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Edited by Hanspeter Kriesi , Jasmine Lorenzini , Bruno Wüest , Silja Hausermann

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Part I

A Study of Protest in
Thirty European Countries

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1 Introduction

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and Jasmine Lorenzini*

In September 2008, Lehman Brothers collapsed and the global money markets seized up. This was the beginning of a financial crisis that started in the United States and soon spilled over to Europe. In Europe, the shock period of the financial crisis was followed by the eurozone crisis, which started in early 2010 with the sovereign debt crisis in Greece. While the worst of the crisis seemed to be over by fall 2012, after the head of the European Central Bank (ECB) had declared that he would do ‘whatever it takes’ to save the euro, the fallout of the crisis continued to haunt Europe at least until the conclusion of the third Greek bailout in summer 2015. It is hard to overstate the sheer magnitude of the impact the economic crisis has had on the lives of people in Europe. Between 2007 and 2013, the number of unemployed people in the European Union (EU) rose from 17 to 26 million. Dramatic losses of income for large social groups combined with a severely tightened and restricted labour market, especially for the younger generation in the countries hardest hit by intensified structural decline. As Adam Tooze (2018: 5) observed in the introduction to his account of ‘the first crisis of a global age’, the combination of these crises and the economic and political responses to them are essential to understanding the changing face of the world today. As Tooze also noted, politics loomed large during the economic crisis. This period saw not limited but big government and massive executive action, as well as economic and political interventionism of an unprecedented kind, with massive distributive implications both across and within countries. For this reason, the Great Recession became tremendously politicized throughout Europe, both in the surplus and the deficit countries (Beramendi et al. 2015a; Walter 2016).

Hence, the Great Recession was not an instance of depoliticization, but – quite to the contrary – a context that spotlighted the importance of political decision-making for both national and international macroeconomic (in)stability and societal consequences. Therefore, the

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economic upheaval of the financial and eurozone crises has left deep traces in electoral mobilization across Europe (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). However, electoral politicization is only one aspect of democratic contestation of the crises. This book sheds light on protest mobilization, together with its prevalence, its drivers, and its links to crises of representation. Under circumstances of extreme economic disruption, the protest arena can become important for democratic contestation, and some observers have indeed hailed it as the key locus of transnational ‘voice’ and democratic innovation (della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

The present volume documents, for the first time, the extent to which protest spread across Europe, the degree to which the protest action repertoire was regenerated, and the kinds of issues that were addressed. The intent of the book is twofold. On the one hand, the book maps the prevalence, thrust, and actors of protest across Europe; on the other hand, it explains protest mobilization as a result of economic grievances interacting with political grievances. The book not only assesses a range of claims in protest literature, which tend both to overstate the importance of anti-austerity protests and to underestimate the relevance of economic grievances in driving protests; it also integrates the study of the electoral and the protest arena to show that electoral mass politics has become largely dissociated from protest mobilization, with potentially impairing consequences for democratic performance.

1.1 **Mapping Protest: Who Protests, How, and What For?**

The first research question we pursue in this book asks how Europeans reacted to the financial and eurozone crises in the protest arena. In answering this broad and important – more descriptive than explanatory – question, we address three claims about protest that have been made in the literature on protest mobilization during the Great Recession: the existence of an internationally interconnected protest wave, the transformation of action repertoires and the radicalization of crisis protest, and the ‘return of the economy’ in the demands of protesters.

Some observers have suggested that an enormous and interconnected wave of protest mobilization against austerity swept not only across the European continent but across the entire globe. These observers situate the origin of this global wave at the beginning of 2011 in the Arab Spring, after which it is said to have spread to Europe, particularly to southern Europe (SE) – to Portugal first, followed by Spain and Greece. It then moved on to New York, where the first Occupy Wall Street camp was established before spreading all over the United States and beyond

(della Porta and Mattoni 2014: 3). Later on, starting in spring 2013, these movements against austerity were said to have been followed by another protest wave, which covered a diversity of countries in western and eastern Europe, as well as certain countries of Latin America and Africa (della Porta 2017). Even if these observers are attentive to some country-specific differences, they end up characterizing the development of protest during the Great Recession in rather loose terms as interconnected protest waves that diffused across Europe as part of a global wave. Thus, Flesher-Fominaya (2017) writes of ‘a wave of European anti-austerity mobilization’ that was part of a global wave of protest following the global financial crisis. Other authors just take such a wave for granted and discuss their own empirical cases (e.g. Peterson et al. 2015; Sabucedo et al. 2017) or theoretical considerations (e.g. Nulman and Schlembach 2018) against the background of such a wave.

However, such a global wave of protest may be too loose of an empirical concept. As a matter of fact, a closer look at the different elements of these alleged waves has revealed important differences. As Navrátil and Cisar (2014: 227) point out, the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States and the Indignados in Spain had a strong national or even local dimension and their claims focused on national and local rather than transnational and global publics and authorities. Similarly, Genovese et al. (2016) contest the sweeping, interconnected character of protest mobilization on the basis of a comparative study of select European countries. Our book is the first study that allows testing these claims for all European countries over a longer time span. We shall amply demonstrate that Europe did not experience one big wave of political mobilization and protest after 2008 and that diffusion processes remained very limited indeed. Despite intense protest mobilization in some countries and periods, protest remained confined geographically and temporally, indicating that the national political arena has remained predominant in explaining protest.

The second claim we want to address in mapping protest relates to the action repertoire that has been mobilized, as well as the intensity and radicalization of protest. Kerbo (1982), who introduced the distinction between ‘movements of crisis’ and ‘movements of affluence’, suggested that ‘movements of crisis’ are relatively unorganized and develop more spontaneously, and that they are more likely to be characterized by hostile outbursts and collective violence. If this were to hold, we would expect a change in the action repertoire of protestors in the course of the crisis, away from ‘business as usual’, i.e. from an action repertoire of protest dominated by demonstrations and strikes towards a more confrontational and more violent repertoire. Previous protest

waves have been observed to result in either the institutionalization or the radicalization of protest (Tarrow 1989). It has also been observed that in periods of crisis, new or innovative modes of action are ‘tested’ (Fillieule 2010) and that during protest waves the repertoire of contention is often transformed, with an emergence of new forms of action that end up characterizing a specific protest wave (Taylor and van Dyke 2004). Therefore, we ask whether, during the Great Recession, ordinary forms of protest, such as demonstrations, were supplemented by innovative protest actions such as occupations or protest camps. The Indignados and Occupy Wall Street movements and their practices of occupying and organizing deliberative assemblies in public squares attracted a great deal of media attention and they have been considered to have introduced true innovations (Maeckelbergh 2012). Hence, we consider the extent to which protest mobilization during the great economic crises led to the spread of such innovations. We shall show that in spite of some innovations and the predominance of ‘movements of crisis’ in some parts of Europe, ‘business as usual’ predominated. Protestors mostly enacted the established patterns of action, although there were creative moments that assumed great significance. Most importantly, we shall show that protest remained largely non-violent, even in the most contentious countries.

Third, our book explores the claims that protesters have made, i.e. the demands they have voiced towards authorities. Given the massive economic decline that large social groups of lower- and middle-class citizens experienced in the wake of the Great Recession, much of the political economy literature expected ‘a return of the economy’ (due to protest mobilization) as compared to pre-crisis periods, i.e. a return of economic grievance-driven mobilization of socio-economic claims (Bernburg 2015; Genovese et al. 2016; Rüdiger and Karyiotis 2014; Solt 2015; Walter 2016). Such a return of economic protest would imply a massive transformation of political protest in Europe. Indeed, while the traditional conflicts – those between classes and regions – had been the most mobilizing ones in a country like Spain in the not too distant past (Koopmans 1996), it is well known that since the rise of new social movements in the 1970s, protests in north-western Europe have been driven predominantly by new cultural conflicts (Hutter 2014: 82f.; Kriesi et al. 1995). The middle-class ‘movements of affluence’, which mobilized political demands on behalf of others, neglected economic issues and mobilized primarily on issues such as women’s rights, human rights, ecology, peace, and global social justice. In times of economic crisis, and in line with the political economy literature, we may thus expect the proactive ‘movements of affluence’ to be replaced by

‘movements of crisis’, i.e. by social movements that emerge as direct reactions to the life-disrupting situations of sudden deteriorations in economic conditions, and which articulate socio-economic demands to alleviate these grievances.

The ‘return of the economy’ – scenario is, however, only one hypothesis and by no means self-evident. The experience of economic grievances may – just as in the electoral arena – be mobilized politically in socio-cultural terms, e.g. against immigrants or in favour of authoritarian limitations of pluralism (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Hence, we should not take the return of predominantly economic claims in the protest arena as a foregone conclusion, especially in those countries where political protest has been mainly culturally framed over the past decades. Indeed, our data show that while there has been a rise in economically framed protest in the wake of the crisis, the issue-orientation of protest has remained regionally specific. In addition, it has also remained partial in the sense that it targets the economic crisis management of the government but not that of private corporations. Because of the lack of sustained and radicalized protest mobilization, even in the heavily affected political economies of Europe, we can hardly speak of a ‘return’ to economic-distributive politics in the protest arena.

1.2 Explaining Protest: How Economic Grievances Relate to Protest Mobilization

The second aim of this book is to study the drivers of protest mobilization. In theorizing these drivers in the context of the Great Recession, we rely on three key concepts of social movement studies: grievances, resources, and political opportunity structures (McAdam 1982). More specifically, we assess three sets of questions. First, we ask about the role of economic and political grievances in driving protest: Do economic grievances mobilize or demobilize protest? Do economic and political grievances cumulate or interact? And are political grievances a result of economic grievances? Second, regarding resources, we analyse the role of political parties in organizing protest in times of crisis and we ask which parties take to the streets in times of crisis. Lastly, we consider the role of political opportunity structures in moderating the link between economic grievances and protest. Here, we ask whether and how fiscal and administrative state capacities condition the effect of grievances. How does supranational intervention in national politics affect protest? Are transnational or intraregional diffusion processes at play? And how do protest politics and electoral politics interact?

For the analyses of the drivers of protest, *grievances* constitute our starting point. The social movement literature has sidelined the study of economic grievances, arguing that resources and mobilization, not grievances, drive protest. For a long time, grievances have had a bad name in this literature as a result of the legacy of collective behaviour models, also known as strain or breakdown theories (Buechler 2004; McAdam 1982: 5–19). These theories conceived of collective behaviour as a largely spontaneous, unregulated, and unstructured group activity, and even went as far as considering it as irrational, disruptive, dangerous, or excessive. As a result of the discredited legacy of collective behaviour theories, economic deprivation has largely been neglected as a driving force in the study of protest mobilization. However, there is ample reason to re-examine the role of economic grievances in explaining protest, as the Great Recession led to much more massive economic deprivation than we saw in the preceding decades. And, indeed, the Great Recession brought the concept back to the centre in the study of protest, both at the macro- (Beissinger and Sasse 2014; Brancati 2014; Quaranta 2016) and the micro-level (Galais and Lorenzini 2017; Grasso and Giugni 2016; Rüdiger and Karyotis 2014).

While exogenous shocks such as the financial and eurozone crises create a tremendous amount of popular discontent, it is unlikely that they create mobilization potentials from scratch. They rather contribute to pre-existing latent mobilization potentials that are linked to structural conflicts, which predate the crisis and which pre-structure the way the crisis mobilization will play out. The mobilization potentials newly created by the crisis add to the existing stock of grievances. In addition, a crisis is likely to serve as a catalyst for the mobilization of these latent potentials. It may reshape, redirect, or reinvigorate an ongoing mobilization process, or it may trigger the articulation of the latent potentials that had already been accumulating before the occurrence of the crisis and have been reinforced by the crisis.

People with grievances seek to express them, and they do so by raising their voices or by exiting (Hirschman 1970). Exit has been an important reaction to the great economic crisis in many countries in southern and eastern Europe. We do not deal with this type of reaction to the crisis here, but rather with people raising their voices collectively. In democratic societies, citizens have the right to vote and they have the opportunity to express their grievances as voters. As Piven and Cloward (1977: 15) noted several decades ago, ‘ordinarily, defiance is first expressed in the voting booth simply because, whether defiant or not, people have been socialized within a political culture that defines voting as the mechanism through which political

change can and should properly occur'. Accordingly, one of the first signs of popular discontent is a sharp shift in voting patterns. More generally, in democratic societies, the action repertoire of protests is likely to make use of the available institutionalized channels of access, which means that the privileged institutional space, i.e. the privileged arenas to voice grievances, are the electoral, and, where available, the direct democratic arena. But the next elections might still be far away, and the grievances suddenly imposed by the economic crisis may call for immediate reaction. The protest arena provides an alternative channel that is available for the expression of grievances to the extent that there are organizations that are ready and have the resources to mobilize them.

Given the importance of politics during these economic crises, there is reason to expect that *economic* grievances are linked in different ways to *political* grievances. In the course of our study we shall thus distinguish between economic and political crises as two potentially interrelated sources of grievances that help explain the emergence of protest. Indeed, political crises intensified across Europe during the Great Recession (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Cordero and Simón 2016; Magalhães 2014). Let us clarify our understanding of '*political crisis*'. A political crisis may be expressed in attitudinal and behavioural terms (Mainwaring et al. 2006). Political grievances correspond to the attitudinal indicators of a political crisis, among which we can count lack of trust in political institutions and lack of satisfaction with the way democracy works. Among behavioural indicators, we can include lower turnout, electoral volatility, the rise of new challengers in the electoral channel, or even the collapse of party systems, and the rise of protest events in the protest arena. The attitudinal component refers to the latent mobilization potentials, which constitute a more or less fertile ground for the political crisis. The political crisis, however, breaks out in the open, only once these latent potentials are mobilized and manifest themselves in behavioural terms. This is to say that political crises do not develop as a matter of course but are the result of political mobilization – in electoral terms or in terms of protest, or both (Kriesi 2015: 21). Focusing on the interaction of these economic and political crises, we ask how the management of the crisis by the government and international actors contributed to the mobilization of protest and, inversely, how the mobilization of protest contributed to the demise of incumbents and the transformation of party systems. Most generally, our study shows that sustained and intense protest follows when and where economic grievances raise expectations among citizens with respect to their national governments and these expectations are not met.

For political mobilization, *resources* are crucial. Both the intensity and action repertoire of protest, as well as the claims made, depend not least on the types of actors mobilizing and organizing protest. We are particularly interested in the role of political parties and organized interests (such as unions) as drivers of protest. In line with the notion of protest depending on the presence of organizational resources for mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1215), and given the increasingly constrained electoral arena (Hutter and Kriesi 2019), one may expect traditional political organizations such as parties and unions to have played a key role in the mobilization of protest across Europe during the entire period covered, especially in countries with an otherwise weak civil society.

In western Europe, protest over the past decades was sponsored mainly by parties on the left (e.g. della Porta and Rucht 1991; Kriesi et al. 1995; Maguire 1995). Moreover, government participation of these parties was identified as a crucial condition for the facilitation of movement activities. In opposition, the left-wing parties were more likely to act as allies of ideologically close movements, such as the new social movements in the 1970s and early 1980s. By contrast, in central and eastern Europe (CEE), parties with little influence in the electoral arena in general, irrespective of their political orientation, were more likely to sponsor protest (Cisar and Navratil 2015; Cisar and Vrablíková 2016). We shall show that the influence of party sponsorship of protest still varies from one European region to another.

More recently, the assumption of necessary organizational resources for mobilizing protest has been questioned with reference to social media. It is argued that social media have lowered organizational costs to a great extent, such that large-scale protest events can be organized in a rather spontaneous fashion without established organizational resources (Anduiza et al. 2014). Thus, the largest demonstration in Portugal during the peak years of the crisis, 2010–2013, was organized by a Facebook group and a blog (Accornero and Ramos-Pinto 2015: 3). These are, however, single instances of protest mobilization and our data allow tracing the prevalence of traditional organized actors in organizing protest even today.

The relevance of the political context goes beyond the role of parties and other established organizations and also includes political processes such as policy-making and the way government and the system of representation function more generally. Earlier versions of the political process approach have been criticized for ‘surveying the terrain of collective action from so high an altitude that crucial processes and internal variations cannot be seen’ (Tarrow 1988: 436). Here we pay