

The Deprivation-Protest Paradox

How the Perception of Unfair Economic Inequality Leads to Civic Unrest

by Séamus A. Power

The global economy collapsed in 2007–2008. The Irish initially accepted harsh austerity when the economy tanked. Yet, when Ireland had the fastest-growing economy in Europe in 2014 and 2015, mass demonstrations, standoffs and clashes with police, and other forms of civil unrest occurred. In this article, I introduce the “Deprivation-Protest Paradox.” Drawing on in-depth urban ethnographic work in a small Irish city and randomly sampled interviews at a series of seven national demonstrations in Dublin, Ireland, I illustrate the ways in which people were aware of a narrative of objective economic recovery in the Republic of Ireland but were not feeling it subjectively in their lived experiences. And this gap—between expectations and lived experiences—galvanized and legitimized protest and civic discontent. I discuss the implications of this paradox for developing a new theory of unfair economic inequality, democratic engagement, and social change.

Thus it was precisely in those parts of France where there had been most improvement that popular discontent ran highest. This may seem illogical—but history is full of such paradoxes. For it is not when things are going from bad to worse that revolutions break out. On the contrary, it oftener happens that when a people which has put up with an oppressive rule over a long period without protest suddenly finds the government relaxing its pressure, it takes up arms against it. (de Tocqueville 1955 [1856]:176)

In this paper, I draw on the cultural psychological literature to utilize and extend classic relative deprivation theorizing. I explore the rise of protest in the Republic of Ireland because of unfulfilled expectations of economic recovery and feelings of deprivation relative to others in Irish society. I detail how the “Deprivation-Protest Paradox” unfolded in a contemporary and localized Irish context and discuss the implications of this for the development of a new theory of unfair inequality.

Widespread civic unrest and rioting spread throughout Europe following the economic collapse of 2008. Violent clashes between protesters and police raged in Athens and Madrid, and thousands filled the streets in Portugal, Italy, and England to protest against austerity imposed by their governments. There was one notable and surprising exception: the Republic of Ireland. A country well known for a long history of violence and resistance to it accepted the yoke of austerity with rela-

tively little protest (Power 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018c; Power and Nussbaum 2014, 2016).

In 2014 and 2015 Ireland had the fastest-growing economy in Europe. But the public mood changed. Tens of thousands demonstrated against a new charge on water that was symbolic of a broader anti-austerity movement. There were frequent large-scale demonstrations, civic disorder, and standoffs with the police. On February 26, 2016, the Irish voted the government of Fine Gael and Labour out of power, leaving them unable to form a majority government. In economic terms, it didn’t really add up. But in spite of the objective indicators of the economic recovery, people in Ireland were not feeling its effects in their everyday lives.

These observations in Ireland—in contrast to the timing of the anti-austerity protests elsewhere following the global financial crisis of 2007–2008—dovetail with the historical example provided by Alexis de Tocqueville (1955 [1856]) in the opening quotation. Indeed, historical evidence suggests that unequal economic recovery and the growing gap between what people expect to happen and what is happening can lead to protest and even riots. In the Irish context, people accepted austerity because they believed by doing so the entire economy would benefit. On aggregate, this is true. However, the economic recovery was unequal: many people did not feel the effects in their everyday lives. In *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, de Tocqueville (1955 [1856]), revealed the ways in which French workers revolted and overthrew their government not during economic hardship but during a loosening of Parisian rule and a reduction in taxes—when the French thought things would get better, but they didn’t.

Similarly, James C. Davies (1962), in another historical account of civic disobedience, noted that revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic

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and social development is followed by a brief period of economic and social decline. His seminal theory highlighted the role of time in leading to revolutions. They often occur, he argued, when a social group's expectations of their status—either economic or social—rise, but these increasing expectations are not met, and indeed, go unfulfilled. Although there is research that suggests “sweet revenge” is satisfying in relation to past losses (Knutson 2004), in general, social psychological evidence largely supports the idea that people are loss averse; they weigh losses more heavily than gains (Tversky and Kahneman 1991).

In a further example, the sociologist Samuel Stouffer, with his research on the US Army, discovered the military police were more satisfied with their slow promotions than air corpsmen were with their quick promotions (Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Star, and Williams 1949). The work of Stouffer and colleagues showed how the correlation within a unit (between promotion rates and satisfaction) was not the same as the across-unit correlation (between promotion rates and satisfaction). To comprehend this paradox, he developed an explanation based on relative deprivation. He illustrated how it is immediate comparisons to relevant individuals within a unit—rather than across units—that were salient for individual satisfaction. The military police were satisfied with their promotion levels relative to other military police and not with the air corpsmen, with whom they seldom interacted. This example highlights the importance of considering what comparisons people make. In an increasingly culturally pluralizing and globalizing world, considering who compares whom to whom is a salient question. Cultural psychology can offer ways to understand these processes.

Relative Deprivation and Cultural Psychology

These foundational relative deprivation case studies have the benefit of being analyzed in depth within broader social and political contexts; however, one problem is the theoretical framework used to explain these counterintuitive situations has been used post hoc. The useful theory that was derived from these empirical investigations is the theory of relative deprivation.

Relative deprivation models, put forth by psychologists, can help explain these situations (Crosby 1976; Pettigrew 2015, 2016; Runciman 1966; Walker and Pettigrew 1984). The basic premise suggests when people compare themselves with a reference group thought no more deserving than themselves but that appears to fare better, this leads to the experience of angry frustration dissociated from objective deprivation. An individual is likely to feel angry resentment due to the failure to possess or achieve a desired object, goal, way of life, or standard of living, only when similar or salient others possess it; when the individual wants it and feels entitled to it; and when the person thinks possession is achievable and does not blame themselves for a previous failure to achieve it. The comparisons people make are situated in both immediate environments and broader societal structures and are motivated by

social and biological needs, personal pasts, and personality traits (Crosby 1976). The perceived disadvantage can manifest in multiple ways, including feelings of exploitation, oppression, the inequality of outcomes, and resentment against other individuals or social groups. The outcome of feeling relatively deprived in relation to salient others is determined by personal characteristics, made manifest in broader social, cultural, economic, and legal contexts (Crosby 1976; Pettigrew 2015, 2016). Cramer (2016), for example, illustrates how feelings of political resentment against liberal elites motivated people in rural Wisconsin to reelect a political candidate who stood for policies that would not benefit people in these rural communities.

Similarly, Karl Marx articulated a concept that dovetails with the concept of relative deprivation. In *Wage Labor and Capital*, Marx (1973 [1849]) said, “A house may be large or small; as long as the neighbouring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain” (11). People are unhappy in their contexts when their expectations are incongruent with their realities. Frustration arises as your neighbor builds an extension.

Frank (2013) makes a similar argument, suggesting it is not absolute income but relative levels of income—and the possibility for the consumption this brings in relation to salient groups of other people—that explain middle-class frustration and feelings that they are “falling behind.” However, despite a widening income gap between groups both within and across countries, the rising global floor of wealth, income, and access to goods and services can help modulate frustration caused by rising economic inequalities (Frankfurt 2015; Power 2017).

Despite having its foundations in the historical analysis of de Tocqueville (1955 [1856]) and the sociological application by Stouffer et al. (1949), the majority of the empirical research in social psychology on relative deprivation uses quantitative experiments (see a thorough review from Pettigrew 2016). Although these have the advantage of precise control of independent and dependent variables, they often lack ecological validity, cultural sensitivity, and a temporal unfolding of relative deprivation phenomena that the original case studies highlighted so well (Power 2011; Power, Velez, Qadafi, and Tennant 2018).

Cultural psychological research (Bruner 1990; 2002; Cole 1996; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Power 2016; Shweder 1991, 2003; Shweder and Power 2013) can develop the relative deprivation concept. This oeuvre suggests there are psychological universals—all people want, feel, think, act, desire, and judge what is right and wrong—but these universals manifest in localized contexts. There are psychological universals that do not manifest uniformly (Casasanti and Menon 2017). As such, cultural and moral norms, informed by history and economics, made explicit in laws and institutions, inform the nonuniform manifestation of all cognitions and behaviors. This has implications for fleshing out the bones of relative deprivation theory.

Comparison groups are always bound in shifting social, cultural, historical, political, economic, and legal contexts. Who compares whom to whom is a matter of understanding the context in which comparisons are made. For example, research by Czaika and de Haas (2012) illustrates predictable patterns of migrant workers who are willing to do the types of jobs locals won't, in worse working conditions, for less pay. The comparison group of the migrants, however, is not the locals in their host country. It is a comparison with their past; they compare themselves with their lives and conditions in the country they left. For the migrant's children, however, they often feel deprived in relation to their peer group: other children at school. This is because their comparison group is other children in their host country, not children in their parent's country of origin. These contextual applications of relative deprivation theory are often lost at the expense of controlled social psychological manipulations of variables. The sociological evidence highlights the importance of understanding the contextual issues involved in intergroup comparisons.

Similarly, the concept of angry frustration invites closer analysis. Again, the manifestation—if any—of this frustration depends on the wider context. On a collective level, in more open democracies, for example, protest is legal and can be made manifest in unfolding social, political, legal, and economic contexts. In contrast, in more closed societies, such as dictatorships (Moghaddam 2013; Popper 1966), governments can prohibit peaceful assembly. On an individual level, angry frustration might have different manifestations, such as anti-social behavior, crime, or mental illness or physical health conditions (Crosby 1976).

Collective action—in the form of rallies, riots, and revolutions—requires conditions beyond individual frustration to materialize (Warren and Power 2015). In contrast to contemporary formulations of relative deprivation theory (Pettigrew 2016), anger is just one manifestation of frustration. In the Irish context, with the collapse and subsequent recovery of the domestic economy, there was frustration, and certainly anger, at the government, which was represented as failing to deliver on election promises of an economic recovery for all Irish citizens. People who protested in the context of unequal economic growth were frustrated and demonstrated because some members of their salient social group—other Irish people—gained financially to a greater degree. Everyone endured the hardship of austerity. Only some are reaping the rewards of an economic recovery.

Economic Crisis and the Republic of Ireland

Previous research examined the relatively muted Irish response to imposed austerity since the global economic crash of 2008 (Power 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Power and Nussbaum 2014, 2016). This research illustrated the interconnected moral and cultural narratives used by two polar opposite groups in Irish society—public elites and unemployed Irish youth—to explain and justify the reasons why the Irish, unlike European Union (EU) neighbors such as Greece

and Spain, accepted austerity without protesting. A master narrative common to both groups was the historically ingrained, culturally widespread moral belief that in life “you reap what you sow.” The implication is that the Irish public was culpable for the 2008 economic crash, and austerity was a natural and inevitable consequence of their previous actions. The Irish people were represented by the group of public elites as being unwise with their money during the economic boom in the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s. Interviews with unemployed Irish youth revealed that although they identify the actions of the government and the banks as contributing to the economic collapse in Ireland, these young people have internalized the “reap what you sow” narrative. In this sense, members of the public narrate examples from their own lives that illustrate self-blame: the tendency to attribute blame for the crisis to their own financial actions and, consequently, to accept austerity without protesting. It is illogical to protest when you feel culpable for your own actions.

The previous Irish minister for finance, the late Brian Leihian, who oversaw the controversial bank guarantee in 2008 that bailed out the failing Irish banks at the expense of the taxpayer, once said, in relation to the Irish economic boom and subsequent austerity following the collapse, that “we all partied.”¹ The implication for Irish ears was that “now we have the hangover.” The former minister was criticized in the Irish media for this statement, which first aired on November 24, 2010, on the investigative journalism show *Prime Time*. Perhaps because of the backlash against this statement, the logic it entailed, and the blame it placed on ordinary people, other public elites were very reluctant to make similar statements on the record, yet it encapsulated an ingrained belief that in Irish life, “you reap what you sow.”

Interestingly, when I spoke informally with an influential Irish elite in December 2016, she made reference to the former minister's remarks when she stated:

Well, there was a narrative out there that people partied. And then people say, “I didn't party.” You get in trouble if you say it. But that's not true. [whispers] It's bullshit. Everyone partied. Some might have stayed in the kitchen getting drunk, others might have popped in for 5 minutes and left, others stayed all night. People mightn't have bought fancy houses, but I don't know anyone who didn't upgrade their car, who didn't buy art, or a sculpture, or something to upgrade their life. But you can't say that—you just can't say it.

Interviews with public elites reveal and conceal. There are disjunctions between what they say on and off the record. In whispered tones, some public elites still blame the actions of ordinary people for causing the economic crisis, even 8 years after the financial collapse. The extract reported above chimes with the initial fieldwork with public elites and unemployed youth. Moreover, these insights are bolstered by previous psychological anthropological research into Irish mentalities that highlights how the Irish often feel culpable for their hardship.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK7w6fXoYxo>.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2001 [1981]), in *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics*, examined the effects of emigration from a small rural town in the west of Ireland on villagers remaining behind. Scheper-Hughes found that social isolation, the role of the Catholic Church as the dominant moral force, unwanted celibacy, and perceived harmful child-rearing practices all affected mental health, especially the onset of schizophrenia. She revealed the importance of the moral premise that “you reap what you sow” and the negative effects this has on mental health. Abstinence and celibacy were attempts to avoid “sowing” and thus earn a place in heaven in the afterlife.

Contemporary ethnographers have developed Irish cultural models and their effect on the distinct lived experiences of groups within the country. Sullivan (1990) investigated how alcoholics and depressed Irish adults understood the onset and manifestations of their mental health problems in the local Irish context. Her respondents drew on historically embedded ideas to describe ways of being Irish. She also identified the moral foundation of “you reap what you sow” and a widespread and profound belief that this form of morality expresses itself in the notion of “redemptive suffering” in the Irish psyche. Sullivan traced this moral premise to the Catholic Church, which highlights having to remedy previous moral transgressions by confessing sins and serving penance: “The more you suffer the quicker you get to heaven” (Sullivan 1990:130), as one respondent commented.

My previous research also suggests an entanglement of the “reap what you sow” moral foundation with other cultural factors that are steeped in Irish collective memories. People draw on the past to make sense of the present and orient toward future action (Bartlett 1932; Halbwachs 1992 [1925]; Power 2016, 2017; Wagoner 2017; Wertsch 2008). Other themes from these investigations with public elites and unemployed people in the Republic of Ireland revealed how the collective memories of the past also underpinned the initial Irish response to the global crisis of 2008. There is a belief that migration from Ireland in times of economic hardship is culturally legitimized and historically ingrained. The Irish hit the road when the going gets tough. Moreover, Ireland is well known for a long history of occupation and violent resistance to it. Interviews with public elites reveal the ways they draw on collective memories of the violent past in Ireland and purposefully distance contemporary Irish behaviors from these actions to articulate a peaceful present. In this way, the Irish do their bloodletting at the ballot box, not on the streets.

According to my respondents, in contrast to the fragmented and violent collective memories of Irish history, contemporary Ireland is now a maturing democracy.

When it comes to dealing with austerity, the Irish were all in it together.

Shifting Context and Changing Behaviors

But times change. Shifting political and economic contexts often lead to the application and interpretation of fundamental

beliefs in different ways. In Ireland the economic and political context changed with a subsequent shift in media analyses. The belief that in life “you reap what you sow” is interpreted and applied by people unhappy with the unfair economic recovery in a different way. It is no longer applied to indicate self-blame. Now it is others—the government and other elites—who should be served their just desserts. Similar to the observations of de Tocqueville (1955 [1856]), the increase in economic growth and the perceived loosening of government budgetary cuts lead to rising expectations for the utilitarian economic improvement of the Irish. After all, the Irish had taken their medicine in the form of austerity. They all expected to get better. Most did not.

Two things happened in Ireland that led this protesting and civic discontent in the context of rising expectations (Power 2018a). First, the economy began to recover quickly in Ireland since 2013. Second, a new austerity charge on water was introduced.

Rapid Economic Growth

Following the bursting of a decadelong property bubble coinciding with the onset of the global financial crisis, Ireland suffered a sharp and deep recession that saw a virtual collapse of the domestic banking sector. Real gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by almost 10% in 2009 and continued to contract in 2010 and 2011, while unemployment climbed from below 5% in 2007 to reach a peak of 14.7% in 2012. This compares with a contraction of 2.8% in the United States in 2009, which was swiftly followed by a return to positive GDP growth from 2010 on. In the context of a sharp economic decline, the Irish government was forced to seek shelter in the form of an EU-IMF financial assistance program, as it lost access to financial markets in the face of a spiraling deficit that reached 32% of GDP in 2010 due to unprecedented capital injections into the banking sector.

In the context of such a sharp recession, the speed of aggregate economic recovery has been stark. The first shoots were visible in 2013, when real GDP recorded positive growth of 1.1%, while gross national product increased by more than 4%. However, the recovery really gained momentum the following year, with Ireland claiming the mantle of fastest-growing economy in the euro area in both 2014 and 2015. Both GDP and, importantly, GDP per capita—a key measure of living standards—moved above its precrisis peak in 2014, a rapid turnaround given the scale of the downturn in Ireland. The improvement in economic performance was strongly led by the exporting sectors in the initial phase and then by increased domestic demand making a significant contribution. While personal consumption had continued to contract in 2013, it recorded positive growth of 1.7% in 2014, which strengthened to an increase of 4.5% in 2015. Although the volatility of Irish national accounts data can make it difficult to precisely measure the strength of economic growth, the broadening of the recovery is evidenced by the performance of the labor market,

where the unemployment rate has dipped below 8%, from a peak of 14.7% in early 2012.

This upturn in the Irish economy has been highlighted in Irish and international media and debated and commented upon by politicians in the Republic of Ireland. This narrative of objective economic growth was omnipresent in the public sphere in Ireland from 2013. The country had formally exited the economic recession. It became the first EU country to exit the eurozone bailout program, and the economy was heralded as a success story for tightening belts and accepting austerity for longer-term economic growth.

But this was only one half of the story of the shifting of the Irish context. The second major shift resulted from the introduction of a new charge on water consumption.

A New Charge on Water

On December 28, 2014, Michael D. Higgins, the current president of the Republic of Ireland, signed a controversial Water Services Bill into law. For the first time in its history, the Irish public would have to pay directly for the water it consumed, in the form of quarterly bills. The enactment of this law was met with strong opposition from sectors of the Irish public in the form of local and large-scale anti-water-charge demonstrations, clashes and standoffs with police, and a refusal of many citizens to register to pay this new charge. In Ireland, water is often represented as a fundamental human right and is particularly plentiful in Ireland, an island, where it often rains. The new charge on water acted as a concrete focal point to galvanize a broader anti-austerity movement: it was the final straw—or better, it was the drop that caused the dam to burst.

Protests in Ireland began not when the economy collapsed but when it was drastically improving. The following analysis develops the Deprivation-Protest Paradox. I highlight the ways in which anti-water-charge protesters—anti-austerity protesters—were aware of the rosy narrative of economic recovery in the Republic of Ireland, but they were not feeling it subjectively. They highlight multifaceted examples and manifestations of this perceived unfair and unequal recovery. And it is this gap—between objective economic growth and subjective lived experiences—that motivates and galvanizes anti-austerity demonstrations. They felt they should be better off now during an economic recovery, but they perceived themselves as not being better off in relation to the comparison group of other Irish people, who were deemed to have benefited disproportionately during the economic upturn.

Methods

Data I collected include observations and semistructured interviews with 200 protesters (balanced by gender, broad adult age, mostly working class) at a series of seven national demonstrations in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. I approached one in every tenth cluster of people for consent to an interview before and during the protest. All interviews were audio re-

corded. I also recorded talks given by politicians, community activists, and trade unionists at post-protest rallies to augment detailed notes of my ethnographic observations. I performed a thematic analysis of the transcribed interview material (Braun and Clarke 2006). All names and identifying features of members of the public are altered. Pseudonyms are used. The sole exception is from the end quotation from a prominent politician who gave a talk at the conclusion of one anti-austerity rally that was televised, recorded in multiple ways by several people, and available online.

The analysis is also informed by 3 months of in-depth urban ethnographic work with a core group of anti-austerity protesters in a small city in the Republic of Ireland. To maintain the privacy of my participants, I do not identify the small city I did my ethnographic work in.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections. First, I use an illustrative example to portray how protesters reflected on the recent past to explain why they did not protest as the economy collapsed in 2007–2008. In the second section, I present evidence showing how protesters were motivated to demonstrate by unequal distribution of resources, wealth, and income during an economic recovery. Third, I present evidence illustrating the types of localized complaints, told to me by protesters, aimed at highlighting how the economic recovery was not being experienced equally.

Awakening to the Possibility of Protest

Reflecting on the initial Irish response to imposed austerity since 2008, my respondents during these national demonstrations provided a number of reasons and justifications for the initial Irish malaise. The dominant metaphor used was that the Irish were asleep and were finally awakening. They clearly see social injustices. The unequal recovery was viewed as unjust because there was a belief that everyone endured austerity and therefore was entitled to be rewarded during an economic recovery. Now only some people are reaping the benefits of this collective hardship. The rising tide should raise all boats. But in Ireland, this is not the case.

One woman in her late fifties drew on Irish history to explain why the Irish did not protest when austerity was first introduced but learned how to do it—and feel justified demonstrating—with the introduction of water charges:

The Irish don't have a history of protest. They either have a history of revolution or immigration. So protest is the one in the middle. And they are just finally learning this one. I don't think they are ready to have a revolution, because in Northern Ireland they know what it is like. They know how painful it is. And they are fed up immigrating, although our youth are still emigrating. My daughter is heading off to New Zealand soon. So the people who are not migrating now are finally

awakening and realizing that there is another option. And that is to protest, and that's where it is going now.

This passage dovetails with previous work, which suggested Irish people remembered the past, particularly a history of migration and violence in Northern Ireland, to articulate cultural and moral reasons why the Irish initially passively accepted austerity (Power 2016). Moreover, it resonates with current research also illustrating the ways in which protesters recall a version of the past to understand and rationalize the present. In this extract, this respondent suggests Irish protesters, including her, have awakened and have learned to protest. In the context of the interview, it is clear that other measures, such as migration or revolution, have been responses to Irish hardship in other historical epochs, but the democratic process of protesting and voting as a legitimized and effective means to have one's voice heard has emerged as an option. The Irish have "finally realized" protesting is an "option" to mitigate social injustice and create societal change. This comment also highlights a possible cultural manifestation explaining the passive Irish response to austerity in relation to Greece. The Irish did not have an easily acceptable cultural script and institutional framework to galvanize protest until water charges were introduced (Wertsch 2008).

Unfair and Unequal Economic Growth

Pursuing this point in order to comprehend why protesters were demonstrating during an economic upturn, rather than a recession, I asked them, "Do you think there's an economic recovery ongoing in Ireland?" I approached one group of protesters, one woman who did most of the talking during the interview, and several men. All were middle aged and spoke with what I interpreted as working-class Dublin accents. They responded, in quick and overlapping answers, to my question about whether there was an economic recovery in Ireland:

Woman: Not for us.

Man 1: Not for ordinary people.

Man 2: Not for us, not for the ordinary Joe Soap [i.e., Joe Blow].

Man 1: Not for the ordinary people. For the rich, all right.

Woman: I mean, how are things different? I am certainly not different.

Man 2: I'm a taxi driver. I was out for 8 hours last night and earned 40 euro.

In this case, people are evaluating their personal situations as worse even though, on average, the economy is improving.

These protesters hear things are getting better—things are "different" with the economy. But they are not experiencing this economic growth in a meaningful way in their lives. The second man's report of how little he's earning gives an empirical illustration of how he is no better off in the aggregate economic upturn. Although indicators such as GDP illustrate strong economic growth in Ireland, these aggregate increases are not reflected in working-class people's everyday experiences. The taxi driver reported earning a paltry 40 euro for 8 hours work. It is an illustration of the ways economic growth is not translated into increased wages for "the ordinary Joe Soap."

I approached a lone protester who agreed to share his thoughts about the economic situation in Ireland. I asked him, too, whether he believed there was an ongoing economic recovery in Ireland. His answer chimed well with many others reported by the demonstrators, illustrating a narrative of objective economic growth that was not experienced equally among all sectors of Irish society:

Author: Do you feel there is an economic recovery going on?

Man: Not for us [referring to others on the protest].

Author: Do you think there is for anyone?

Man: Well, for a very small proportion of people. If you look at the very wealthiest people in society, they have almost doubled their wealth over the last 10 years. For the 1%, their wealth has grown on average by 7% per year since 2008. For me, and for people under 25, there has been no recovery whatsoever.

Again, it is clear this respondent is making a comparison with a relevant group in Ireland: even though he was alone in the crowd at the protest, he articulates a clear division between "us" and "a small proportion of wealthy people." He clearly perceives himself as being disadvantaged in comparison, as relative deprivation theory would predict. The wealthy elite are getting richer in contemporary Ireland, but "there has been no recovery whatsoever" for him or others like him. From his perspective, as articulated in other comments during our talk, he, and others in the 99%, are equally as capable, hardworking, and deserving as the 1%, yet they are not reaping the benefits of the economic upturn. He told me that despite his efforts to find a job, he is unemployed. The wealthy, not ordinary people, are harvesting the benefits of the aggregate economic upturn.

In sum, protesters were aware there was an objective economic recovery in Ireland—the notion was omnipresent in the public sphere at the time of these interviews. But they were also clear that it was not being felt equally for all members of Irish society in their subjective lived experiences. Given this, it is

important to comprehend the culturally and temporally specific themes these individuals protested about and how they relate to motivating demonstrations in the first place.

Local Manifestations of Perceived Unfair Economic Recovery

My earlier research illustrated the ways in which both public elites and unemployed Irish youth had a tendency to partially blame the economic crisis on the actions of ordinary Irish people. So, in the context of economic recovery, I asked protesters, “Who, if anyone, do you blame for the economic crisis in Ireland?” They put the responsibility firmly at the feet of the political and banking elite in the Republic of Ireland. This stands in stark contrast to earlier interview data that suggested blame for the economic crisis was distributed toward a variety of sources, inclusive of the actions of the Irish public. A man approaching his sixties summarized the views of many other protesters I spoke to during these demonstrations thus:

We blame the elite for the economic recession. We well understand, the ordinary punter [gambler] understands, that if he goes into Ted Rogers [a place where you can gamble] and puts a bet down on a horse, if he loses that money it's gone. The stock market is designed in such a way that it's supposed to be a gamble. So, when people lose their money on the stock market, they should lose. The government shouldn't turn around and tell the Irish people for generations to come to pay off these particular bankers and these particular people. And while it has taken the Irish people a little while to get moving, they are becoming awake and aware. And they've had enough . . . and that's the reason why you have tens of thousands of people out here today.

On September 29, 2008, the Irish government made the controversial decision to guarantee the six failing Irish banks at the expense of the taxpayer. My respondent is explicitly referring to this controversial action. The bankers and investors gambled with their money and lost, and it is not right for them to be bailed out after losing.

Like the Irish who accepted austerity because they felt culpable, these gambling bankers should reap what they sowed. The fact that they have not gotten what they deserved is “the reason why you have tens of thousands of people out” on the streets. The sense of injustice galvanizes this social movement. I interviewed a couple, and the woman—again, middle aged—revealed that it was the introduction of the charge on water that served as a focal point for this social movement, but it has developed beyond this. Another manifestation of the gap between rising expectations and lived realities appeared in morally charged narratives about the homeless crisis in Ireland that was making headlines, being particularly stark in contrast to stories of strong economic recovery. She said:

It's not right. The children are being brought up in hotels because their homes have been taken from them, because they can't afford the mortgage. It's just not right. You should

just let them rent a house. They may never own it, but so what? At least they have a roof over their head. We are here today against the water charges, but actually, it's everything. It's no longer only the water. It's a lot of other things.

Although the introduction of the charge on water initially galvanized a protest movement, it mobilized people to protest against what they perceived as growing economic inequality in Ireland. According to my respondent, people are not just against water charges, “but actually, it's everything,” referring to a multitude of social problems and injustices, including homelessness. And indeed, there is a homeless crisis in Ireland, particularly prevalent in urban areas such as Dublin. Another demonstrator I spoke to on the streets of Dublin emphasized this issue when he told me, “Well, there is an awful lot [of people], especially in the lower class, that don't even have a roof over their head at the moment. Some of them live in cars and all because they can't afford rent. Governments seem to be putting it on the back burner all the time.”

A well-documented feature of the Irish economic recovery was the decrease in the number of unemployed people in Ireland. As recorded earlier, this reached its peak in 2012, at 14.7% and was at 7.8% in June 2016. However, it is important to note these figures are confounded due to high rates of migration from Ireland. If migration didn't occur in Ireland following the economic collapse, it might be assumed the number of unemployed people in the country would be higher. Still, many protesters dismissed the decrease in unemployment as creative bookkeeping by the government and their officials. The claim is the figures might be officially falling, but the reality behind this decline is not reported on, or revealed, by the media or the government. Although unemployment figures are officially falling, many people are unhappy with being required to work on “job-bridge” schemes.

This program requires people to accept jobs that are offered to them for a slight pay increase on their core social welfare payments. If they refuse, they cannot claim any social welfare. Some protesters are dissatisfied with the types of jobs available, and others are unhappy with the conditions of work. For example, this middle-aged protester articulated a representative position:

Next they [the government] will be selling us, and we will be going into slavery. They have these schemes set up; it's called Job Bridge. It's slavery. It's slavery. It's designed to enslave a person and to make the books look good for Europe and America. To say: “Oh, look what we done. We have 100,000 jobs extra.” It's all bullshit. It's fiddling books while getting people to work for free.

Another manifestation of the disjunction between the narrative of objective economic recovery and subjective lived experiences is revealed in discourse about the cost of living in contemporary Ireland. This woman, who was accompanied by four other middle-aged women and one man, highlighted this issue when she said:

There is far too much austerity on ordinary people, on ordinary working-class people. And even middle-income people are being crucified with high taxation, with motor tax, petrol tax, VAT [value added tax], everything, everything you buy in this country, this, it's far too dear, it's far too expensive . . . and at the same time the politicians are getting these lucrative wages and salaries, expenses and travel costs, and it is unbelievable what they get.

This protester is making comparisons between “ordinary people” and other comparable groups—in this case, political elites—and she finds that they are disadvantaged in comparison, as relative deprivation theory suggests. She said, “There is far too much austerity on ordinary people.” In contrast, “the politicians are getting these lucrative wages.” This leads to angry frustration and manifests in her taking to the streets to demonstrate against this perceived unfair inequality.

At the end of these protests, organized by the group Right2Water, speeches were often given by left-wing politicians, trade unionists, and community activists. These were often skilled orators and often drew on revolutionary aspects of Irish history as they spoke from stages constructed near salient locations in Irish revolutionary history to remind the crowd of previous Irish victories over perceived social injustices. They purposely create parallels between previous Irish social movements and current injustices, such as water charges, homelessness, inadequate jobs, and rising prices. Summarizing these grievances, one prominent left-wing politician, Mary Lou McDonald of the Sinn Féin political party, spoke with rousing vigor:

Let no one be in any doubt that our demand will be an end to water charges and to Irish Water [the company set up to oversee the installation of water meters to determine the amount each household used and what they should be charged] and the beginning of a society based on equality, decency, fairness, and full citizenship for every single one of us, and that means a roof over every citizen's head, that means decent work, that means a decent chance, and fair taxation.

On February 26, 2016, the Irish electorate used the central democratic tool at their disposal to vote out the government that oversaw the dramatic economic recovery with independents and left-wing politicians who campaigned on abolishing water charges, gaining much parliamentary power. Though the protesters were effective in getting their voices heard, the major party, Fine Gael, who oversaw the economic recovery, continued to cling to power in an unstable and minority government (at the time of writing). On July 14, 2017, this government announced that it would refund the money Irish citizens paid to Irish Water.

Conclusion

On the one hand, the Irish public understands there is an aggregate economic recovery, that official government figures all indicate strong growth. Yet many segments of society are

unhappy because they are not experiencing this economic growth in a meaningful way in their everyday lives. Although the Irish accepted the yoke of austerity as the economy collapsed, protests were eventually galvanized and legitimized in the context of an unequally shared economic recovery that led to a feeling of relative deprivation. The Deprivation-Protest Paradox sheds light on a counterintuitive process. There was no protest for shared absolute deprivation, but there was a strong protest movement for relative deprivation.

The disjunction between what people expected to happen and what did happen led to angry frustration when one group of people compared themselves with others and found themselves disadvantaged. This manifests overall in protesting on the streets and in voting out the governing party. Within this context, my analysis reveals how complaints about the unfair economic recovery are both shared by protesters and but also heterogeneous in content. Protesters told me about inaccurate employment figures, the homeless crisis, the rising cost of living, the water charges and other taxes, and a shift in initial blame for the economic crisis. Their lived experiences reveal the reasons why the Irish protested during an economic recovery.

The timing of this social movement for a more fair and equitable Ireland is important. It occurred during an economic recovery, not a decline. There is historical precedent for social movements arising during economic recoveries. De Tocqueville (1955 [1856]) observed a related pattern of revolt and civic unrest in France preceding the French Revolution (1789). More recently, the Occupy Wall Street protests occurred across the United States not during the economic collapse in 2007–2008 but when the US economy was growing under the Obama presidency in 2011. Again, this social movement occurred when the overall economy was objectively improving, but not equally and not for everyone. This created a sense of unfair economic inequality. It created a growing distinction between the “haves” and “have-nots.” This notion was captured by the well-known trope of the Occupy social movement: “the 1% vs. the 99%,” an idea not lost on the Irish respondents.

Another important feature of the Irish social movement is the average age of participants. As might be expected, it was not young educated students who drove these demonstrations. Rather, it was predominantly middle-aged working-class people who formed the core of these national—and local—protests.

Relative Deprivation: Extending the Theory and Joining It with Other Cases

In the United States, the perception of relative deprivation since the Occupy protests has led to further polarization between the two primary political parties. The rise of right-wing Donald Trump for the Republicans and the socialist Bernie Sanders can be seen as a manifestation of perceived unfair disparity. Both politicians tapped into the large swaths of the US population that felt Obama's economic recovery had not

meaningfully impacted their everyday lives. President Trump said he wanted to make America great again by attempting to create a more homogenous United States, with supposed implications for the creation of more jobs and a more economically fair country. Sanders envisioned a more inclusive and heterogeneous United States but shared a tactic with Trump to highlight perceived social injustices and relative deprivation of the majority in relation to minority cultural and ethnic groups. His rhetoric is also concerned with creating a more equal and fair society when the growing gap between the 1% and the 99% is reduced.

The Irish case study clearly has parallels, particularly with the unfolding US economic and political context. The Deprivation-Protest Paradox, outlined in my analysis in the localized Irish context, highlights the need to extend relative deprivation theory in a globalizing and culturally pluralizing world. In its classic format, supported by experimental psychological research, the relative deprivation theory posits that when an individual or group compares itself with a salient individual or group and finds themselves lacking or disadvantaged, this leads to angry frustration (Crosby 1976; Pettigrew 2015, 2016).

Insights derived from the Deprivation-Protest Paradox, which dovetails with cultural psychological work on the principle of “universals without the uniformity” (Cassaniti and Menon 2017), complicate basic relative deprivation theorizing. The fundamental insight is that psychological universals—thinking, feeling, wanting, acting, and moralizing—do not manifest in uniform ways across both time and cultures. Group comparisons, relative feelings, and manifestation of anger, if any, all depend on the cultural groups embedded in broader historical, social, moral, economic, political, and legal contexts.

In contemporary Ireland, the protesters are not comparing themselves to some other potentially salient social groups (e.g., Syrian asylum seekers, African refugees, or famous Irish celebrities or sports stars, all of whom have far worse or far better social and economic status and are potentially comparable). The leaders and supporters of this anti-austerity social movement make certain and precise comparisons: between those who are obviously benefiting from the recovery and those—like them—who hear about it and endured austerity in various forms to various degrees but are not experiencing it in their everyday lives. The salient group—similarly to the US Occupy movement—is between the haves and the have-nots. Future research needs to examine the ways in which relevant reference groups are chosen and why.

Protests and other forms of democratic civic unrest do not necessarily occur when resources become scarce on aggregate. The Deprivation-Protest Paradox illustrates the counterfactual process: protests can occur during periods of rapid economic growth. Comparisons between social groups, informed by collective remembering, can help unpack the localized meanings behind this abstract paradox.

The temporal dimension helps account for this. Interestingly, not one Irish protester said those who are currently benefiting from the economic recovery lost more in the economic downturn. Although Irish protesters draw on the past

to make sense of the present, they draw on a particular version of the past. They do not recall the effects the downturn had on those who had the most to lose. They only see unequal recovery, not unequal recession. This highlights issues of perceived absolutism. The protesters remember enduring austerity—of being on the border of actual poverty if their social welfare were cut—and therefore austerity measures affect them more deeply. In contrast, they believe the downturn for those wealthier people has a lesser effect, even though in objective terms their relative loss is greater. The temporal unfolding of events and how these are remembered are important to conceptualize to understand economic crises and the rise of protests.

I gathered no direct evidence from interviews with protesters that suggested the tightening of Irish belts—through increased taxation and cuts to public expenditure—was a responsible way to mitigate the financial crisis and possible national bankruptcy. Similarly, no protester expected that an unequal aggregate recovery would eventually positively impact their lives, both socially and financially. Yet there was no direct argument against the idea that austerity needed to be introduced and that it led to an economic recovery. Their frustration is not unfair austerity during the recession; it was unfair austerity during an unequal recovery.

Previous work has argued that revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of socioeconomic development is followed by a short and quick reversal of this upswing (Davies 1962). This temporal account differs from mine in a number of respects. First, in the Irish case, a prolonged period of economic growth was followed by a sharp recession in 2008. However, people did not protest at this point (Power 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). The Irish endured austerity as the economy receded and stagnated. Second, the Irish protested during an economic recovery, not decline. This observation contradicts previous temporal accounts of relative deprivation. Third, my account highlights the importance of understanding economic, historical, cultural, legal, and social contexts before one can meaningfully comprehend social movements, democratic engagement, and, ultimately, social change.

In the Irish context, like the US Occupy movement, the manifestation of this culturally sensitive relative deprivation is legal protest, overseen by the police and the tactics they use to control demonstrators to keep the peace. It is easy to imagine how perceptions of unfair economic inequality can manifest in more violent behaviors. Greece and Spain, for example, have seen protesters clash with riot police in Athens and Madrid since the global crisis began in 2008 (Power 2015; Power and Nussbaum 2014). Similarly, in more dictatorial societies, agents of the state—including (secret) police—might prevent assembly in the form of peaceful protest (Moghaddam 2013). Another manifestation might be the rise of satire in Ireland to highlight societal, economic, and political injustices. Voting in rival political parties or a realignment of political allegiances to form governments is another; therefore, the manifestation, if any, of angry frustration resulting from social comparisons depends on what is, and has historically been, allowed.

Cultural manifestations of temporal events steeped in historical, economic, political, and legal contexts have implications for basic relative deprivation theory that are primarily supported by experimental work, despite the theory's origins in qualitative research. The theory needs elaboration in a globalizing and culturally pluralizing world. It needs to answer questions about who compares who with whom, how, why, and with what outcomes, if any.

People understand their social positions in relation to other groups, but salient reference groups are potentially shifting (Shibutani 1955). Moghaddam (2005) argues that international mass media, with a focus on affluence and democratic ideals, has created rising expectations that often go unfulfilled for people in many parts of the world. This is because the daily lived experiences of people are unlike their media consumption. A consequence of this, according to Moghaddam, is to create frustration, anger, and support for "antiestablishment" viewpoints. Like the Irish case, a sense of relative deprivation arises between what people think the world could, or should, be like and its actuality. Reference groups are not necessarily within physical boundaries. Salient groups can be online, imagined, or peripherally or partially known, either through media or the internet. Lifestyles can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, or idealized beyond actuality (Orgad 2014; Shweder and Power 2013). Despite these potential inaccuracies, these imagined other social realities could potentially create angry frustration. This happened in the Irish case. The manifestation of rising expectations—either realized partially, in full, or not at all—depends on broader contextual issues.

The Deprivation-Protest Paradox is fundamental to understanding protest and economic development in a globalizing and culturally pluralizing twenty-first century. The Irish case highlights the issues of unfair economic inequality. The unequal economic recovery leads to feelings of relative deprivation. Above a perceived level of absolute deprivation, where one struggles for the basics in life—as might be seen in economic protests in Venezuela due to food shortages in 2016—relative deprivation is experienced due to the perception of increasing relative disadvantage during economic growth. All Irish citizens experienced austerity in some form. Their complaints were situated in the localized Irish context, informed by moral judgments and by remembering the past to articulate a series of problems with contemporary Irish society. The government was seen as illegitimate and had to be voted out of power. Protesting highlighted this representation of the government.

According to the demonstrators, political change needed to occur, followed by economic change. The distribution of economic resources during the recovery did not need to be uniform. It needed to be perceived as being fair. There is not a moral foundation for economic equality, just fairness of distribution (Tyler 2011).

Extending from the Deprivation-Protest Paradox, a theory of unfair inequality suggests that protests during economic crises can be predicted by examining how fair or unfair both

economic recoveries and recessions are judged to be by relevant societal groups, rather than by solely examining objective economic indicators for economic growth or decline. This is because, above an absolute level, impressions and perceptions of what is expected to happen—perceptions of what is fair or unfair—during economic upturns or downturns for groups in societies is important in determining whether people take to the streets to protest against their position or not. The contemporary Irish anti-water-charge protest is one example; the Occupy Wall Street movement is another. The rise of extreme political polarization in the United States—with Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump—is a third case. Feelings of relative deprivation manifest in support for hardline, more extreme views of what ought to happen in society. And historical cases abound, such as de Tocqueville's (1955 [1856]) investigation of the cases of the French Revolution. People don't simply respond directly to objective economic conditions; they also respond to their subjective experiences and what they think those mean.

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Comments

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Constructing Symbols of Inequality

Protests and social upheavals are complex phenomena that are hard to predict in advance but, in hindsight, lead us to ask what factors led people to protest. Even in stable authoritarian regimes with no visible opposition, there are always hidden, everyday forms of resistance to power that can, under the right conditions, transform into open rebellion (Bayat 2013; Scott 1990). When do those hidden transcripts of dissatisfaction float to the surface and mobilize anger and action?

Séamus Power answers this question by developing relative deprivation theory to account for different cultural specificities. His nuanced approach explains why the Irish people did

not protest the government's harsh austerity measures when the economy collapsed in 2007–2008 and why at a later point, in 2014–2015, when Ireland had the fastest-growing economy in Europe, mass demonstrations erupted, triggered by a new charge on water consumption. In his analysis, the population accepted economic hardship for three reasons tied to Irish history (e.g., the notion “you reap what you sow”), but took to the streets when economic recovery was happening but experienced unequally. Thus it was feelings of deprivation relative to others in the Irish society that counted.

Another important feature of Power's paper is the attention to meaning making analyzed from his in-depth ethnographic field study. In this commentary, we aim to elaborate on how symbols are constructed to express feelings of inequality and drive protest. As Power explains, the demonstrations broke against a new water charge, but this charge was symbolic of broader perceived unequal distribution of resources during the economic recovery. The introduction of the water charge became the symbolic trigger and focal point for this social movement against austerity. Thus we wish to explore the role of affective symbols from other contexts in mobilizing protest.

Earlier theorists of the crowd (e.g., Le Bon and Tarde) observed that people are not moved by so-called rational discourse, including statistics and other such means of persuasion. Instead, they respond to symbolic images and slogans that shape their emotions and motivate action toward common ends (Wagoner 2018). In Ireland's case, the water charge was the symbol that condensed broader meanings of inequality and created a vivid image for the momentum of the protest. As Power explains, what made this symbol effective was that it was embodied an Irish cultural memory of water as a fundamental human right and a plentiful resource that the public should never have to pay for.

Looking at the discursive and symbolic processes that drive protest shows cultural specific meanings that relate to a community's values, collective memory, and national sentiments. Driving protests thus requires a process of meaning construction through symbols that are culturally meaningful and affective to the specific targeted community. It can be instructive to analyze this in other cases of mass protest, such as the recent Arab uprisings.

In Tunisia, protests in late 2010 were mobilized in response to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who was humiliated by police who confiscated his cart when he refused to pay them a bribe. The corruption and brutality of government officials, together with the marginalization of the working class, were common practice, but the image of Bouazizi gave concrete form to these grievances and thereby ignited anger and protest. Through new communication technologies, such symbols are quickly transmitted from one context to another, where they can be appropriated by new causes.

The Tunisia revolution sparked and inspired Egyptian protests, which employed their own local symbol of injustice, that of Khaled Said. Said was a young Egyptian middle-class man who was beaten to death by two police officers in broad

daylight. The call for the protests utilized the image of Said next to his disfigured corpse, with the slogan, “We are all Khaled Said.” The incident visualized police brutality. Said's image provided a relatable point of connection to the incident, and the slogan emphasized how no one is safe from this destiny under such a regime. In short, this symbol shaped people's emotions, forged a shared identity as repressed Egyptians, and mobilized collective action (Awad and Wagoner 2018).

Some symbols also become part of a global protest movement and create transnational solidarity groups. The Occupy movement is one such example. Its slogan “We are the 99%” constructed a symbol of solidarity in opposition to the 1% wealthy elite (the distinction of “Wall Street” and “Main Street” was also used frequently in political discourse). The symbol traveled from Wall Street and was diffused in different parts of the world, with its meaning elaborated to symbolize globalization around the world and the wealth inequalities it has created.

Symbol construction, when accompanied by vivid images such as those of Bouazizi or Said, drive collective emotions in a stronger manner than if the government brutality were symbolized through statistics and general information about torture and imprisonment. But strong symbols also rely on storytelling to create mental images and relatedness to a widely spread phenomenon, which can be seen in the recent #metoo campaign, rallying people online to share and read stories of sexual harassment and mobilizing solidarity for the cause.

Using Power's case study and his cultural psychology take on the construction of meaning and motive to protest, we can see commonalities between the Irish case and other protest movements. There is a common process of discursive and symbolic meaning-making processes that mobilize masses to protest, while there are unique and context-specific affective symbols that drive people in a specific time, social, economic, and political setting to anger and protest. This leads us not to abandon relative deprivation models but rather to enrich them by looking at how anger is channeled into cultural symbols that mobilize collective action.

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Objectivity, Subjectivity, and the Imprecision of the Social Sciences

During World War II, Samuel Stouffer and colleagues discovered an odd finding as they studied soldiers in the American Army (Stouffer et al. 1949): the military police, despite their slower promotions, felt more fulfilled with their pro-

motion rates than other military personnel, who enjoyed more frequent promotions. Stouffer et al. coined the term “relative deprivation” to describe how people’s subjective sense of being well treated can vary dramatically from their situation described more objectively by sets of numbers. Being poor is not the same as feeling poor. Resentments felt about inequities are not a monotonic function of those inequities as assessed by some objective measures.

Soon after the war, James Davis (1959) elaborated on the fundamental distinction between objective and subjective well-being. Davis noted that revolutions and rebellions tend to occur not when people are objectively the worst off; rather, he noted, a prolonged period of increasing prosperity is followed by a sharp slump. Davis christened his theory with the graphic name of the “J-curve” of expectations.

Subsequently, researchers (Crosby 1976, 1982; Gurr 1970; Runciman 1966; Williams 1975) have explored varying models of relative deprivation. Some (e.g., Bernstein and Crosby 1980) have looked at relative deprivation in controlled laboratory situations, whereas others have concentrated on real-world political and economic contexts (Carrillo et al. 2011). While the models outlining antecedents, correlates, and consequences of relative deprivation vary slightly from one another, the crux of their postulations consider when and why individuals feel deprivation in contexts of inequity. Among these postulations are notions of subjective reality, comparison to another individual or group, feelings of deservingness, expectations, and allocation of blame. Mapping resentment or anger as a catalyst to action requires consideration of context as well as consideration of individual differences (F. Crosby 1984; F. J. Crosby 1976).

Séamus Power’s research adds to the corpus of empirical studies on how subjective perceptions can differ from objective assessments. As one can infer from Power’s article, the pattern of unrest in Ireland in the twenty-first century does not conform to predictions based on Davis (1959). Contrary to the J-curve theory of rebellion, the Irish did not express anger during the economic downturn of 2007–2008. Yet Power’s data do fit very nicely with relative deprivation theory. Irish ire erupted during the return to national prosperity because the disgruntled individuals felt subjectively deprived despite objective indications that the economy was improving. They turned to collective action against the elites, whom they perceived as reaping benefits that were undeserved. Concordant with Faye J. Crosby’s (1976) model of relative deprivation and with the findings of Smith, Cronin, and Kessler (2008), angered Irish became politically galvanized because they blamed the elites, not themselves, for the unfair distribution of benefits.

Relative deprivation theory has been popular in psychology and sociology, in political science, and even in economics (Smith et al. 2012), but in anthropology, little empirical work seems to have been guided by the conceptualizations that are so popular in other parts of the social sciences. Power has brought some useful concepts to the attention of anthropol-

ogists and has thus, at the very least, made a real contribution to scholarship. And, as social science is cumulative, his documentation of the Irish case has also added to the databases concerning relative deprivation and the J-curve.

Every real contribution invites more work. We see that Power’s data collection might be extended in three ways. First, one might dig through the economic indicators to determine whether the Irish economy was, in fact, improving in 2014 and 2015 or whether the apparent improvement was, in reality, an artifact of emigration, as Power implies. Second, it might be illuminating to further investigate perceptions of personal disadvantage and, separately, perceptions of group disadvantage. Runciman (1966) differentiated between egoistical deprivation and fraternal deprivation, and Faye J. Crosby (1982) adapted Runciman’s approach when she measured personal and group deprivations among employed women, employed men, and housewives. Indeed, it was the distinction between personal and group deprivation that led Crosby to discover “the denial of personal disadvantage.” Employed women who were collectively discriminated against knew that employed women in general were subject to discrimination, and yet imagined that they themselves constituted individual exceptions to the general rule (F. Crosby 1984). How might the phenomenon play out in the Irish context, especially considering the relatively collectivist approach of the Irish? Finally, one might probe whether feelings of deprivation vary systematically among different groups of non-elite Irish. Power notes that many of the protesters were middle-aged. What of younger and older citizens? What of other differences linked to gender, education, or region within Ireland?

Whether or not more data are collected by Power and his associates, some additional philosophical reflections would be welcome. As Carrillo et al. (2011) point out, the very term “relative deprivation” has been used in at least two senses. For some, it is a model or theory; for others, it is a concept (Crosby, Muehrer, and Loewenstein 1986). Models and theories in the natural sciences, and even in the social sciences, involve the statement of propositions in a form that allows for falsification (Popper 1966). Thus a model of relative deprivation or a theory of the J-curve of rising expectations makes some predictions that, in turn, are tested against actual data. A concept, in contrast, may not be proven true or false but rather may be judged to be useful or not useful.

Power nods in the direction of the distinction between models and concepts when he references the idea of cultural and social contexts. He notes that the lived history of the Irish people and the dominant public rhetoric of the Irish might explain why they did not take to the streets in 2007 and 2008. Irish quiescence in 2007 and 2008 refutes Davis’s theory of rebellion, but it does not refute the concept of the J-curve because concepts, unlike models and theories, are not falsifiable. Similarly, although no one model of relative deprivation has proven solely valid, the concept is a useful one, as the very interesting work of Séamus Power testifies.

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Ireland: When Everyone You Know Buys Art, or a Sculpture, to Upgrade Their Life

People protest when they can take no more, but also when there is a glimmer of hope: when it becomes obvious that there is enough to go around, but despite that, all boats are not being lifted. People protest when they find out just how much is being squandered and how little the elite know or care.

Séamus Power quoted Alexis de Tocqueville (1955 [1856]), who pointed out that it was “in those parts of France where there had been most improvement that popular discontent ran highest” (176). The French Revolution occurred when and where it did within France not only because there was great suffering and poor harvests but also because the squandering of great and growing riches had become so clear to so many.

Ireland is not about to have a revolution, but in contrast to every other affluent nation, it has suffered by far the greatest crash. Figure 1 shows how public expenditure rose to bail out banks in many countries but more in Ireland, and then the subsequent choices made to cut down on public expenditure.

In the United States, protest erupted in the 1960s when it became clear that a large proportion of the population was not being listened to. These people were simply unheard, not even

ignored but unknown. Speaking 3 years after the Watts riots of 1965, Martin Luther King told an audience at Grosse Pointe High School:

It is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. (Walters 2015)

In England, the riots of 2011 were mainly confined to London. They were not riots over austerity. Instead, their geography revealed economic inequality to be key. It was where there was most to be looted, where the riches and ignorance of the very affluent were flaunted most, that rioting was most common (Dorling and Lee 2014).

Figure 2 shows that more rioters lived in a ring of boroughs outside central London than in entire English regions located far away from the capital and far away from the shopping malls of the rich (Dorling 2014b).

Power suggests that “in the Irish context, people accepted austerity because they believed by doing so the entire economy would benefit.” However, emigration increased rapidly—hardly an example of accepting austerity.

On September 30, 2008, a bank deposit guarantee was introduced that made people wonder why it was needed. Within

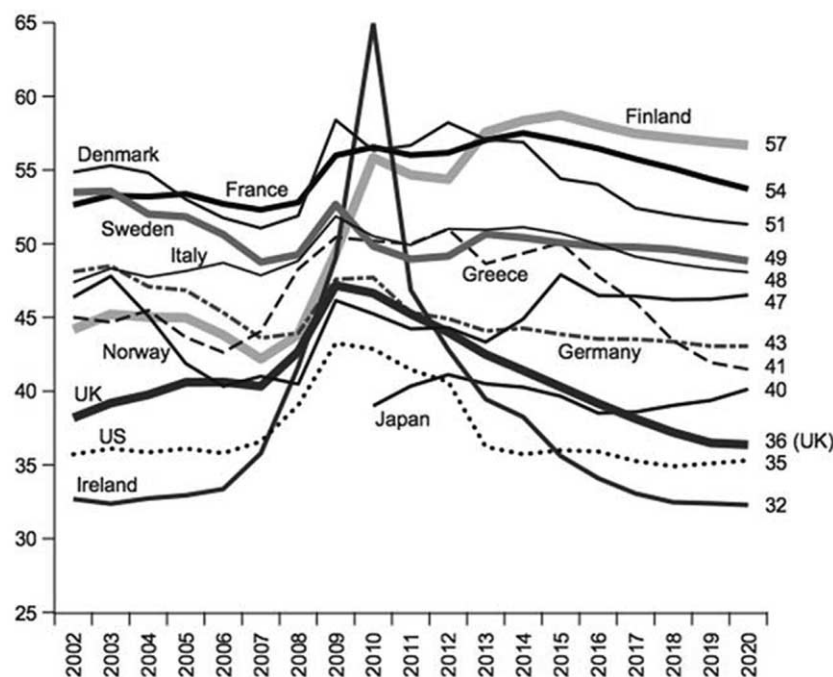


Figure 1. Public expenditure as a proportion of GDP 2002–2020.



Figure 2. The regions of England and boroughs of London sized by the numbers of people accused of riot in 2011. A color version of this figure is available online.

days the crash had begun, most probably just after 10:00 p.m. on October 2, 2008, when the chief executive of the Financial Regulator of Ireland appeared on Irish television news. As Michael Lewis (2011) so eloquently explained, quoting Colm McCarthy 3 years after these events, the reaction of the Irish public to that man's appearance was, "They saw him and said, Who the fuck was that??? Is that the fucking guy who is in charge of the money??? That's when everyone panicked" (98).

Analysis of large-scale survey data taken each year in Ireland between 2004 and 2014 recently revealed that life satisfaction reached a minimum in 2010, driven by the despair of those who were worse off. Social trust fell, and in 2010, "belonging to the lowest income quartile . . . had a significant negative impact on life satisfaction. This is in marked contrast to 2008, where the income stratification of life satisfaction was completely due to subjective economic hardship" (Weckroth, Kempainen, and Dorling 2017:18). In other words, by 2010, the poorest in Ireland had come to realize that they were disadvantaged as a group, whereas just 2 years earlier, their answers to survey questions did not reveal such knowledge.

Only analysis of survey data taken from across a whole country can tell you when the overall mood changes. Anecdotes, such as that of Colm McCarthy quoted above, help identify plausible trigger points. Anecdotes also identify the ignorance of the elite, such as the rich Irish woman, quoted by Power, who said that prior to the crash she did not know anyone "who didn't buy art, or a sculpture, or something to upgrade their life." Power suggests that when the crash came, the rich lost the most. He says, "in objective terms their relative loss is greater."

But in objective terms, who really lost the most? Was it the person who now has to sleep in a car because they can no longer pay the rent on their old home? Or the person whose home is now worth a few hundred thousand euros less, but they still live in it and own it?

Most recently, the situation in Ireland has become much worse, as figure 3 reveals. Cuts are a political choice, not inevitable.

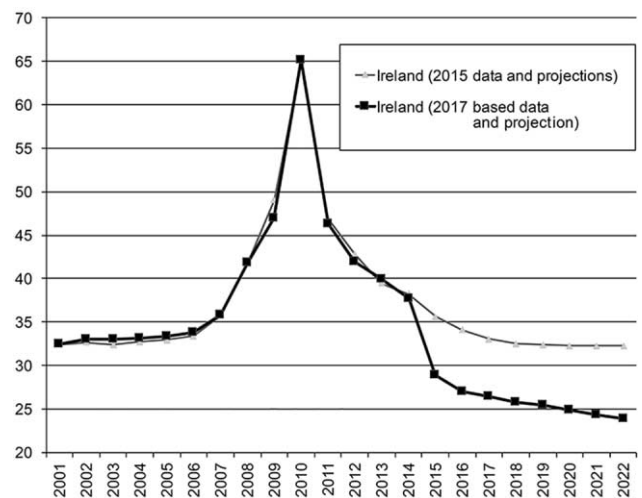


Figure 3. Ireland: public expenditure as a proportion of GDP 2001–2022, original and most recent IMF estimates and projections.

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Perceptions of Inequality Shape Preferences for Redistribution

Power offers a compelling case study of an important phenomenon: people's anger about inequality is driven not just by actual levels of income and wealth but by their expectations surrounding those levels, with particular anger arising when those expectations are not met. We review research in psychology and economics consistent with Power's Deprivation-Protest Paradox, which sheds further insight into the complex psychology of inequality.

As Power notes, people's perceptions of relative gains and losses are determined in large part by salient reference points, with losses looming larger than gains (Tversky and Kahneman 1991). Broadly speaking, such reference dependence would imply that people are dissatisfied with outcomes when those outcomes are below their expectations. Recent research has suggested that, in fact, people's reference points for inequality are far more equal than the current state of affairs, with people's ideal distributions of both wealth and income more equal than they estimate them to be, and far more equal than the current actual distributions (Norton and Ariely 2011). For example, US citizens estimate the ratio between CEO pay and average unskilled worker pay to be about 30:1 and consider a ratio of 7:1 to be ideal, both far lower than the actual average pay ratio across US firms, which most estimates suggest exceeds 300:1. Data from the International Social Survey Program show that these patterns hold true in some 40 countries (Kiatpongsan and Norton 2014; Niehues 2014). These misperceptions of inequality are not limited to static estimates: people systematically overestimate opportunities for upward mobility (Davidai and Gilovich 2015) and misperceive changes in inequality in their country over time (Gimpelson and Treisman 2015; see Hauser and Norton 2017 for a review).

These inaccurate perceptions, which then serve as reference points, are often driven by limited, local, and salient information. For example, when estimating national inequality, people draw inferences from their immediate surroundings and available reference groups, without accounting for their selection bias (Cruces, Perez-Truglia, and Tetaz 2013). This is further exemplified by the research of Diermeier et al. (2017) demonstrating that greater inequality-related media coverage leads to heightened concerns about general economic conditions and unfairness in society.

Most importantly, and consistent with Power's account, these (mis)perceptions of inequality—over and above actual inequality—can drive preferences for redistributive policies. Recent research demonstrates that perceived inequality can be a better predictor of policy preferences than actual inequality

(Engelhardt and Wagener 2014). For instance, perceived—but not actual—inequality predicts people's belief that income differences in their country are too large (Niehues 2014) and are associated with support for redistribution (Gimpelson and Treisman 2015).

As a result of the influence of perceived inequality, people's attitudes and emotions about redistributive policies can be shifted with simple interventions that change the salience of inequality. When researchers provided employees at the University of California with access to information on their coworkers' wages, employees with salaries below the median for their pay unit (i.e., reference group) reported lower job satisfaction, while those earning above the median reported no change (Card et al. 2012). Relatedly, Cruces, Perez-Truglia, and Tetaz (2013) demonstrate that providing respondents with information that their income relative to other citizens is lower than they believed leads to greater support for government redistribution; respondents who learned they were relatively wealthier than they had estimated became less accepting of redistribution. In addition, Kuziemko and colleagues (2015) show that reminding respondents of increases in inequality shifts preferences toward increased taxation of the wealthy. Finally, DeCelles and Norton (2016) demonstrate that simply being exposed to inequality—walking through the first-class cabin of an airplane while boarding—can lead passengers seated in economy class to experience greater anger than if they are not exposed to first class, while Kuziemko et al. (2014) demonstrates that even the temporary feeling of being in “last place” can affect redistributive preferences.

In sum, Power's suggestion of a Deprivation-Protest Paradox is supported by research that demonstrates the role of perceptions of inequality on people's emotions, their perceptions of fairness, and their policy preferences. While periods of austerity may cause hardship, heightened awareness of inequality in the restoration period—and the shifting reference points that recovery engenders—can lead to the strongest reactions from citizens.

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In 2017, a group of scholars published a volume entitled *Universalism without Uniformity* (Hota 2017), reflecting on the contributions of cultural psychological approaches to the study of emotions and morality. As the sole political anthropologist writing in the volume, my essay attempted to show that there could be surprising convergences between cultural psychology and political anthropology in studying embodied and moral dimensions of politics despite significant epistemological disagreements between the two fields. By pointing to cultural

psychology's early insights into multiculturalism, I made a call for cultural psychology to take contemporary politics more seriously.

Séamus Power's essay, "The Deprivation-Protest Paradox," appears to heed such a call by offering a cultural psychological analysis of political protests in a climate of economic austerity following the global economic collapse of 2007–2008. Though the Irish economy has been the fastest growing in Europe in the past few years, mass demonstrations, standoffs and clashes with police, and other forms of civil unrest have become a part of urban life in Dublin. As Power argues, though Dubliners were aware of a narrative of objective economic recovery in the Republic of Ireland, they found their own experiences to be discordant with circulating scripts of economic recovery, articulating disillusionment, anger, and deprivation instead. Theorizing this gap between expectations and lived experiences as the Deprivation-Protest Paradox, Power shows how such a paradox galvanizes and legitimizes protest and civic discontent among contemporary Dubliners.

In so doing, Power's analysis joins recent anthropological analyses that have belabored uncertainty as the dominant idiom of late neoliberalism by pointing to the relationship between material conditions and affective experiences in times of increasingly neoliberal austerity and precarity. These accounts detail accompanying temporal and affective "incommensurations" (Stewart 2012), blockages and disruptions (Millar 2014), informing idiosyncratic social experiences of waiting (Jeffrey 2010), boredom (O'Neill 2017), as well as feelings of being bottlenecked (Melly 2017), and, as Power adds, deprivation. Power's analysis also contains clues about the populist turn within such conditions. Indeed, as one informant asserts, "ordinary people" at these protests formulate their feelings of relative deprivation and disadvantage by contrasting themselves with political elites, insisting that there is "too much austerity on ordinary people" while "politicians are getting these lucrative wages," calling upon notions of unfairness and economic injustice.

Power, however, largely relies on social psychological literature rather than drawing on anthropological debates on precarity and populism, betraying cultural psychology and anthropology's continuing hostilities. Though cultural psychology's attempts to reconcile the psychological-moral with the cultural predates concerns with the politics of morality and the affective turn within anthropology, anthropology has rarely, if ever, turned to cultural psychology for a theorization of moral-affective dimensions of contemporary forms of politics, turning instead to continental philosophy despite its overwhelmingly secular, ahistorical, and Western provenance (see Navaro 2017). This is not in the least because cultural psychology has itself been looked at as either apolitical or even endorsing a problematic politics of its own by engaging in a positivist reification of culture while uneasily tacking back and forth between questioning the universalizing impulses of psychological approaches and engaging a universalizing lens of its own while insisting that such a lens does not imply uniformity. Indeed,

Power himself relies on an understanding of "Irish mentalities" while asserting that "shifting political and economic contexts often lead to the application and interpretation of fundamental beliefs in different ways." But Power also emphasizes that his informants call upon an Irish history of migration and violence to articulate cultural and moral reasons why the Irish initially "passively accepted austerity," illustrating how social actors themselves "recall a version of the past to understand and rationalize the present." While his analysis ends up casting protest as a result of shifts in relatively stable, fundamental "cultural" beliefs with eliciting political conditions, his analysis betrays the extent to which social actors' political experiences are historically specific and how these histories are invoked by social actors to understand their own affective responses. These insights could inform an anthropology of affect that has insisted that "affect renders capture implausible," pointing instead to "the welling up of energies" (White 2017)—neglecting how affects themselves are both sensed and rendered sensible within history. Though these insights might veer too close to the territory of emotion and emotional scripts for those interested in the affective experiences of precarity, they assert that affective, sensing bodies are themselves subjects of history, as are the translations and slippages between public affect and emotion, which anthropologists of affect have underplayed by focusing largely on the immediacy of affective encounters.

Power might consider that anthropologists have argued that by assuming a fundamental break between everyday life (cast as a time of passivity) and times of heightened intensities (e.g., street protests and revolutions), social theorists risk overlooking longer histories within which social actors are engaging in agentive quotidian struggles with legal and bureaucratic structures rather than being passive spectators (Das and Randeria 2015). In order to avoid oversimplifying past experiences of the Irish as stable and passive and contemporary protests as moments of rupture, it would be essential to tease out complexities in the historical experience of Dubliners, affective scripts used by the Irish to understand their relationship to material scarcity and emergent understandings of economic precarity within such an ethnographic context. While Power asserts that his analysis is ethnographic, anthropologists would point out that his analysis shuts out the blooming, buzzing experiential dimensions of ethnography to focus on establishing a typology of protests, invoking Ireland problematically as a specific site of mentalities while relegating national histories and political and economic conditions to the background. In so doing, Power's analysis is especially vulnerable to criticisms such as those leveled at the theorizing of affective experiences of precarity as illuminating structures of feeling in a "placeless" way without a specific vantage point from which to critically grapple with precarity's distinctive features (Hinkson 2017).

Importantly, Power's essay makes it clear that to study contemporary politics, cultural psychology must ask itself thorny questions about its continuing epistemological assumptions

and, as a corollary, of its own politics. Power's analysis, in many ways then, opens the doors for a much larger set of questions and issues that are critical for any possibility of meaningful passage between a cultural psychology of politics and political anthropology.

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When does anger and resentment produce political protest? Under certain conditions, of course. Protests are part of the broader phenomenon of social movements, and there is a long literature in sociology and political science about what specifically prompts social movements. Factors such as leadership, resources, communication, and identity are also a part of the story, with one recent contribution focusing more on how organizational factors gave rise to the Irish protests (Layte and Landy 2017).

But Séamus Power appropriately uses psychological anthropology to finger a key cause of the protests, one that is often missing from the broader social movement literature. Continual comparison is a basic mechanism of social groups, though, as Power points out, who we compare ourselves with and what we compare varies. Our reference groups, usually our community and family networks, matter most. If you have a strong sense of community and limit your comparisons with others while keeping expectations low, you are more content (Graham 2012). Happiness does not always correspond with absolute economic wealth. Strong community/sociality, for instance, means that Latin Americans report higher levels of happiness than those in regions with comparable or higher incomes. In the United States, poor whites are the least optimistic among other lower-income ethnic groups, which helps explain populist protests like the Tea Party and Trump.

Large differences in wealth have prompted many different kinds of reactions, from cargo cults to the more recent prosperity gospel (Attanasi and Yong 2012), both of which clamor for visible wealth. Some communities deflect differences because they value other goals, such as faith, family, or community, like the Amish and other countercultural groups, from downshifters to environmentalists to agrarians (Jindra 2014). In East and Southeast Asia, increased wealth and capitalism has coincided with a significant rise in various forms of religiosity, with family and community remaining largely intact (Hefner 2010). In Ireland, however, increased wealth has accompanied a religious decline, and I would be curious to know how the protests relate to this strong secularization. Are economic protests, as opposed to Irish nationalist protests, heightened in a secularized environment? Did religiosity tamp

down economic motives and potential protests? Has there been a breakdown of family and community, with a concomitant scramble for education, jobs, and worldly success, and protests when hopes are thwarted?

A major issue, as Power briefly mentions, is how our salient reference groups have changed due to changes in communication and technology. Migration has long been a relief valve for Ireland, but modern technology has helped stimulate migration from many other places, like Africa, even when passages are illegal and more dangerous than in the past. Economic conditions in Africa in the 1980s were bad, but there was little illegal migration to Europe at that time. The introduction of television in Cameroon in the late 1980s, bringing new worlds such as *Fresh Prince* to viewers, created a renewed sense of deprivation right at the same time that the economy tanked. This intensified later with the popularity of the internet, cell phones, and social media, which tend to collapse worlds, and African migration to Europe gradually picked up after the turn of the century until the recent flood of migrants.

In general, modern technology creates feelings of relative deprivation and resultant political protest in some contexts, but it also works in nonmaterial and more personal ways through social media. People usually put on their best face on social media, so we get distorted visions of others' lives. The attractive images and lives and the numerous "likes" received by others can work to make people more dissatisfied, unhappy, or depressed (Twenge 2017).

These kinds of factors and trends will likely continue to create resentment, unhappiness, and protest in some contexts, whether in the streets or through the ballot box, or simply cause higher levels of depression and dissatisfaction, with fallout including higher suicide rates and drug use as people attempt to escape to more satisfying worlds. Can social policies that create greater equality lessen the impact? To a certain extent, but given the problems of social media, family instability, and the insidious comparisons we all tend to make, it will be a challenge.

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Irrationality Intrudes into Economics, Again

Over the past few decades, research on irrationality has gradually intruded into what has been the traditional domain of economics. Obvious markers of this trend are the rapid growth of the research field known as behavioral economics and the awarding of the Nobel Prize for economics to a psychologist, Daniel Kahneman, in 2002. The innovative contribution of Séamus Power through his concept of the Deprivation-Protest

Paradox should be interpreted within this larger picture because Power is making the very important point that the materialist-rationalist model of human behavior does not explain the kind of collective action that has recently taken place in Ireland. Of course, the materialist-rationalist model is at the heart of mainstream economics.

As Kahneman (2011) and others have pointed out, economists study “econs” rather than humans. But econs seem to be from another planet: they are rational and consistent in their selfishness and decision making. Actual human behavior tends to be irrational, sometimes self-sacrificing, and often inconsistent. Humans are brilliant at rationalizing and positioning themselves as logical and consistent, but this “front” hides actual human behavior, which tends to be irrational. By “irrational” I do not mean in the traditional Freudian sense of being influenced by “repressed” factors pushed into the unconscious. Rather, I mean “irrational” in the sense that behavior is often influenced by evolutionary derived implicit processes involving split-second decision making, which operates under the radar of our conscious awareness.

Power’s concept of Deprivation-Protest Paradox points to irrational processes and highlights two puzzles, the first concerning the conditions in which collective action takes place. Social identity theory, realistic conflict theory, resource mobilization theory, system justification theory, equity theory, and other major theories of intergroup relations have attempted to solve this puzzle, but none as directly as relative deprivation theory. The focus of Power’s discussion is rightly on relative deprivation, and his findings reveal that in Ireland people experienced greater deprivation at a time when, according to objective criteria, the Irish economy was recovering and people should have been more satisfied.

Power’s research highlights the important role of subjective irrational expectations and social comparison processes rather than objective material conditions. The Irish participants in Power’s study felt deprived when comparing themselves with better-off others, even though objectively the Irish economy was improving as a whole. This reminds me of Iran in the 1970s: The quadrupling of oil prices in 1973 produced a booming economy, but a minority of Iranians were becoming richer much faster than the majority. The majority of Iranians felt relatively deprived in comparison to the group gaining wealth at the fastest rate, even though the entire economy was improving according to objective criteria. The outcome of this process was massive relative deprivation, collective action, revolution, and the ousting of the shah in 1979. This was the Deprivation-Protest Paradox in action.

The second puzzle highlighted by Power’s concept of Deprivation-Protest Paradox concerns change and continuity: how do we explain the lack of change that exists in relative deprivation processes, specifically, and styles of thinking and action more broadly? The issue of resilience in behavioral style is particularly puzzling from the perspective of materialist-rationalist approaches, as found in the social sciences (e.g.,

realistic conflict theory) and as central to economics. From the materialist-rationalist perspective, behavioral style should change as a result of transformations in economic conditions, but this expectation is rarely fulfilled. The puzzle of behavioral resilience is not only important in research and theory but is of the highest practical importance in efforts to bring about rapid and widespread change, such as in national development projects and in political revolutions.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is the central cog of the United Nations system for planning and implementing national development projects. The UNDP is highly influenced by materialist-rationalist models of human behavior and works on the basic assumption that economic systems will bring about changes in styles of cognition and action. This assumption is also shared by many revolutionaries who topple regimes, transform economic systems, and expect the behavioral style of populations to change in the same direction. Revolution after revolution has failed to fulfill this expectation, even in cases where revolutionaries explicitly attempt to harness the power of research to bring about the behavioral changes they seek (as the communists attempted to use behaviorist research in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution).

The puzzle of behavioral resilience highlights the importance of political plasticity and the need to explore how fast and in what ways styles of cognition and action can change (Moghaddam 2018a). For example, can the Deprivation-Protest Paradox change, and if so in what ways? Is the Deprivation-Protest Paradox an outcome of socialization practices, or is this behavior inborn? Limits to behavioral change are suggested by our experiences with revolutions, both contemporary and historic.

Revolutions involve enormous political and often economic change, typically in a short time span. For example, the revolutions in France (1789), Russia (1917), and Iran (1979) all resulted in the toppling of royalty and the coming to power of new regimes with new constitutions and changed economic conditions. However, a perhaps surprising feature of revolutions is that they typically involve the replacement of one dictatorship with another—the king for Emperor Napoleon in France, the tsar for Stalin; and now for Putin, in Russia; the shah for the “Supreme Leader” mullah in Iran, and so on. The American Revolution might be argued to be different, but after almost 250 years, many inside and even more outside the United States see progress in American democracy to be extremely slow.

In conclusion, then, through the concept of the Deprivation-Protest Paradox, Power has pointed to the weakness of the materialist-rationalist model of human behavior, and also highlighted several puzzles that still challenge researchers. By continuing to explore implicit processes and motivated reasoning, we will arrive at a fuller picture of the conditions that result in collective action and the limitations and possibilities for change in styles of cognition and action.

Reply

Expanding the Deprivation-Protest Paradox: The Tipping Point Theory of Civic Unrest

Irish people accepted harsh austerity without protesting when the economy collapsed in 2008. Yet, when Ireland had the fastest-growing economy in Europe in 2014 and 2015, there were mass demonstrations, clashes with police, and other forms of civic unrest. I titled this observation the “Deprivation-Protest Paradox.” I aimed to show how the perception of unfair economic inequality can lead to civic unrest. The seven commentaries on this article are largely supportive of my initial formulation and offer multiple perspectives to further comprehend this paradox. In this response, I endeavor to answer the questions raised by my colleagues. By so doing, I formulate the “Tipping Point Theory of Civic Unrest.”

Overall, there is agreement that relative deprivation plays an important explanatory role in determining when people tolerate economic inequality and when this tolerance gives way. There is overarching explicit, or implicit, support for comprehending individual and collective behavior within appropriate localized contexts and extrapolating larger theoretical points from individual case studies. The relative deprivation framework has a long history in the social sciences and has been utilized and developed to understand a broad array of phenomena. In a decontextualized form, the theory states that when an individual or group compares itself with similar or salient individuals or groups and finds itself lacking or discriminated against in possessing or achieving a desired object, goal, way of life, or standard of living, this leads to angry frustration when the individual or group wants it and feels entitled to it, and when it is thought that achieving a standard is credible and previous or current failure to achieve it is not attributable to the (in)action of individuals or groups.

Social psychological theories need greater contextualization. The content of four commentaries (Awad and Wagoner; Dorling; Jindra; Moghaddam) suggests case studies parallel to the Irish paradox and highlights the explanatory and predictive power of relative deprivation theory: the Arab Spring, with particular focus on the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt; Iran, when the shah was overthrown in the context of aggregate economic growth; 1980s Cameroon; the 2011 UK riots (particularly, though not exclusively, in London), when people felt unequal wealth distribution was unfair; the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States that formed in the context of an aggregate economic upturn; and the riots that broke out in the United States during the civil rights movement, when elites did not care about, or know of, the “voices of the unheard.” Context matters in the utilization and development of relative deprivation theory. Hagerty and Norton describe an ecologically valid experiment to demonstrate relative deprivation: people reported higher levels of dissatisfaction when they walked through

first-class cabins on airlines in contrast to when they did not (DeCelles and Norton 2016). Applying this theory to the Irish case—and in future case studies—invites closer analysis of who is comparing who with whom, what the meanings are of perceived disadvantages, and how perceived disadvantages manifest, if at all.

As Conrique and Crosby suggest, the Irish case study supports the theory of relative deprivation and provides evidence against the J-curve theory. They ask whether the J-curve theory and concept is still useful. It is. The J-curve theory predicts protests, and rebellions are likely to occur when a period of prolonged economic growth is followed by stark decline (Davies 1962). This chimes with behavioral economic research that argues losses are felt more acutely than gains (Thaler et al. 1997; Tversky and Kahneman 1991). The J-curve theory predicted rallies and riots in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain following the economic collapse from 2008. It failed to predict the pattern of acceptance and inaction in Ireland during the recession and recovery. It also failed to predict the Occupy Wall Street movement that developed in the context of an economic recovery, not decline. The J-curve has predictive power, as does the Deprivation-Protest Paradox. Context matters in understanding the utility of these theories: they are not competing. Both theories have explanatory power. The key to understanding which theory will account for action or inaction lies in perceptions of fairness. Fairness is the underlying mechanism uniting the J-curve theory of rebellion, feelings of relative deprivation, and the dynamics of the Deprivation-Protest Paradox.

Fairness might be a universal moral foundation (Haidt 2012, 2015; Shweder 2003) that is evident in humans and non-humans (Brosnan and de Waal 2003, 2014) and from early childhood (Bloom 2013; Shaw and Olson 2014). But what is, and is not, considered fair and tolerable varies across both time and culture. The Irish case study reveals that people tolerate economic hardship, even economic recession, when they think it is fair and justifiable. But when economic hardship is deemed unfair, even during economic growth, people can form protest movements, and perceptions of what is and is not considered fair modulate whether people tolerate growing economic inequality and hardship or not (Power 2017, 2018a).

Dorling raises a provocative normative question when he asks, “But in objective terms, who really lost the most [during the Irish economic recession]? Was it the person who now has to sleep in a car because they can no longer pay the rent on their old home? Or the person whose home is now worth a few hundred thousand euros less, but they still live in it and own it?” The homeless crisis in Ireland, which has gone from bad to worse since I conducted my ethnographic research, is abhorrent and unfair. But others, too, who kept their houses but saw decreases in the quality of their lives can also claim the economic recession was unfair. Of course, those who kept their homes are in better financial positions, and those who had money to buy houses at reduced prices during the recession, only to sell them on at a profit—or to rent them during a stark

recovery—are benefiting, which might seem unfair for some too. Solely focusing on the losses of “ordinary people” and not acknowledging losses and gains of wealthier people as well as “ordinary people,” as the protesters described themselves, leads to incomplete arguments and representations of the world. The answer to Dorling’s question lies in how we conceptualize fairness: who feels circumstances are fair or unfair, and who has power to act on or enforce systems and ideologies that maintain or challenge the status quo? Deprivation—and feeling (un)fairness—is relative to those who are making comparisons.

Dorling and Conrique and Crosby both reference the impact of migration from Ireland during the recession and recovery. Dorling says migration from Ireland during the economic collapse is evidence of an active, not passive, response to austerity. Migration from Ireland in times of hardship is seen as a culturally widespread, historically ingrained response to economic hardship. Net migration from Ireland increased with the onset, and progression, of the economic recession (Bergin and Kelly 2018). This exodus of people, with a large proportion of young males who became unemployed due to the downturn in the construction industry (see Kelly et al. 2015), helped keep the peace on the streets. Migration mitigates growing unemployment. This is because migration means there is less competition for limited employment for those who remain. One consequence of this is that Irish governments would not have to pay core social welfare payments that unemployed people are entitled to if they remained in Ireland (Power 2016; Power and Nussbaum 2014). Active migration helped alleviate potential civic unrest. Migration mitigated protest.

The Irish economy did recover beginning in 2012 (Fitzgerald 2014; Honohan 2014). The recovery was unequal. Urban centers, including Cork and Dublin, recovered more quickly than other regions—particularly the Irish midlands. However, it was in the urban areas where civic unrest and protest was greatest. Moreover, observations across multiple national demonstrations in Dublin suggest deprivation was felt across the lifespan (children would accompany parents, students and young adults were interviewed, and the oldest interviewees were two 88-year-old twins) and across gender (roughly equal split between women and men), but the meaningful divide was between socioeconomic classes. Protesters largely identified themselves as “ordinary people” or “ordinary working people,” with the implication being that there were wealthy people who, unlike the protesters, were benefiting from the economic upturn. Discursive analysis of transcribed interview data suggests the effect of relative deprivation was evident on both individual and group levels. On the group level, interviewees spoke about feeling left behind as the economy recovered. On an individual level, people articulated individual stories and gave personal examples of being left behind. In contrast to Faye Crosby (1984), there was no denial of personal disadvantage. Actual disadvantage was perceived on individual and group levels. The economic recovery was not an artifact of migration. Regardless of migration levels, the Irish economy

began a stark, though regionally unequal, recovery that was experienced on individual and group levels by women and men across the lifespan who identified as being nonwealthy.

Despite this economic recovery, Dorling presents evidence suggesting decreasing public expenditure as a proportion of GDP from 2001 to 2022. The use of the expenditure-to-GDP ratio presents a misleading picture, as there was a well-documented and anomalous spike in GDP growth of 25% in Ireland in 2015. This vertiginous rise in the denominator significantly lowers the ratio, which is clearly evident in Dorling’s chart (fig. 3). This spike in GDP was an effect on the internationally agreed statistical methodologies—initially designed to capture output from manufacturing—struggling to capture output from the modern services sector. When technology companies move intellectual property to Ireland, despite not adding real value in terms of production to the economy, it is recorded by the national accounts system. It is a problem for the national accounts of all countries but is accentuated in a small economy with large multinationals, like Ireland in 2015, where these kinds of actions from big firms are much more visible on the national scale. The Nobel laureate Paul Krugman referenced this abnormal increase in GDP as “leprechaun economics” (Power 2018*b*). However, the official expenditure data show that, in nominal terms, government expenditure actually grew in 2015 and subsequent years. While having a lesser impact, the statistical treatment of multinational activities in Ireland’s national accounts continued to distort measurements of GDP in Ireland in 2016 and 2017, as acknowledged by the statistical authorities, rendering use of the expenditure-to-GDP ratio problematic for these years. Although the recovery in Ireland was unequal and perceived as unfair by many, the picture might not be as glum as Dorling claims. Digging deeper into economic data presents a more nuanced picture of the Irish recession and recovery and the consequences this has on people’s perceptions. The larger point is that academic research should follow the argument where it leads, which sometimes includes researching topics and drawing conclusions that deviate from conventional academic norms and assumptions and arrive at seemingly unpleasant and challenging truths (Flexner 1936; Power 2017). Social norms surrounding fairness of distribution of economic resources is one such challenging idea.

Awad and Wagoner argue that symbols can be constructed to express feelings and drive protest. Symbols can encapsulate and signify what is and is not considered fair or unfair. Charging directly for the water people consume during economic growth in a small island, filled with rivers and lakes and where it frequently rains, became a symbol of unfairness in the Irish context, just like the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, who refused to pay a bribe to corrupt police, embodied perceptions of unfairness in Tunisia. Symbolic signifiers may seem irrational. But, as Moghaddam points out, the Deprivation-Protest Paradox illustrates the limits of classical models of economics that assume rationality. Protests ought to occur due to objective declines—increasing scarcity—not when there is abundance in terms of a booming economy, albeit when there

are unequal distributions. Economists need to incorporate perceptions of fairness, located within distinct sociocultural and historical contexts, into formal models concerning distribution of economic goods and resources. Hagerty and Norton support this claim by concluding that (mis)perceptions of economic inequality and fairness shape preferences for redistributive policies.

Perceptions matter. Perceptions of economic inequality, illustrated by the experimental social psychological research outlined by Hagerty and Norton, influence people's emotional responses and can generate anger and frame preferences for wealth redistribution. One policy implication might be that as the world becomes simultaneously wealthier and more unequal, governments need to either (1) more equally redistribute this wealth to create more egalitarian societies or (2) at least create the perception of fairness to decrease feelings of relative deprivation, frustration, and unfairness in order to keep the peace on the streets. However, revelations of the accumulation of wealth hidden in tax havens, as highlighted by the Panama papers as well as charitable reports from Oxfam, for example, show that in 2016, there were 62 people who had as much wealth as the world's poorest 50% (Oxfam 2016). Things went from bad to worse. A year later, Oxfam (2017) reported that 8 men had as much wealth as half of the world's poorest people. The former strategy—of increased egalitarian redistribution—seems like a more morally responsible option rather than merely creating the perception of fairness. This conclusion seems congruent with the implicit or explicit claims made throughout these commentaries.

Revolutions topple dictators; protests can oust governments; new laws and constitutions can be introduced, but often, despite this, little changes on the ground. Social activists, protesters, and others who advocate for various forms of social, economic, or political change ought to be aware of these levels of change: first-order change (macrolevel events such as economic collapses) can inform reactions on a secondary level, where new laws are introduced, bailing out the banks or introducing a new charge on water. But acceptance, indifference, or resistance of these first- and second-order changes occur on the ground level (Moghaddam 2013, 2016, 2018a; Power 2018a). These tertiary-level processes can best be understood by social scientific research. Hota suggests that I engage with the political anthropological literature to a greater degree. This could be a fruitful integration of research across disciplinary divides, adding greater temporal and interpretative lines to more holistically examine the dynamics of the Deprivation-Protest Paradox. It could help examine third-order change—and resistance and indifference to it—and to answer Moghaddam's question of whether the dynamics underlying the paradox can change. Ethnographic research, in the tradition of political anthropology—which complicates notions of mentalities, emphasizes notions of precarity, and destabilizes the packaging of recession and recovery into a contemporary paradox—offers theoretical and methodological advancement for understanding social movements.

Jindra asks about the roles of technology and the history of Catholicism in Ireland to explain the dynamics of the (lack of) protest dynamics during the recession and recovery in Ireland. Technological advancements affect what is, and can be, imagined (Zittoun and Gillespie 2015, 2018). Imagination offers the possibility to leave the “here and now” and try visualize more just, fair, and utopian future societies. Violations of imagination might be consequences of gaps between imagined, and expected, futures and lived everyday realities. For example, protesters in Ireland imagined a more dystopic future Irish society where water services were privatized and a fundamental symbol of human rights—water—was monetized and not controlled by the people. This image was used by some protesters to motivate and justify protest in the present, to mitigate the realization of a dystopian future (Power 2018c). Technological advancement brings potential for transformations in perceptions, and expectations of what the world is and ought to be like. Violations of imaginings and embodied expectations, generated and amplified by technological integration, bring with it the potential for disappointment, frustration, anger, and civic unrest.

The role of the demise of the Catholic Church in Ireland as a formal moral authority and a correlation with social movements is also interesting. Evidence from the World Values Survey suggests that as countries become richer, safer, and more secular, they become more liberal and focus on individual rights and issues concerned with social, economic, and political justice (Welzel 2013). As the various religious scandals, including revelations of extensive child abuse by clergy, rocked the Catholic church in Ireland in the 1990s (and beyond), the resultant social and political pressure has led to the demise of the Catholic Church in Ireland as a moral authority and to the introduction of divorce, gay marriage, and, most recently, a liberalization of abortion laws. The more prolonged and “thickly descriptive” (Geertz 1973) form of anthropological ethnography Hota advocates would articulate a more nuanced picture of this seemingly global social trend across domains in the localized Irish case. I hypothesize the Irish version of Catholicism is more punitive than its form in Mediterranean countries, where forgiveness may be prevalent. But the “reap what you sow” moral principle is malleable. In Ireland, it is the church and the government that are held accountable for moral violations: they reaped what they sowed. Violations of fairness are evident in Ireland, in an economic realm but also in social, political, and religious domains too—a hypothesis that is experimentally testable.

The Tipping Point Theory of Civic Unrest

Under what conditions does tolerance for economic inequality reach a tipping point and produce civic unrest and protest? Combining previous social scientific research and the views of the seven commentators suggests that protests occur when prolonged economic growth is followed by a sharp decline; when people expect their lot to improve, but these expecta-

tions go unmet; when people realize the extent of economic inequalities and when resources are being wasted; when injustices are crystalized in locally meaningful symbols; when technology shifts expectations of what life could, or ought, to be; when technology is used to quickly transmit violations of these injustices globally; when people feel they can take no more injustices; when there is a glimmer of hope for a better future that is worth protesting for; when scarcity is placed on (sacred) resources; when migration is not available, or desirable, and people have to face the (limited) reality of their problematic context; when people realize the extent of economic inequality and the government's and elites' indifferent or uncaring attitudes toward this inequality; when leaders manipulate perceptions of unfairness and create civic discontent (Davies 1962; de Tocqueville 1955 [1856]; Moghaddam 2018a; Pettigrew 2015; Power 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Stouffer et al. 1949; Wagoner 2018). Experimental evidence is needed to isolate causal patterns, to determine meaningful relationships between relevant variables, and to construct a decontextualized explanation of the rise of civic unrest and protest. Computer modeling can help determine the hierarchy and predictive power of various explanations of civic unrest and protest. But contextualized fieldwork, ranging from the in-depth, thickly descriptive variety advocated for by anthropologists to the field social psychological work presented in the main article, is key to understanding the contextual conditions in which tolerance for economic inequality gives way. Multimethod, multidisciplinary, dialogical, and collaborative research provides the best path toward understanding salient social phenomena (Power et al. 2018). In order to answer the question of what conditions cause tolerance for economic inequality reach a tipping point and produce civic unrest, it can be beneficial to locate the issue in global and historical terms.

Two global representations of economic inequality frame perceptions of (un)fair inequality. The first representation, popular with liberal egalitarians, highlights growing wealth and income inequality throughout the world (Atkinson 2015; Dorling 2014a, 2017; Moghaddam 2018b; Piketty 2014). From this perspective, rising income and wealth inequality is immoral, unjust, and unfair. The rich are getting richer, leaving the rest of us in their wake. It is a problem that needs to be mitigated. Simultaneously, the rise in the global floor of wealth, income, and access to goods and services has led to hundreds of millions being lifted out of poverty and improved living conditions for most people on earth in a relatively short period of historical time (Haidt 2015; Pinker 2011, 2018; Rosling 2018). Increased economic inequality, in the context of aggregate economic growth, is not necessarily immoral (Frankfurt 2015; Power 2017). The review of the experimental literature highlights how people do not demand economic parity; they want equity (Norton and Ariely 2011; Tyler 2011). The psychological mechanism underlying acceptance, or at least tolerance, of economic inequality—captured by two divergent global narratives of rising economic inequality and rising living standards—lies in whether people consider economic di-

vergence to be fair or not. The moral foundation of fairness is universal, but perceptions of fairness vary over time and cultures: manifestations of fairness are not uniform.

A tipping point theory of economic inequality—when, regardless of actual levels of inequality, people consider economic inequality to be unfair—addresses some of Moghaddam's questions concerning social change and political plasticity. As Moghaddam rightly points out, not all macrolevel changes—changes in constitutions, leaders, economic growth, laws, and so forth—lead to predicted change on the ground. The UNDP has a materialist-rationalist economic model at its core. It assumes economic systems will bring about changes in styles of cognition and behavior. The dynamics underlying the Deprivation-Protest Paradox highlight economic irrationality. The observation is against the fundamental assumptions of the materialist-rational choice theory of economics. Perceptions of fairness of economic growth or stagnation, recession or recovery—rather than actual levels—engage political plasticity and generate civic engagement on a meaningful level on the ground. As Hagerty and Norton reveal, perceptions of inequality shape preferences for redistribution. United Nations and government programs need to consider perceptions of fairness in cultural contexts if they want to generate meaningful change. Culture matters in understanding economic development (Banfield 1958; Harrison 1985; Harrison and Huntington 2000; Landes 1999; Power 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Shweder 2003, 2017; Weber 2009 [1905]).

As the world becomes richer but more unequal, relative deprivation theory will have an important role in explaining how and why comparisons between individuals occur; how aggregate economic growth is experienced, understood, and felt; how the interrelated psychological dynamics of remembering and imagining inform who compares who with whom; the role of cultural thoughts, values, beliefs, and moral frameworks in mobilizing or inhibiting the direction of social movements; and how fairness is evaluated within contexts of what is, has been, could be, and should be. Relative deprivation theory—and its development along experimental and field studies—has explanatory power, but the next generation of this work will be to formulate a tipping point theory of civic unrest. Without taking precautions to more fairly distribute the accumulation of wealth and income, protests, social movements, and violent rallies, riots, and revolutions, will become more likely across democracies and dictatorships. This is because social movements (on the streets, online, or both) aim to modulate perceived injustices. Economic fairness will prevent a tipping point of civic unrest being reached. Once the tipping point is reached, protests will ensue and have the potential to generate social change.

—Séamus A. Power

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