depends on the extent to which such a deprivation—and the grievances associated with it—are considered as politically relevant. In other words, we assume that “objective” conditions must be framed by people in order to lead to protest or other ways to respond to the economic crisis, and the perception of the political environment is crucial in this respect. More specifically, we argue that material deprivation interacts with the perception of the “openness” or “closedness” of the political environment to lead people to organize and respond publicly to the economic crisis. To this end, we examine the extent to which the perceptions of the stability of the political system or the perceptions of the effectiveness of the government play a role in this context. These types of assessments can be thought of as two sides of citizens' understanding of the

political opportunity structure for developing their responses to the economic crisis and, more generally, their activation in the public domain. While political stability may be considered as an input measure of the perception of political opportunity structures, government effectiveness can be seen as an output measure of perceived opportunities.

Empirically, the analysis is based on a random sample of political claims in nine countries (Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) covering seven years (2008-14). These countries have been affected differently by the economic crisis and differ also with regard to the political responses in terms of austerity policies implemented by the respective governments. Political claims include both verbal statements and protest actions. This allows us to measure how civil society actors have responded to the economic crisis and the related austerity policies as well as how such responses vary both across countries and over time. In addition, we use a number of aggregate-level indicators allowing us to measure the extent of the crisis as well as variations in the policy responses to the crisis. These indicators will then be related to the protest and claims data to examine if and how the level of material deprivation interacts with the perceptions of the stability of the political system as well as that of the effectiveness of the government (at the aggregate level) to explain four aspects of the response of civil society actors to the crisis: their relative presence, the form of their intervention, the target of their intervention, and the thematic focus of their intervention. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, we discuss previous research and theory motivating the study. Next, we discuss the data and methods applied in the present article. We then present and discuss results. Finally, we conclude by discussing their implications for future research.

### **Popular Reactions to the Economic Crisis: The Social Movement Perspective**

After eight years of economic crisis in Europe—often characterized as the Great Recession—the literature on its effects has become abundant. Scholars in sociology, political science and economics, as well as from other disciplines, have written extensively on the impact of the crisis on a variety of aspects such as policy making, individual attitudes and well being, family patterns, political responses, and still many others. In this article we focus on one such aspects, namely how citizens' have reacted to the economic crisis in the public domain. This translates into an analysis of the collective responses of organized citizens through political claims making.

As citizens struggle to cope with the effects of the 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 crisis may provide the political space and motivations for the mobilization of those seeking to criticize 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's 1 percent, against the 99 percent of hard-working, law-abiding citizens.

Research has shown that the economic downturn affected citizens' support for government intervention (Malhotra and Margalit 2010; Margalit 2013; Popp and Rudolph 2011) and fuelled political protests and social movements (Bennett 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2013). Particularly in those countries worst hit, large protests took place as governments were blamed for the negative economic context (Giugni and Grasso 2015; Grasso and Giugni 2013; Grasso and Giugni 2016). Political science literature shows how voters use their judgment about circumstances around them to hold politicians accountable (Fiorina 1981) as well as showing that citizens use a wide array of institutional and noninstitutional modes of engagement (Barnes and Kaase 1979). However, with rare exceptions (Levin, Sinclair, and Alvarez 2015), research has tended to focus on understanding the causes for voter turnout, ignoring other political activities such as claims in the public domain. Moreover, most studies of participation tend to focus on sociological explanations of participation (Brady 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), disregarding the effects of economic perceptions, blame attribution and policy-related approval. It is particularly during periods of economic challenges that macroeconomic conditions might fail to meet expectations resulting in feelings of deprivation and dissatisfaction leading individuals to claims making in the public domain (Thomassen 1989). Providing opposing expectations to the mobilization hypothesis, the withdrawal hypothesis suggests that personal economic worries block participation since individuals are deprived of resources needed for participation,

instead focusing on more pressing material issues (Rosenstone 1982; Brody and Sniderman 1977). Others argue that personal economic worries should not impact on participation since individuals tend to deal with these issues on their own (Lane 1959; Rosenstone 1982). Evidence on these accounts is varied. Not all studies have found effects of negative macroeconomic conditions on mobilization (Rosenstone 1982; Brody and Sniderman 1977). Moreover, the intensity and direction of the effect of economic adversity on political would seem to depend on economic context for example of an election (Southwell 1988), and whether social welfare exists to alleviate the worse effects of negative economic conditions (Radcliff 1992). Given that research to date has not provided firm answers on all these questions, it appears important to examine the effect of material deprivation and government evaluations on diverse types of political claims making in the current economic crisis.

The social movement literature has long discussed whether deprivation leads to an increase or a decrease in protest participation. 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 behavior resulting from weakened or absent social controls (Buechler 2004). 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).

Smelser (1962) linked strain and breakdown into a structural-functionalist macro 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. 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.

While some elements of strain and breakdown theories persisted in the works of Goldstone (Goldstone 1991b; Goldstone 1986; Goldstone 1991a), Piven and Cloward (1977), Snow et al. (1998), and Useem (1980), by and large, 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. Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly (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. 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, McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978).

Perhaps it could be contended that some elements of strain and breakdown theories survived in the ways in which we view social movements now. 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). McAdam's (1982) political process model recognizes opportunity structures as central for understanding the emergence of social movements. Kriesi, Koopmans, and Duyvendak (1995) showed how diverse political opportunity structures operate in this context.

Nonetheless, long gone are the days when social movements were understood as deviant behavior resulting from 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, Walgrave, and Van Aelst 2005; Schussman and Soule 2005). In particular, younger people and students are understood to be more “biographically available” (McAdam 1986). Moreover, relative to older cohorts the generations coming of age since the 1960s and 70s are understood to be the most active in protest activism and movement politics (Grasso 2014).

Therefore, while classic theories of deprivation as spurs for protest action, focusing on grievances and relative deprivation as the origins for political protest, have been increasingly dismissed, the current crisis context motivates our study to examine whether grievances matter for protest. Today, more support exists for mobilization models, which emphasize the importance of resources, political opportunities, the construction of political problems, and ideological identification for the development of political solidarity and the organizational structures necessary for political action and mobilization. The main ideas behind this shift in focus are that, while groups may be

relatively deprived, they first need to realize, or perceive this, and also see themselves as able to mobilize 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 to be redressed through political action—and without the organizational structures, resources, and political opportunities necessary to mobilize 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, specifically, the costs and pressures experienced by individuals suffering economic hardship, are more likely to push them to exit political engagement, rather than mobilize them to political action.

In line with this, the post-materialism thesis (Inglehart 1977, 1990) suggests that the experience of relative economic security during the early years of socialization leads to the development of values which emphasize post-material, liberal values over materialist ones and which in turn spur people to anti-state “elite-challenging” political action such as demonstrating, joining boycotts, signing petitions, and participation in new social movements. According to this theory, it is the opposite of the experience of economic hardship—material security—which leads to political participation and to the formation of those types of values emphasizing self-expression and universal moral causes which are seen to be conducive to protest participation.

However, as the recent emergence of the Occupy movement would support, it could also be suggested that the experience of hard times could lead individuals to focus attention on economic inequalities and the human costs these exert on fellow citizens and therefore lead individuals to develop values which are more supportive of egalitarian redistributive policies and welfare support measures. In other words, the

experience of economic crisis may lead to the formation of values which spur individuals to political action by constructing hardship and relative deprivation as the result of political arrangements which can be altered through political intervention. Tough economic times may also provide the basis for political solidarity and identification with political groups, leading people to mobilization and political action. It therefore remains a puzzle as to whether the experience of economic crisis should be seen to depress or foster political action in the form of protest. While on one reading the experience of economic hardship might lead individuals to “exit” political engagement, on an alternative reading it might spur individuals to “voice” grievances and therefore engage in political action to attempt to address these problems through political change.

In this article, we draw from the literature on social movements and protest behavior discussed above. In particular, as we have seen, grievance theory predicts that people engage in protest activities and, more generally, become more “contentious” when they are discontent, frustrated, or aggrieved. This contrasts with resource mobilization and political opportunity theories that stress instead resources (broadly defined) and political openings (understood in different ways). Here we start from grievance theory and the idea that the economic crisis has produced varying levels of material deprivation in European countries, but we contend that such a deprivation impacts upon the “contentiousness” of the organized civil society to the extent that people perceive that the political-institutional environment is conducive. Drawing on political opportunity theory and, more specifically, on the idea that opportunities must be “framed” and perceived in order to have an impact on social movements (Gamson and Meyer 1996), we examine the extent to which material deprivation interacts with the ways people view their political environment, specifically in terms of the perception

of political stability or in terms of the perception of the effectiveness of the government. While the former aspects may be seen as referring to the “input” side of political opportunity structures, the former relates to their “output” side (Kitschelt 1986). We argue that grievances stemming from exposure to the economic crisis do not so much have an unconditional effect on the responses of civil society actors in the public domain, but material deprivation interacts with perceptions of the political environment to influence the responses by civil society actors in the public domain.

We look at the impact of material deprivation and, above all, of the interaction between material deprivation and these two measures of perceptions of political opportunity structures on four aspects of the responses by civil society actors to the economic crisis: their presence in claims making (as opposed to the presence of other actors), their use of protest action (as opposed to other forms of intervention), their addressing their claims to state actor (as opposed to targeting other actors), and their focusing on socioeconomic issues (as opposed to other issues). Broadly speaking, we consider these four aspects as measures of the “contentiousness” which might be produced by the grievances relating to the economic crisis. Indeed, from the perspective of grievance theory, one would expect the economic crisis to lead to an activation of the civil society, especially, but not exclusively, in the form of protest actions, targeting state actors, and focusing on socioeconomic issues.

### **Data and Methods**

The data used in this study stems from a systematic content analysis of newspapers in each of the countries under study (in Greece and Poland the number of newspapers has been reduced for practical reasons). Following the methods of political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), which has proved fruitful in previous

work on social movements and contentious politics, we have created a comparative dataset consisting of about 1000 claims in each country (for a total sample of 9033 claims) covering the period from 2005 to 2014. The claims were generated by random-sampling newspaper articles based on a list of relevant keywords. All articles containing any of the three words “crisis,” “recession, or “austerity” have been selected and coded, to the extent that they referred to the current economic crisis. For this article, state and party actors are excluded from all the analyses in order to focus on civil society actors, except when we analyze the relative weight of the latter as compared to other actors (namely, state and party actors and economic actors). Furthermore, we focus on the 2008-14 period; that is, the period starting from the very beginning of the economic crisis.

Given the hierarchical structure of the data, we use multilevel random-intercept logistic regression models in our analyses. The models are structured according to a variable combining countries and years. Since we have nine countries and seven years, our models are built on 63 level-2 observations (or groups), each representing a given year in a given country. However, some of the analyses are conducted on 61 or 62 as there are no observations on some of the dependent variables within one or two groups. The level-1 observations are represented by the claims. The models only include predictors measured at level-2.

We examine the effect of level-2 predictors as well as the interaction between level-2 predictors, notably, material deprivation on the one hand, and perceived political stability and perceived government effectiveness on the other, on four measures of citizens' responses in the public domain (all dummy variables): a first one concerns the form of intervention by civil society actors (protest = 1, other form = 0); a second one

deals with the target or addressee of claims by civil society actors (state addressees = 1, other addressees = 0); a third one looks at the content or issue of claims by civil society actors (socioeconomic issues = 1, other issues = 0); and finally a most general one refers to the actors making the claims (civil society actors = 1, other actors = 0).

We include in the models a number of level-2 predictors measured on a yearly basis for each country. The most important ones refer to material deprivation on the one hand, and on perceived political stability and perceived government effectiveness on the other. These are the aspects that are at the core of our analysis. The indicator of Material Deprivation is an aggregate measure coming from Eurostat (2016) and refers to the material deprivation rate, economic strain, and durables dimension based on four items or more. In our data it varies between .7 and 21.5. Government Effectiveness is an index created by the World Bank (Global Economy 2014a) and ranging from -2.5 to +2.5. It captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. In our data it varies between .29 and 2.13. However, since this variable is strongly correlated with the measure of material deprivation, we recoded it into a dummy where the values below or equal to the median (1.45) take the code 0 and all the values above the mean take the code 1. Political Stability is an index created by the World Bank (Global Economy 2014b) and ranging from -2.5 to +2.5. It measures perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism. The index is an average of several other indexes from the Economist Intelligence Unit, the World Economic Forum, and the Political Risk Services, among

others. Again, we recoded this variable into a dummy where the values below or equal to the median (.53) take the code 0 and all the values above the mean take the code 1.

In addition to these three key variables, we include in our models five further predictors. The first two refer to the state of the economy and can be considered as measures of the economic crisis: the Quarterly GDP expressed as percentage change from previous period (OECD 2015) and the Yearly Unemployment Rate, expressed as percentage of the labor force being unemployed (OECD 2014a). The next two variables are meant to capture the extent and severity of austerity policies: Yearly Social Spending (public), expressed as percentage of the GDP (OECD 2014b), and Yearly Tax Wedge, expressed as percentage of labor cost (OECD 2014c). These two variables reflect the definition of austerity policies as reducing government spending and increasing taxation. Finally, we also include a measure of the Institutional Context, namely the Gallagher index of disproportionality (Gandrud 2015), which is an indicator of the openness or closeness of the political system for challengers.

All these variables vary both across countries and over time. For all the measures we took the average referring to each year in each country and created the respective variable thus. Estimates were applied in some cases in order to filling missing data. The Appendix shows the descriptive statistics for all the variables in the analyses. Finally, it is worth noting that findings should be taken with some care as the distributions for some of the variables (namely, civil society actors and, even more so, protest actions) leave some empty cells when crossed with the grouping variable in the multilevel regression models. As a robustness check, we also ran the analyses grouping on the basis of country. The results remain largely unchanged.

## **Findings**

Our analysis is based on multilevel random-intercept logistic regression models predicting each of the four aspects we focus upon: the fact that the claim is a protest action (as opposed to other forms), the fact that the claim addresses state actors (as opposed to other actors), and the fact that the claim focuses on socioeconomic issues (as opposed to other issues), the fact that the claimant is a civil society actor (as opposed to other actors, namely state and party actors and economic actors). For each aspect, we run three separate models: one with only the main effects, then one in which we add an interaction term between material deprivation and the perception of political stability, and finally one in which we add an interaction term between material deprivation and the perception of effectiveness of the government. Before presenting the findings, let us keep in mind that we are dealing with material deprivation at the aggregate level, and the same remark applies to all the predictors included in the models.

**Table 1. Multilevel Random-Intercept Logistic Regression for Protest vs. Other Claims (log-odds)**

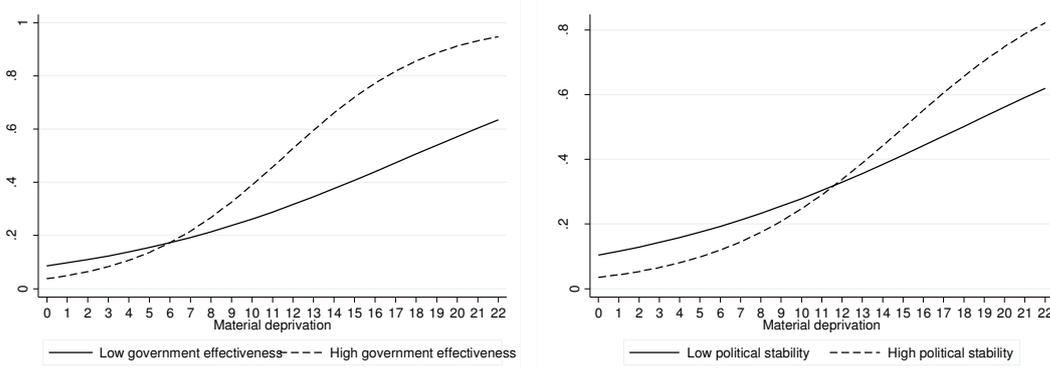
	Main effects	Interaction effect (political stability)	Interaction effect (government effectiveness)
Fixed effects			
Material Deprivation	0.14*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.13*** (0.04)
GDP	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Unemployment	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)
Social Spending	0.21** (0.10)	0.29*** (0.10)	0.31*** (0.11)
Tax Wedge	-0.04	-0.07	-0.10**

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	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Disproportionality	-0.08***	-0.10***	-0.10***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Stability Index	-0.40	-1.17**	-0.37
	(0.29)	(0.45)	(0.28)
Government Effectiveness Index	0.06	0.17	-0.88*
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.50)
Deprivation * Stability		0.10**	
		(0.05)	
Deprivation * Effectiveness			0.15**
			(0.07)
Constant	-5.06***	-5.60***	-5.03***
	(1.17)	(1.20)	(1.15)
Random effects			
Sigma u	.37	.34	.33
	(.15)	(.15)	(.16)
Rho	.04	.03	.03
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Log likelihood	-503.585	-501.325	-501.018
Observations	1016	1016	1016
Number of groups	62	62	62

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Figure 1. Plot of Interaction Effects of Material Deprivation with Perceived Political Stability and Perceived Government Effectiveness on Protest**



Notes: Adjusted predicted means based on logistic regression with interactions shown in table 2. Other variables are set at their means.

Table 1 shows the three models relating to protest actions (as opposed to other forms of claims). Here we observe a lower number of statistically significant effects. Material deprivation has a direct effect on protest supporting the findings of a few previous studies (Bernburg 2015; Karyotis and Rüdiger 2014; Klandermans et al. 2008). In addition, we observe a positive effect of social spending (reflecting the one we saw earlier) and a negative one of the disproportionality index (confirming the political opportunity argument that more proportional electoral systems lead to more protest).

To visualize the interaction effects for all four dependent variables we calculated the predictive margins based on the models with interactions, then plotted them so as to show graphically how the two variables pertaining to perceived political opportunity structures (political stability and government effectiveness) moderate the relationship between material deprivation and the dependent variable at hand. The effect of material deprivation on the dependent variable at given values is shown for the two values of the moderating variables (0, meaning “closed” opportunities and 1, meaning “open” opportunities), holding all other variables at their means.

Concerning the interaction terms, in this case they are both statistically significant and positive. The plots show that at higher levels of material deprivation, the slope for high government stability is steeper than for low government stability. What

this means substantively is that at high levels of material deprivation low government effectiveness seems to be less important since the effect of material deprivation on protest is greater where political effectiveness is understood to be high. On the other hand, at low levels of material deprivation, the effect is greater for low government effectiveness. The same is true with opportunity structures understood through the lens of government stability. Thus, when it comes to explaining protest behavior, the perception of political opportunities moderates the relationship between material deprivation and protest, supporting our general hypothesis. This can clearly be seen in Figure 1, which plots the interaction effects of material deprivation with perceived political stability and perceived government effectiveness on protest.

Table 2 examines the impact on claims addressing state actors (as opposed to other actors). In this case, no effect of material deprivation can be observed. Thus, in this case the hypothesis that the grievances produced by the economic crisis lead civil society actors to increasingly address their claims to the state is not confirmed. Among the main effects, only two are significant (at the 10-percent level): unemployment and social spending (but the latter with a negative sign this time).

**Table 2. Multilevel Random-Intercept Logistic Regression for State Addressees vs Other Addressees (log-odds)**

	Main effects	Interaction effect (political stability)	Interaction effect (government effectiveness)
Fixed effects			
Material Deprivation	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.04)
GDP	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)

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Unemployment	0.05*	0.06*	0.05
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Social Spending	-0.20*	-0.16	-0.10
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Tax Wedge	0.07	0.05	0.01
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Disproportionality	0.01	0.00	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Stability Index	-0.43	-0.83	-0.39
	(0.33)	(0.53)	(0.32)
Government Effectiveness Index	0.24	0.30	-0.78
	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.59)
Deprivation * Stability		0.05	
		(0.06)	
Deprivation * Effectiveness			0.16**
			(0.08)
Constant	2.70**	2.52*	2.92**
	(1.30)	(1.32)	(1.29)
Random effects			
Sigma u	.56	.57	.54
	(.13)	(.12)	(.12)
Rho	.09	.09	.08
	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Log likelihood	-507.911	-507.433	-505.814
Observations	801	801	801
Number of groups	61	61	61

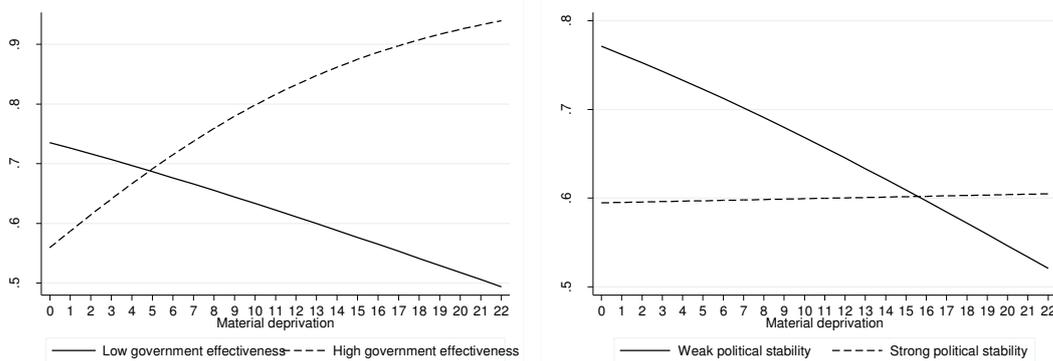
Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Most importantly for our present purpose, we observe a significant effect of the interaction term combining material deprivation and the government effectiveness

index. Thus the perception that the government is effective seems to moderate the relationship between material deprivation and the fact that civil society actors target state actors rather than other addressees. In other words, it is only amongst those that perceive government as highly effective that material deprivation has an effect. The plot of the predictive margins, which can be seen in Figure 2, shows very well the importance of the interaction in this case. What this means in substantive terms is that at higher levels of material deprivation there is a steeper effect of perceiving government as highly effective.

**Figure 2. Plot of Interaction Effects of Material Deprivation with Perceived Political Stability and Perceived Government Effectiveness on State Addressees**



Notes: Adjusted predicted means based on logistic regression with interactions shown in table 3. Other variables are set at their means.

Finally, Table 3 looks at the last indicator of “contentiousness” we are interested in: namely, the focus on socioeconomic issues (as opposed to any other issue). Recent work by well-known scholars has sought to “bring capitalism back in” to social movement studies (della Porta 2015). We expect material deprivation brought about by the economic crisis to be associated with a more frequent focus on this kind of thematic focus of claims, for obvious reasons. Consistently with the previous analysis, we also

observe, in the first model, a negative effect of unemployment, a positive effect of increasing social spending, and a negative effect of increasing taxation.

**Table 3. Multilevel Random-Intercept Logistic Regression for Socioeconomic Issues vs Other Issues (log-odds)**

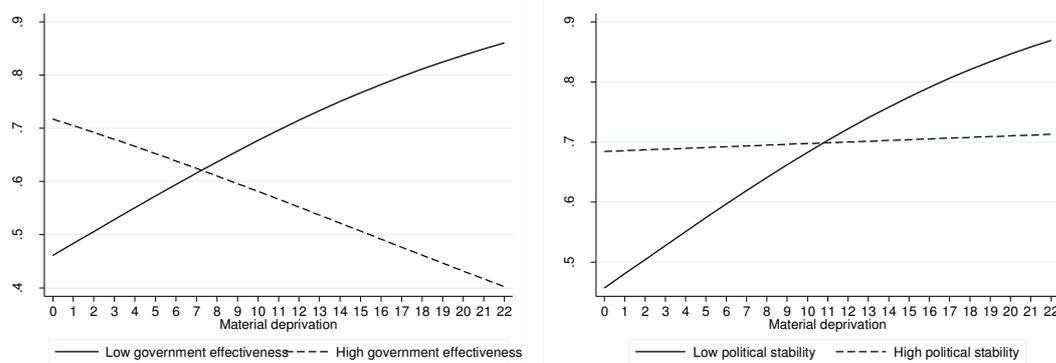
	Main effects	Interaction effect (political stability)	Interaction effect (government effectiveness)
Fixed effects			
Material Deprivation	0.08** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)
GDP	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Unemployment	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.04** (0.02)
Social Spending	0.25*** (0.08)	0.18** (0.08)	0.17** (0.08)
Tax Wedge	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Disproportionality	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Political Stability Index	0.29 (0.23)	0.95*** (0.36)	0.20 (0.21)
Government Effectiveness Index	0.10 (0.23)	0.01 (0.22)	1.09*** (0.40)
Deprivation * Stability		-0.09** (0.04)	
Deprivation * Effectiveness			-0.15*** (0.05)
Constant	-2.47*** (0.91)	-2.15** (0.88)	-2.73*** (0.86)

Random effects			
Sigma u	.27 (.12)	.19 (.14)	.17 (.15)
Rho	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Log likelihood	-621.083	-618.541	-617.134
Observations	1002	1002	1002
Number of groups	62	62	62

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Figure 3. Plot of Interaction Effects of Material Deprivation with Perceived Political Stability and Perceived Government Effectiveness on Socioeconomic Issues**



Notes: Adjusted predicted means based on logistic regression with interactions shown in table 4. Other variables are set at their means.

Concerning the interaction terms, they are both statistically significant, suggesting that there is a moderating effect of both the perception of political stability and of the effectiveness of the government. Once again, this provides evidence supporting our main argument about the interplay of material deprivation and the way in

which people view their political-institutional environment, both in input (political stability) and output (government effectiveness) terms. This is best seen in Figure 3, which shows the plots of the predicted margins for this aspect. Again, different levels of perceived government effectiveness lead to very different predictions concerning the impact of material deprivation, although in a different pattern than with the previous dependent variable. However, here high average levels of perceived government effectiveness are characterized by a negative effect of material deprivation, while low levels lead to a positive effect. Different slopes can also be clearly seen when we look at the moderating effect of political stability index, but in this case the slope of the lines indicate a positive effect in both situations.

**Table 4. Multilevel Random-Intercept Logistic Regression for Civil Society Actors vs Other Actors (Log-Odds)**

	Main effects	Interaction effect (political stability)	Interaction effect (government effectiveness)
Fixed effects			
Material Deprivation	0.03** (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)
GDP	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Unemployment	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Social Spending	0.17*** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.04)
Tax Wedge	-0.05*** (0.02)	-0.05*** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Disproportionality	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)

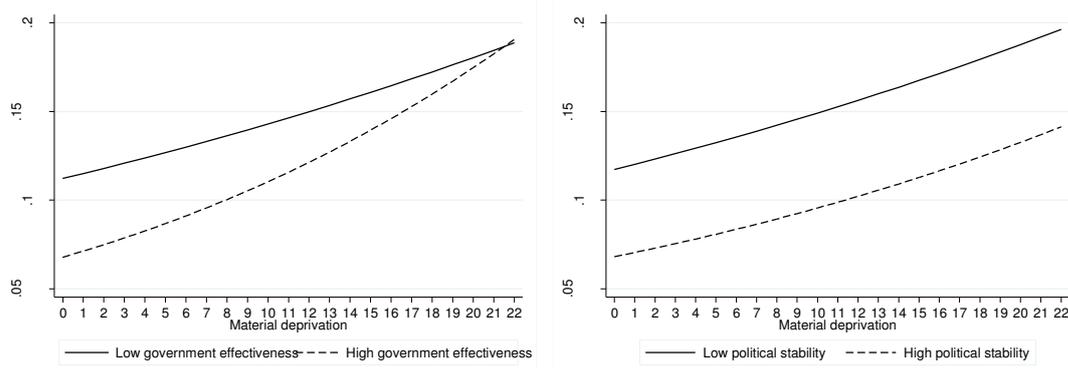
Civil Society Actors' Response to the Economic Crisis

Political Stability Index	-0.53*** (0.11)	-0.60*** (0.18)	-0.52*** (0.11)
Government Effectiveness Index	-0.39*** (0.11)	-0.38*** (0.11)	-0.55*** (0.19)
Deprivation * Stability		0.01 (0.02)	
Deprivation * Effectiveness			0.03 (0.03)
Constant	-3.55*** (0.43)	-3.59*** (0.44)	-3.53*** (0.43)
Random effects			
Sigma u	.13 (0.05)	.13 (0.85)	.12 (0.06)
Rho	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Log likelihood	-3088.869	-3088.747	-3088.355
Observations	8658	8658	8658
Number of groups	63	63	63

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Figure 4. Plot of Interaction Effects of Material Deprivation with Perceived Political Stability and Perceived Government Effectiveness on Civil Society Actors**



Notes: Adjusted predicted means based on logistic regressions with interactions shown in table 1. Other variables are set at their means.

Table 4 shows the results for the presence of civil society actors. The model with main effects shows several statistically significant effects. We discover that the level of material deprivation has a significant effect on the presence of civil society actors: the higher the level of material deprivation in society, the more likely that claims are made by civil society actors (rather than by other actors). We also observe a significant effect of unemployment. The latter, however, reduces rather than spurs the intervention of civil society actors, which goes against the overly simplistic argument that “objective” grievances have a stimulating effect on popular contention. The two indicators of austerity policies also display a significant effect. Both the level of social spending (as a percentage of the GDP) and the level of taxation (tax wedge) significantly affect the propensity of civil society actors to intervene publicly on issues pertaining to the economic crisis. However, such an intervention becomes more likely with increasing (rather than decreasing) levels of social spending and is also more likely when taxation diminishes (rather than rising). In both cases, austerity policies (that is, decreasing levels of social spending and increasing taxation) seem to deter rather than spur popular contention in this regard.

Most importantly, our two measures of aggregate-level perceptions of political opportunity structures (the political stability index and the government effectiveness

index) are also statistically significant. Both lead to a greater likelihood of civil society actors being the protagonists of claims making (as opposed to other actors). More precisely, where and when people tend to think of the political system as being stable and deterring violence or the government to be effective, civil society actors are less likely to become engaged in claims making on issues pertaining to the economic crisis. This finding is in line with the idea put forth by proponents of the political opportunity approach that stable political alignments and conditions as well as “closed” political opportunity structures (in terms of seeing the government as being highly effective) are not conducive to political contention (Tarrow 1989).

What about the main focus of our analysis, that is, the interaction terms? As we can see in the other two models, neither the interaction between material deprivation and perceived political stability, nor the one between material deprivation and perceived government effectiveness, are statistically significant. Thus, in contrast to the other three dependent measures of citizen responses to the crisis studied in this article, when it comes to explaining the presence of civil society actors in claims making, there does not seem to be a moderating effect of these perceptions of political opportunities on the relationship between material deprivation and claims making.

Figure 4 shows the plots for the presence of civil society actors. Both interactions were not significant in the regression model. We observe that the two lines for the government effectiveness index have a different slope. If the interaction had been significant, this would have meant that if people view the government as highly effective, the impact of material deprivation on the likelihood that a claim is made by civil society actors is greater than when people have a poor evaluation of the performance of the government. In other words, at low levels of material deprivation

there is a fairly large difference in the prediction of the likelihood of presence of civil society actors in claims-making across low and high perceptions of government effectiveness, while such a difference reduces itself and eventually becomes null at high levels of material deprivation. In contrast, for the political stability index the two lines are close to being parallel.

In sum, our evidence supports our argument about the moderating effect of perceptions of both input and output aspects of the political opportunity structure on the relationship between material deprivation and four measures of “contentiousness” relating to the economic crisis. Specifically, we found perceived political stability and government effectiveness to interact with material deprivation in most cases. To be sure, in some cases material deprivation also has a direct effect. However, the key insight here is that, more often than not, it interacts with perceptions of the political environment to lead to higher or lower levels of involvement of civil society actors, of protest, of state actors being targeted, and of socioeconomic issues being the focus of claims making.

### **Conclusion**

In this article we have investigated the relationship between material deprivation and different types of responses to crises by civil society actors. In particular, we wished to ascertain if these effects are moderated by perceptions of political stability, on the one hand, and of the effectiveness of government, on the other. We started from grievance theory, a strand of scholarship on social movements that predicts that people engage in protest activities when they are discontent, frustrated, and aggrieved. However, we argued that grievances stemming from exposure to the economic crisis—as captured through an aggregate-level measure of material deprivation—do not so

much have an unconditional effect on the responses of civil society actors in the public domain, but material deprivation interacts with perceptions of the political environment to influence the responses by civil society actors in the public domain, in terms of their presence, the use of protest actions, the targeting state actors, and focusing on socioeconomic issues.

Our findings provide evidence in favor of the expectation that material deprivation interacts in important ways with both input and output measures of perceptions of political opportunity structures, which we have operationalized through an indicator of perceived political stability and with an indicator of perceived government effectiveness. This supports arguments about the social construction of grievances and the way they are framed in public discourse.

In spite of the (we think) important insights it provides, our analysis has a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting our findings. Specifically, the way we built the analysis, through multilevel models clustering the data by country and by year, has the advantage of taking into account both time invariant and time-varying contextual predictors. However, the data is limited in this respect due to the low number of cases on some of our dependent variables. This applies above all to the analysis of protest actions, as the overall level of protest is quite low, and especially so in certain countries. In addition, the nature of our contextual predictors calls for a cautious interpretation of the results. Yet analyses conducted on models clustered by country (instead of country and year) yield largely consistent results, hence offering a good robustness check. Another important caveat regards the level of analysis. The variables included in the regression models are all contextual factors characterizing a given country in a given year. This is the grouping variable in the

multilevel models. Therefore, our findings should be interpreted in the light of this specific design, and we should avoid falling into the trap of ecological fallacy. When, for example, we say that material deprivation interacts with the perception of political stability of that of the effectiveness of the government, this refers to the aggregate level and can by no means be inferred to the individual level. To test the same hypotheses at the individual level we would need survey data.

Future research should make more detailed analyses in particular through a comparative design allowing us to detect and study cross-national variations in the ways the explanatory factors we have examined play a role. We also need to single out the mechanisms connecting economic crises and collective responses to them. Finally, we should analyze potential interaction effects between measures of the severity of the crisis, of austerity policies, and of self-perception of the effects of the crisis on one's own life in order to see whether we observe mediating and moderating effects.

#### **About the Authors**

**Marco Giugni** is a professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations and Director of the Institute of Citizenship Studies (InCite) at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His research interests include social movements and collective action, immigration and ethnic relations, unemployment, and social exclusion.

**Dr. Maria T. Grasso** is Lecturer in Politics and Quantitative Methods at the Department of Politics, University of Sheffield. She received her BA (Hons.) in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (2005), MSc in Sociology with Distinction (2006), and doctorate from the University of Oxford (2011, Nuffield College). She is Deputy Editor for Western Europe of *Mobilization*. Her research interests are in political sociology, political participation, social change, and social movements. She is the

author of *Generations, Political Participation and Social Change in Western Europe* (Routledge 2016) and co-editor of *Austerity and Protest: Popular Contention in Times of Economic Crisis* (Routledge 2015).

**Appendix: Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Protest	7972	.05143	.220887	0	1
Civil Society Actors	8693	.1203267	.3253619	0	1
State Addressees	5585	.6916741	.4618433	0	1
Socioeconomic Issues	8465	.615003	.4866234	0	1
Material Deprivation	8703	7.642882	5.242594	.7	21.5
GDP	8703	-.4984316	3.280243	-9.13	5.99
Unemployment	8703	10.27762	5.941207	4.04	27.47
Social Spending	8703	25.11483	3.715024	17.93	31.95
Tax Wedge	8703	39.9509	8.641174	21.86	51.34
Disproportionality	8703	7.321456	5.006133	1.25	17.66
Political Stability Index	8703	.4912099	.4999515	0	1
Government Effectiveness Index	8703	.4937378	.4999895	0	1

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