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Los Angeles

**Beyond Ethnicity:  
African Protests in an Age of Inequality**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

**Lisa Michele Mueller**

2014

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2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

**Beyond Ethnicity:  
African Protests in an Age of Inequality**

by

**Lisa Michele Mueller**

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Miriam Golden, Chair

What explains African protests in an age of rising prosperity? I show that the main cause of the increasingly frequent urban protests that we observe in twenty-first century Africa is economic inequality despite substantial economic growth. Using cross-national statistical analyses of most African countries and original ethnographic and individual-level survey data from fieldwork in Niger, I find that African protests are driven largely by economic or material concerns, and less by ethnic antipathies or preferences for democracy. Examining different forms of inequality and grievance, I show that Africans are more likely to protest, all else equal, if they perceive their future economic opportunities as constricting instead of expanding. Economic or material concerns, however, are not sufficient to cause protest participation. Corroborating other scholars' research, I also find that social networks are important for mobilizing aggrieved people by providing solutions for coordination and cooperation problems.

This dissertation of Lisa Michele Mueller is approved.

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2014

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# Part I

## Introduction

# Chapter 1

## Prosperity and Protest in Africa

In 2009, thousands of demonstrators swarmed the streets of Niger's capital city of Niamey after President Mamadou Tandja tried to outstay his constitutional mandate. Protests continued for months, culminating in Niger's fourth military coup d'état since national independence from France in 1960. On February 18, 2010, soldiers stormed the presidential palace and captured Tandja, seemingly in response to popular demands. Military leaders argued that deposing the democratically elected president in a "corrective coup" was ironically the best defense of Niger's democracy. Observers who were familiar with Niger's politics largely agreed (Barnett, 2010; Baudais and Chauzal, 2011).

Despite the apparent chaos of the coup and uprisings of 2009, democracy in Niger is arguably stronger after Tandja's ouster. The junta upheld its promises to oversee free and fair elections and to restore civilian rule. Former prime minister Mahamadou Issoufou won the 2011 presidential vote in

a run-off, with defeated challenger Seini Oumarou extending “sincere congratulations and best wishes of good luck and success” (*“Oumarou Accepts Defeat in Niger Presidential Vote”*, 2011). A spokesperson for the European Union called the transfer of power “a milestone in the process of transition to democracy” (*“Oumarou Accepts Defeat in Niger Presidential Vote”*, 2011). Sustained protests and swift military action against Tandja appear to have stymied dictatorship in Niger.

This is merely one of many large and politically consequential protests that have recently occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region that as a whole is experiencing civil unrest along with unprecedented economic growth. Recent studies have highlighted a continent-wide swell in the incidence of civil conflict since the 1990s (Butcher, 2012; Weezel, 2013; Pierskalla and Hollenbach, 2013; Hendrix and Salehyan, 2012). Over that same period, economic stagnation gave way to a period of steady growth. African per capita incomes weathered several oil and price shocks to grow by 1.6 percent annually in the late 1990s and over two percent annually since 2000 (Arbache, Go and Page, 2008). Given this paradox of increased prosperity and increased protest, my dissertation investigates the causes of variation in protest frequency and individual-level protest participation on the continent. I argue that African protests arise from Africans’ economic concerns about inequality and future economic conditions, even in the context of aggregate economic growth. Economic grievances, combined with social networks that help protesters organize, explain events like the 2009-2010 uprisings in Niger.

Africa’s protests receive far less attention than Africa’s few remaining civil



wars, despite research on Europe, Latin America, and Arab countries that highlights protest as a precursor to democratic transition (Wood, 2000; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Beinin and Vairel, 2011; Collier, 1999*b*). The literature on protest in Africa includes detailed chronologies of historic waves of protest, like the well-documented anti-colonial movements and South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle (Sachikonye, 1995; Ellis and van Kessel, 2009; Crumey, 1986; Freund, 1984; Schmidt, 2005; Harsch, 1993; Diseko, 1992; Smith, 1997), but it includes only a few systematic explanations for why some African countries experience more protests than others and why some Africans protest whereas others do not (e.g. Resnick 2011, Scacco 2008). Protest in Africa is especially puzzling in an age when more Africans are taking to the streets despite the fact that nearly every African country has averaged positive economic growth for over a decade.

Most studies of African conflicts focus on the importance of ethnicity, reflecting a popular stereotype that African politics revolves foremost around ethnic competition. My dissertation complements this research by highlighting the economic underpinnings of contentious politics in Africa. I study how social protest attracts Africans who see their future economic opportunities constricting instead of expanding. I contend that the main cause of the increasingly frequent urban protests that we observe in Africa is increasing economic inequality despite substantial economic growth.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I summarize two major arguments from the African politics literature about the causes of conflict in Africa: that ethnicity explains civil war, riots, and protest; and that

inequality is actually the root cause. Next, I discuss the differences between these types of conflict and explain why it is worthwhile to study protest separately from larger-scale and more violent forms of contentious politics. In the third section of the chapter I give a more elaborate introduction to my argument that African protesters are driven largely by economic and material concerns, and less by either ethnic antipathies or intrinsic preferences for democracy. Finally, I outline the structure of the dissertation.

## **1.1 Does Ethnicity Cause Conflict in Africa?**

The conventional wisdom is that African countries experience conflict because they are ethnically diverse (Annett, 2000; Esteban and Ray, 2011; Muller, 2008; Rothchild, 1997; Taras and Ganguly, 2006; Adekanye, 1995; Reynal-Querol, 2002; Collier, 1998). In a speech to the British parliament in December 1944, Prime Minister Winston Churchill warned that the mixing of ethnic populations would “cause endless trouble”—a view that Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin echoed and that Muller (2008) revived in his recent essay, “Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism.” Even scholars who think that ethnic conflict can eventually produce desirable political outcomes emphasize that ethnic conflict is a necessary evil along the path to self-determination and participatory democracy (Beissinger, 2008). Colonialism, which created state borders that forcibly divided and combined communities, may have predisposed Africa to ethnic wars and competition, as in Congo, Somalia, and Zambia (Posner, 2003). In rare cases such as Julius

Nyerere's Tanzania, top-down government campaigns helped engender cross-cutting national or pan-African identities and enhanced ethnic cooperation (Miguel, 2004, 337). Many Africans, though, still identify first and foremost with their sub-national ethnic groups, especially during periods of heightened political competition (Eifert, Miguel and Posner, 2010*a*).

Ethnic attachments generate conflict when one group threatens another's political or economic dominance or tries to spread its language, culture, or religion (Rothchild, 1997). Members of an ethnic group might distrust, attack, or rebel against members of competing groups or a regime that they perceive to threaten their survival and access to resources. Posen (1993) describes this climate of mutual suspicion and antagonism as an ethnic "security dilemma." Sudan is an iconic case of an ethnic security dilemma, having experienced a civil war from 1983 to 2005 surrounding Arab northerners' efforts to impose Islamic law on darker-skinned and predominantly non-Muslim communities in the oil-rich south. Hundreds of non-Muslims also died in Nigeria's 2001 and 2010 riots between the Muslim Hausa-Fulani and the Christian Yoruba (Scacco, 2008; "*Nigeria Ethnic Violence 'Leaves Hundreds Dead'*", 2010). Nomadic Tuaregs have launched ongoing violent secessionist movements in Sahelian countries, including Niger and Mali, claiming that ethnic majorities have marginalized them and displaced them from their rightful territory. A border dispute between Senegal and Mauritania in 1989 escalated into ethnic riots in both countries, with Mauritanian lynch mobs expelling roughly 70,000 non-Arab people "back" to Senegal and Senegalese President Abdou Diouf deploying the army to protect Arabs in Senegal's capital city of Dakar (Parker,

1991). In Rwanda, Hutus and Tutsis are still struggling to re-establish social trust after generations of political competition and a genocide in 1994. The Rwandan genocide sent 1.2 million Hutu refugees fleeing into neighboring Congo, upsetting Congo's ethnic balance and flooding the Kivu region with armed génocidaires. Congo's Mobutu government came to the military aid of ill-defined "native" Congolese, sparking a bloody ethnic war in refugee camps and surrounding communities (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2003).

Although research on these and other African conflicts has discredited the primordialist assumption that ethnic identities form "in the blood" (Posner, 2003, 127), they nevertheless stress that ethnic identities can become politically salient and conflictual when politicians and rebel leaders use them instrumentally to recruit supporters and to denigrate their opponents (Posner, 2005; Weinstein, 2007; Laitin, 1998). Home to some of the most ethnically diverse and war-prone countries in the world (Collier, 1998), Africa presents evidence consistent with the hypothesis that the more ethnically diverse a place is, the more likely that place is to undergo conflict.

However, the hypothesis that ethnic diversity causes conflict has become more nuanced in recent years. Few scholars now claim that ethnic diversity "leads inherently to greater levels of political instability" (Annett, 2000, 3).<sup>1</sup> Instead, scholars propose that conflict arises when ethnic groups compete for power and resources (Fjelde and Hultmann, 2010; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Weinstein, 2007). The fact that many so-called ethnic wars like those in Senegal, Mauritania, and Sudan began as conflicts over oil, water, land, and

---

<sup>1</sup>Annett (2000) and Muller (2008) are exceptions.

political representation suggests that the “ethnic” label may be a misleading post-hoc descriptor. Rebels are systematically likelier to target civilians in resource-rich areas (Fjelde and Hultmann, 2010), and they tend to play the ethnic card when they lack lootable natural resources or foreign aid to buy popular support with economic incentives (Weinstein, 2007). It is a common error, or “base-rate fallacy,” to assume that because conflicts sometimes acquire an ethnic dimension, ethnicity must cause conflict (Habyarimana et al., 2008, 138).

Scholars searching for the roots of conflict in Africa have thus begun to eschew the conventional measure of ethnic diversity, ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF). ELF measures the probability that two randomly selected people in a society will belong to a group with a common historic linguistic origin (Garcia-Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002, 2). Newer datasets move beyond this measure to record ethnic groups’ political relevance (Posner, 2004; Wucherpfennig et al., 2011), polarization (Garcia-Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002), or inclusion and exclusion from political power (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Wimmer, Cederman and Min, 2009). Using a measure of ethnic exclusion from the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (Wimmer, Cederman and Min, 2009), researchers have produced econometric evidence that the likelihood of civil war and coups in Africa increases when rulers use ethnicity as a criterion for allocating government positions (Roessler, 2011; Cederman, Gledditsch and Hug, 2009). Analyzing the same dataset, Buhuag (2010) and Min, Cederman and Wimer (2008) likewise find that violence stems primarily from an ethnic group’s grievances against the state, not grievances

against other ethnic groups.

Recent scholarship also questions earlier assumptions that higher ethnolinguistic fractionalization necessarily increases the likelihood of civil war. Instead, it shows that higher fractionalization actually decreases the likelihood of civil war in Africa and elsewhere, because fractionalization among would-be fighters increases the costs of coordination and cooperation (Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Collier, 1998). To the extent that higher fractionalization does breed conflict, it seems to do so by impeding economic cooperation and increasing poverty, which in turn generates grievances that cause instability (Nhema and Zeleza, 2008; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Habyarimana et al., 2007; Miguel, 2004; Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). Ethnic divisions can magnify inequality as well as poverty, through lasting colonial legacies that granted some ethnic groups privileged access to the upper class (Young, 1976, 175).<sup>2</sup>

Combined, this body of research implies that inequality, and not just ethnicity, is an important additional cause of conflict in Africa. It reveals that ethnicity sparks violence only indirectly, by exacerbating economic deprivation and disparities in wealth and power. Inequality correlates with ethnic fractionalization, especially at lower levels of income and democracy like those characterizing much of Africa (Milanovic, 2003, 23). Githongo (2006, 19) notes that economic inequality in Africa is often manifested along ethnic and regional lines; Garcia-Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2002, 7) even acknowledge that their measure of ethnic polarization can proxy for income polarization.

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<sup>2</sup>Young calls this process “differential modernization.”

In other words, “the ‘Africa problem’ is not ethnic fractionalization per se, but rather low income and democracy that ‘allow’ ethnic fractionalization to play a negative role (in increasing inequality)” (Milanovic, 2003, 23). In my dissertation, I test this theory and further investigate what generates forms of conflict besides civil war.

## **1.2 Does Inequality Cause Conflict in Africa?**

It is timely to study inequality in Africa, because Africa is experiencing rising inequality along with economic growth. While “emerging Africa” has seen steady increases in GDP per capita for 15 years or more (Radelet, 2010), aggregate growth has masked the persistence of poverty that would not exist if total GDP were distributed equally. The number of Africans living on less than a dollar a day climbed from 140 million in 1975 to over 360 million in 2000, during a period culminating in significant economic expansion (Artadi and Sala-i Martin, 2003, 7). In 1970, one in ten poor people in the world was African; by 2000, the fraction was close to one in two (Artadi and Sala-i Martin, 2003, 7). Poverty and inequality are not the same thing, but inequality “acts as a filter between growth and poverty” (Nissanke and Thorbecke, 2006, 1339). When growth occurs in countries that are very poor at the outset, people at the bottom of an unequal income distribution experience inequality as persistent poverty. Even if the extremely poor enjoy some income gains as the economic tides rise, they will not completely emerge from poverty as long as inequality remains high. In other words, “poverty, at any given growth rate

of GDP, falls less rapidly in the case of a more unequal distribution than in the case of a more equitable one” (Nissanke and Thorbecke, 2006, 1344).

Africa has undergone remarkable growth, but not necessarily pro-poor growth. Uganda, for instance, succeeded in reducing inflation from 100 percent in 1987 to the single digits in 1992 by abolishing marketing boards for coffee, tea, and cotton. After opening up to favorable world commodity markets, the country experienced annual GDP growth of 6.3 percent between 1990 and 2000. However, small-scale farmers and unemployed urbanites benefited little from these improvements, and Uganda actually saw an increase in poverty between 1999 and 2002.<sup>3</sup> Africa as a whole has higher income inequality than any region in the world except Latin America. The poor make up 61 percent of Africa’s population, but hold only 34 percent of the total income (Mubila, 2012, 3).

Africa’s inequality has ancient roots. Natural endowments attracted colonial occupiers whose economic institutions, such as cash crop agriculture, concentrated wealth in the hands of the few (van de Walle, 2009). However, initial factors cannot explain changes in inequality over time. Africa appears to be following the Kuznets curve, whereby inequality increases as a society transitions from a predominantly agricultural economy to a more industrial one (Piketty, 2006; Okojie and Shimeles, 2006). In the early stages of industrialization and attendant economic growth, just a small proportion of society advances economically through steadier, more lucrative employment. Only

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<sup>3</sup>Poverty rose by 1.3 percentage points annually at the national level, 0.9 percentage points in urban areas, and 1.4 percentage points in rural areas (Kappel, Lay and Steiner, 2005, 34).



once most of society has left the farm does inequality begin to fall. Increased social unrest is one political implication of the Kuznets curve, because inequality generates grievances against the upwardly mobile during early stages of growth and geographically concentrates the poor in agricultural enclaves and urban slums where they can organize (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2002).

Although long-term economic trends are uncertain, most African countries seem to be in the very early stage of industrialization—the stage at which the Kuznets theory predicts the highest risk of social unrest. Most African economies remain dependent on natural resources, the revenues from which accrue largely to wasteful governments (Jensen and Wantchekon, 2004). Labor is concentrated in unproductive sectors like subsistence agriculture and small-scale entrepreneurship, with labor productivity lagging far behind labor productivity in Asia and Latin America (Figure 1.1). A common measure of industrialization besides labor productivity is manufacturing activity. African countries are not yet undergoing manufacturing revolutions like the ones in South Korea and Bangladesh that employed millions of peasants in factories during the 1960s and 1980s, respectively (Park, 1990; Feldman, 2009; Ross, 2008). Manufactured exports comprise only 55 percent of total exports in the average African country, compared to 76 percent in the average non-African developing country (Page, 2012, ii96). Early African leaders, eager to shed dependence on former colonial powers, pushed their countries toward industrialization by sheltering domestic producers and building factories with public funds. State-led import substitution proved unsustainable, however, and Africa de-industrialized in the 1980s and early 1990s (Page, 2012, ii95). Today,

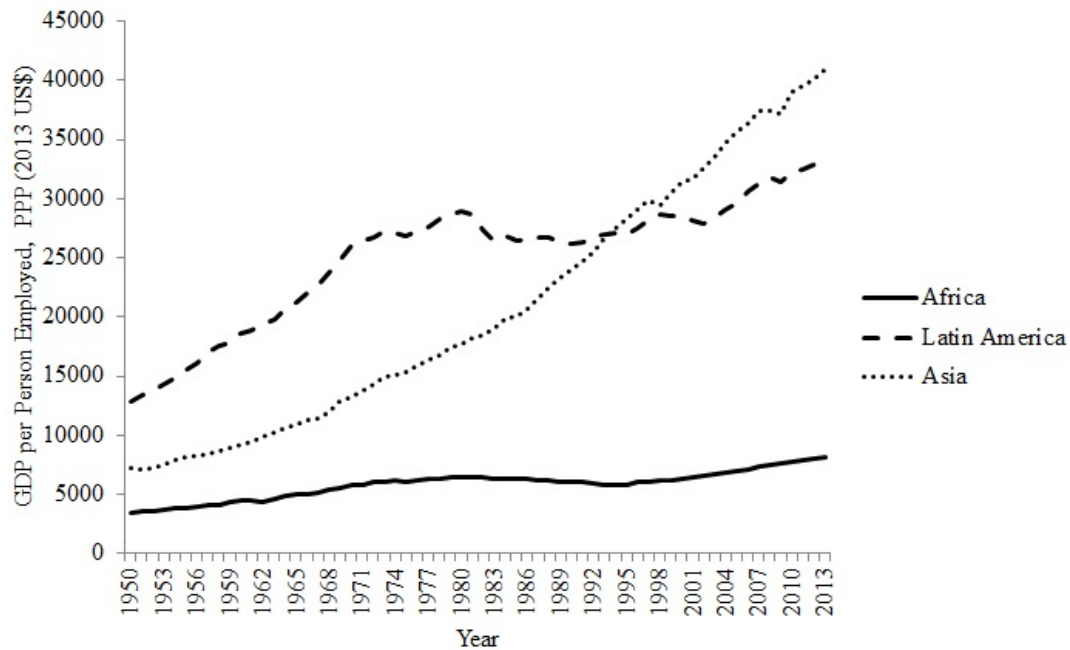


Figure 1.1: Labor Productivity by Region over Time  
 Source: The Conference Board Total Economy Database (2014).

African manufacturing sectors are even smaller and less diverse than they were during the first decade after independence.

Nevertheless, there are some signs of industrialization in Africa. Labor productivity has ticked up slightly since 1994 (Figure 1.1) amid capital and technological investment from China, Europe, and the Middle East (McMillan and Rodrik, 2011; Page, 2012). African governments and their partners are beginning to improve investment climates and to expand manufacturing—for instance, by lowering tariffs and establishing “special economic zones” (areas with concentrated investment in trade infrastructure like ports, roads, and electricity) (Page, 2012). Compared to locally-owned firms, the foreign-owned

firms that are beginning to appear in Africa employ significantly more workers in manufacturing jobs (Eifert, Gelb and Ramachandran, 2005). Seasonal migration from the countryside to more industrial urban centers is so common that an estimated 40 percent of African rural household income now comes from non-farm sources (Bryceson, 2002, 730). Movement toward industrial work has accelerated because of unfavorable world market prices for farm outputs and because trade liberalization and foreign investment have created new employment opportunities (Rispen, 2009; Bryceson, 2002). Industrialization has involved not only a shift in income sources but also exploding urban populations (Fox, 2012) and changes in social identification (Bryceson, 2002, 726). Analyzing survey data from 33,000 respondents in ten African countries, Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2007, 7) find that only 31 percent of the respondents identify themselves first and foremost in ethnic terms; more respondents identify with “class/occupation” identities. Absent aggressive—and unlikely—economic redistribution, industrialization will heighten inequality while only a minority of Africans benefit from new opportunities. Economic grievances could therefore become increasingly salient in the short and medium terms.

The evidence for industrialization in Africa is mixed, but the evidence for aggregate economic growth is clear. Africa’s total GDP per capita has risen steadily starting around 1995 (Figure 1.2). Continent-wide GDP per capita was \$2,340 in 1980 and \$3,703 in 2012, according to World Bank statistics. This growth has been widely distributed at the country level: only two African countries, Zimbabwe and South Sudan, have recorded negative average annual

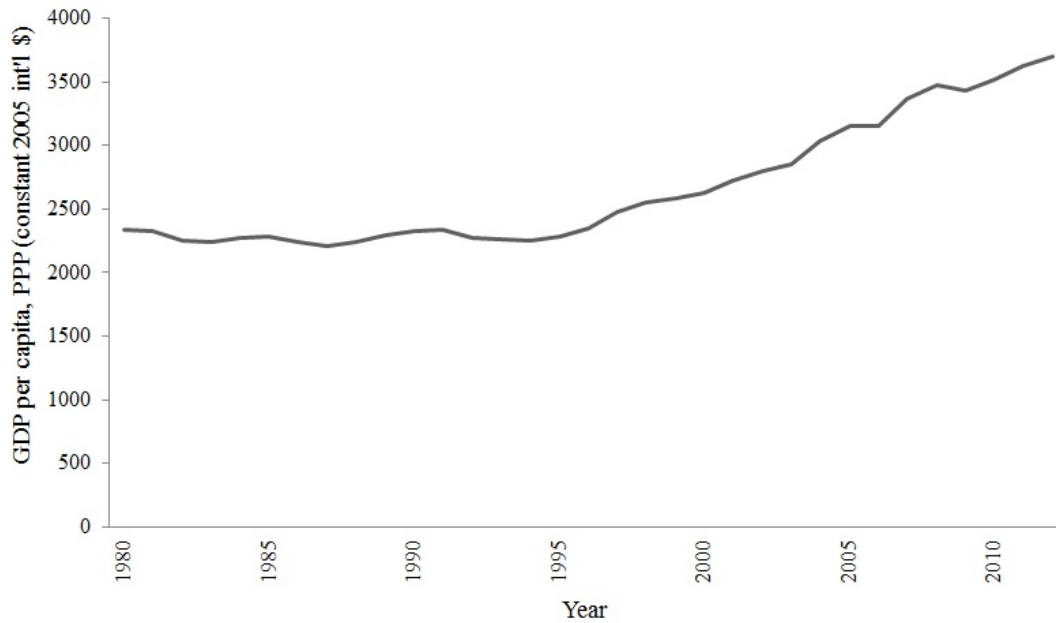


Figure 1.2: GDP per Capita in Africa, 1980-2012

Note: Data are from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (2012).

income growth since the year 2000 (Figure 1.3).<sup>4</sup> Every other country on record has enjoyed at least modest positive growth in GDP per capita, and many have fared even better: 19 African countries have grown three to five percent on average each year since 2000, and 15 have averaged over five percent annual growth. Eight countries, including the former war zones of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Rwanda, have grown over seven percent annually on average, putting them on par with the fast-growing “Asian tigers” of the 1980s (Rispens, 2009).

However, this broad distribution of income growth across African countries

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<sup>4</sup>South Sudan has existed only since 2011, but its “war-produced economy” (Elnur, 2009, 93) was presumably no better before than after independence. Somalia has likely also experienced negative growth, but does not report income data.

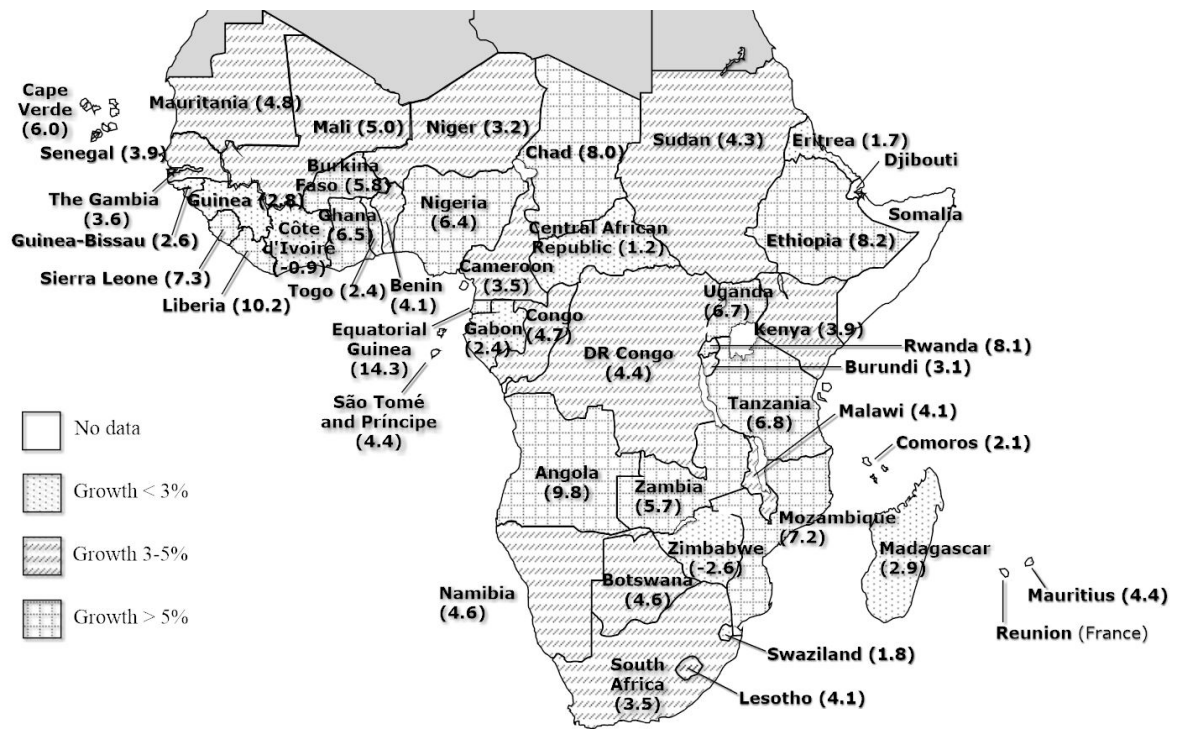


Figure 1.3: Average Annual Growth in GDP per Capita in Africa, 2000-2012

Note: Average annual percent growth from 2000 to 2012 in parentheses.  
 Data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2012).

masks inequality within countries. Figure 1.3 summarizes changes in average within-country inequality over recent decades in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the rest of the world. The measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient, is the most widely available gauge of disproportionality in shares of income across households. It ranges from 0 to 100, with higher numbers denoting higher inequality. Inequality has clearly climbed over the past several decades in Africa and around the world. In the 1980s, the average African country had a Gini coefficient of 47; in the 1990s and after, that number increased to 51. Combined with Figures 1.2 and 1.3 displaying movement of nearly all African countries toward prosperity, Figure 1.3 presents evidence consistent with what Firebaugh (2003) calls “the new geography of global income inequality”—a phenomenon beginning in the late twentieth century whereby inequality across countries fell while inequality within countries rose. According to Firebaugh, both of these trends—falling cross-country inequality and rising within-country inequality—have resulted from industrialization. Industrializing poor countries, many of them in Africa, have begun to catch up to richer countries. Yet, as Kuznets theorized, only a small percentage of poor people have benefited in the short term, which is reflected in country-level Gini coefficients.

Inequality within African countries has not only increased since the 1980s, but it has also remained higher in absolute terms than inequality in the rest of the world except Latin America (Figure 1.3). According to the World Income Inequality Database, six of the most unequal countries in the world are African: Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana, Sierra Leone, Central African

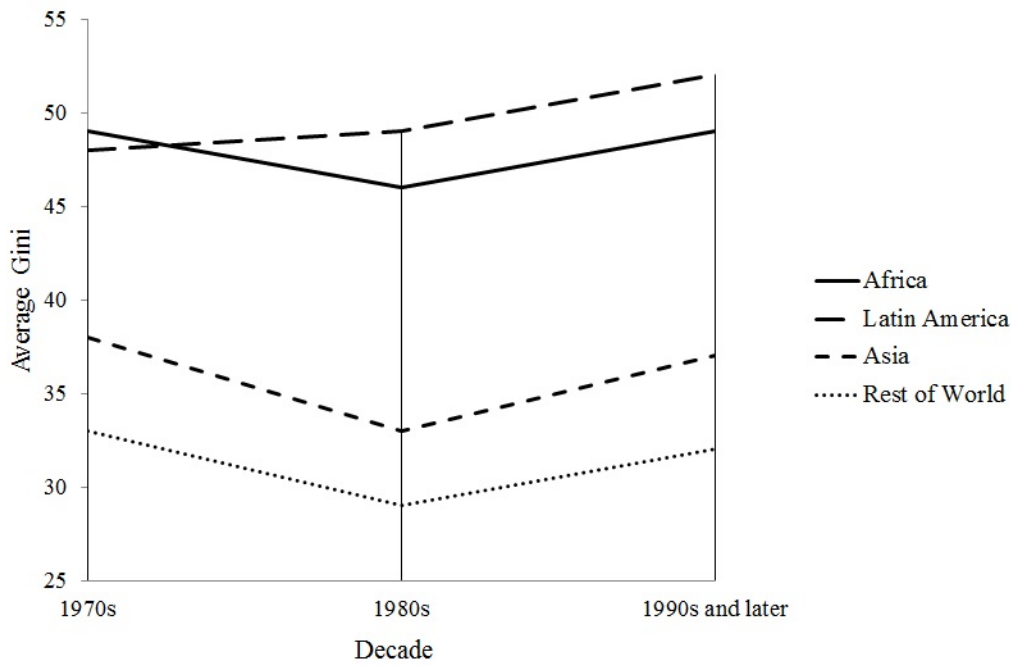


Figure 1.4: Inequality by Region over Time

Note: Data are from the UNU-WIDER World Income Inequality Database (2008). There are few observations of Gini coefficients after 2000. Reflecting different independence dates and data availability, African averages are calculated from 18 countries in the 1970s, 22 countries in the 1980s, and 38 countries in the 1990s and later.

Republic, and Namibia. This trend extends beyond the distribution of income: Africa has also seen rising inequalities in education, health, and nutrition (Cogneau et al., 2006; Christiaensen, Demery and Stefano, 2002; Frankema and Bolt, 2006; Okojie and Shimeles, 2006). Scholars have long acknowledged high inequality in Latin America (Greskovits, 1998), but they have tended to perceive inequality in Africa's largely agrarian societies to be low and of little consequence for poverty reduction (Fields, 2000). Contrary to this assumption, poverty in "emerging Africa" seems to be a problem of distribution and not of production. If incomes were distributed evenly, no African would be poor by the World Bank's standard of living on less than two dollars a day (Firebaugh, 2003, 13).

High average inequality among African countries has not resulted from one or two outliers. Ten African countries have a Gini coefficient of at least 50, according to the most recent data from the World Income Inequality Database (Figure 1.5). Several of these, including Namibia (Gini of 74), Botswana (54), and South Africa (57), are clustered in the south, which is not surprising given these countries' close trade relations and shared industrial emphasis in mining. However, inequality is also extremely high in the more northern countries of Niger (51), Kenya (57), and the Central African Republic (61). These countries share no borders and have diverse economies, with Niger specializing in cotton production, Kenya in small consumer goods manufacturing, and the Central African Republic in the mining of precious metals. Even the African countries with the most equal income distributions, including Ethiopia and Chad, have Gini coefficients of at least 30. Most European countries, including but not



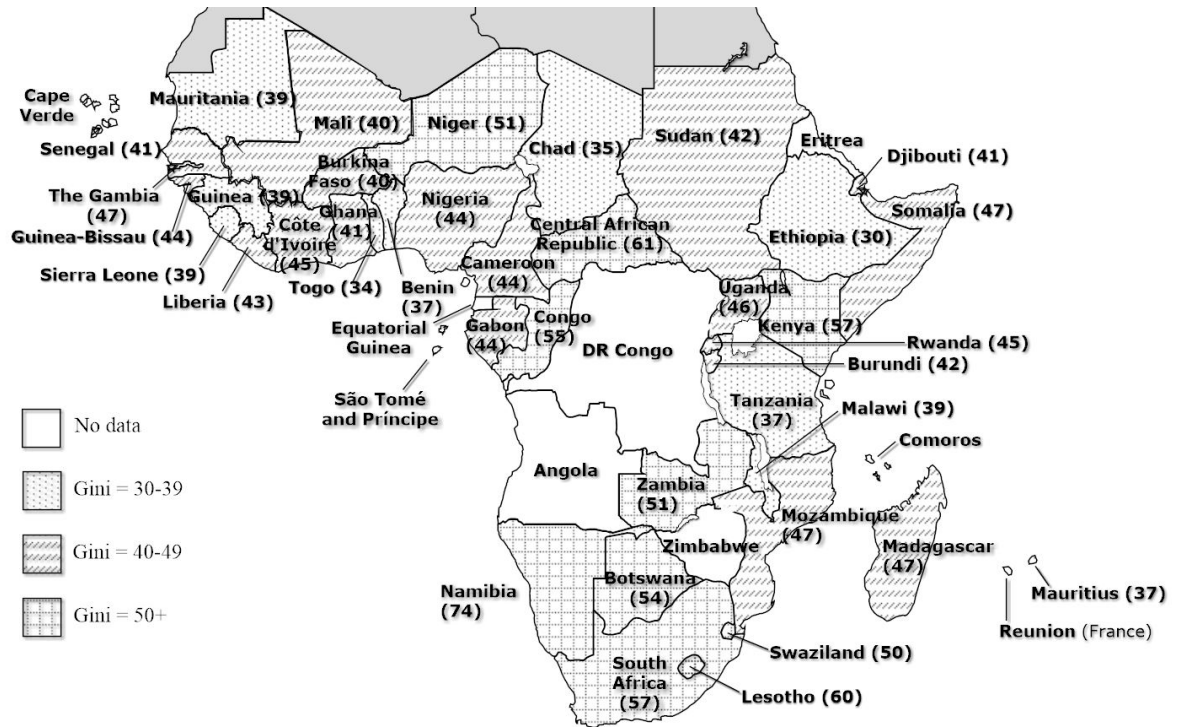


Figure 1.5: Inequality in Africa

Note: Most recent Gini coefficients in parentheses. Dates of most recent data vary by country. Data are from the World Income Inequality Database (2012).

limited to Scandinavian social welfare states, have Gini coefficients closer to 20. In short, inequality is pronounced, widespread, and growing across Africa.

High inequality means that Africans living at the bottom of the income and consumption distribution often experience no perceptible improvements in their living conditions, even as aggregate economic activity increases (Kanbur and Venables, 2005). Analyzing data from 16 African countries Fosu (2008) finds that an increase in national income of 10 percent translates into a decrease in poverty of 35 percent under conditions of perfect equality, whereas the estimated reduction is only four percent at the sample mean Gini of 42.8. There

is variation across African countries in “poverty-growth elasticity,” meaning the percent change in poverty rates for a given percentage of economic growth (Easterly, 2000): Poverty-growth elasticity is over 60 percent in Niger, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea, but less than 10 percent in Central African Republic and Sierra Leone (Fosu, 2008, 565). This variation may stem from inequality, which can depress long-term rates of income growth by preventing a large portion of society from fully participating in markets (Fanta and Upadhyay, 2009; Ravallion, 1997; Sokoloff and Engerman, 2000). Even if inequality does not eventually impede growth, it may prevent the poor from sharing in a higher average income (Ravallion, 1997). For example, in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania between 1983 and 1991, real expenditures among the poorest 10 percent of the population fell despite reduced poverty nation-wide (Demery and Squire, 1996).

What causes this “immense chasm between the rich and the poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Karinge, 2013, 437)? One explanation is that natural endowments gave rise to colonial plantation-style economies, which impoverished all but a small African elite (van de Walle, 2009). In post-colonial years, natural endowments have enabled “the governing class” to extract large revenues, which members of that class distribute unequally as patronage (van de Walle, 2009, 319). A related explanation for inequality is Africa’s high levels of corruption (Karinge, 2013; Acqaah-Gaisie, 2005). Transparency International rates African countries as some of the most corrupt in the world (*Corruption Perceptions Index*, 2012). Corruption in Africa tends to be of the disorganized, decentralized type that creates uncertainty and economic inefficiency

(Gyimah-Brempong, 2002, 185). It also seems to be associated with inequality. In Africa, a one-point increase in the Corruption Perceptions Index is associated with a seven-point increase in the Gini coefficient (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002, 186). Africa’s corruption and hence inequality may have colonial origins. Colonial subjects with government jobs often remained attached to their local communities and felt little loyalty toward European institutions. They were therefore inclined to steal resources from the “civic public” and to give back to the “primordial public”—a tradition that has endured under institutions that are ineffective at monitoring corruption (Ekeh, 1975). Influxes of foreign aid in the 1980s and 1990s expanded opportunities for politicians to siphon public resources into private coffers, exacerbating inequality between the state class and everyone else (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002). Finally, as paragraphs above outlined, nascent industrialization might partially account for recent rises in inequality. Econometric research on the determinants of inequality is inconclusive, but analyses show Africa region dummies to be statistically significant, positive, and large in magnitude (Barro, 2000).

Regardless of its many sources, inequality may help explain conflict in Africa. Sociologists and psychologists document the anger and jealousy that the poor feel when they see others advancing (Gurr, 1970; Shapiro, 2002). Dissatisfaction with inequality can be especially high during periods of economic growth, because growth conditions the poor’s expectations of upward mobility (Hirschman and Rothschild, 1973; Nafziger and Auvinen, 2002). Nafziger and Auvinen (2002) and Cramer (2003) cite anecdotal evidence that relative deprivation “helps explain the increased violence by belligerents and their clients”

in Africa. For example, militias that perpetrated violence in Liberia during the 1990s stated their motivation as the refusal of urbanites to redistribute wealth back home to rural villages. Racially-defined disparities in income and access to political power were central grievances in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and in South Africa's recurring riots both during and after apartheid. In a statistical study, Muller and Seligson (1987) analyzed a sample of 63 countries over a period from 1973 to 1977, finding a correlation between the share of personal income accruing to the richest quintile of a country's population and deaths in domestic protest events: "Most countries with relatively low income inequality (an upper 20 percent share that is one-half of a standard deviation or more below the mean) have relatively low death rates from political violence (in the range of 0 to -1 standard deviation), whereas most countries with relatively high income inequality (an upper 20 percent share that is one standard deviation or more above the mean) have relatively high death rates (equal to or above the mean)" (Muller and Seligson, 1987, 434).

It is unclear whether this relationship between inequality and protest still holds today, because most recent research on the link between inequality and conflict examines a different outcome: civil war. There is no convincing evidence that a higher Gini coefficient raises the risk of civil war, possibly because a high degree of inequality signals to rebels that government elites can finance a strong counter-insurgency (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier, 1999*a*; Collier and Hoeffler, 1996). However, it would be erroneous to conclude that inequality does not contribute to conflict, because most of the conflict arising from inequality may be omitted from analyses for failing to meet the casualty

thresholds of 500 or 1,000 battle deaths to count as full-scale war. In contrast with the civil war literature, studies on quotidian unrest in Latin America reveal that inequality is a major source of grievances among protesters, as in Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terras (MST) demonstrations against anti-poor inflationary macroeconomic policies (Cramer, 2003, 403). Even without reaching the level of civil war, the "violence of everyday life" in Latin America has resulted in annual homicide rates as high as 20 deaths per 100,000 people (Scheper-Hughes, 1992).

### **1.3 War versus Protest, Grievance versus Opportunity**

Several themes surface from the literature on conflict in Africa. First, the causes of protest might be distinct from the causes of violent collective action in the form of riots or civil war. Research indicates that inequality does not cause civil war, because inequality signals to rebels that government elites can finance a strong counter-insurgency (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier, 1999*a*; Collier and Hoeffler, 1996). However, this is not evidence that inequality does not cause protest. The costs and risks of protesting are lower than the costs and risks of armed rebellion, so inequality might not send the same signal to would-be protesters that it sends to would-be rebels. It is possible that would-be protesters have grievances about inequality but are less concerned about the prospects of a violent government response to a demonstration, even if protesters occasionally face government fire ( "*Dozens Killed*'

*at Guinea Protest*”, 2009). Existing research on the link between inequality and political instability in Africa has tended to overlook these fundamental differences among forms of conflict. Nel (2003), for example, measures political instability as an index of coups, constitutional crises, revolutions, guerrilla wars, and riots. His finding that inequality has no relationship with conflict is therefore suspect.

The determinants of civil war might differ from the determinants of protest also at the micro level. Scacco (2008, 5) remarks that political scientists have produced detailed explanations for why individuals engage in acts of rebellion (Petersen, 2001; Weinstein, 2007), insurgency (Wood, 2008; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2006), genocide (Straus, 2006), and non-battle violence during civil wars (Kalyvas, 2006). Yet, “the incentive structures and dynamics at work in civil and interstate wars are very different from those that we observe in shorter, more localized” collective action (Scacco, 2008, 5). Briefer, more localized collective action is worth studying, because it is not necessarily less politically consequential than larger-scale violence. As Beissinger (2013) notes in reference to Ukraine’s 2004 Orange Revolution, “Rather than violent, protracted projects of social change aimed at transforming semi-agrarian societies (Skocpol, 1979; Huntington, 1968), most contemporary revolutions are compact urban uprisings that articulate demands for civil and political freedoms.”

A second theme in the literature on conflict in Africa is that grievances are widespread, whereas opportunities to engage in collective action—whether violent or peaceful—are scarce. Presumably, people must be upset before they

raise their voices or take up arms against a regime. However, some disapproval with the political status quo is nearly universal, even in societies like the post-1960s United States where protest is rare (McCarthy and McPhail, 1998). It is important to study the attitudes that make people want to challenge the status quo in the first place, but a complete explanation for protest frequency and participation must account for the factors that, in the words of Scacco (2008), “pull” angry people to the streets. These factors may include selective incentives, as Weinstein (2007) proposes, as well as social networks and informational resources that help people coordinate, as Scacco (2008) maintains.

In light of these two themes—differences in types of conflict and the contributions that grievances and opportunities make to conflict outcomes—my goal is to disaggregate both the dependent and independent variables of the existing literature. I examine protest as its own form of contentious politics rather than confounding it with rebellion, insurgency, and rioting. My explanations for protest participation address not just the attitudes and desires that push protesters into action, but also the social networks that pull them into the streets.

With this two-pronged approach, I reveal some findings that are similar to those in the existing literature—for instance, that protest events occur more frequently in more democratic states (Chapter 4) and that Africans who attend community meetings are more likely than Africans who are less socially engaged to participate in protests (Chapter 5). I also make some unexpected and novel inferences—for instance, that inequality causes protest in Africa even if it does not cause civil war (Chapter 4) and that some grievances,

namely expectations about one's future economic well-being, are more likely than others to motivate Africans to protest (Chapter 7).

## 1.4 The Argument

Do economic grievances drive protest in contemporary Africa? On the one hand, economic growth in countries like Ghana and Rwanda could make Africans optimistic and more satisfied with incumbent regimes—even ones that are imperfectly democratic. On the other hand, higher expectations for income, jobs, and public goods could foment unrest if incumbents failed to meet those expectations. Existing research on protest, which highlights earlier time periods and regions outside of Africa, is inadequate to explain protest in Africa today, which may have different correlates and causes. Research on African politics, with its focus on ethnicity, is also inadequate to explain the effects of Africa's unprecedented economic growth on the likelihood of protest. I aim to fill gaps in both of these literatures.

Although protests might appear on the surface to be a society's automatic reaction to shared hardship (Le Bon, 1886/2006; Zolberg, 1972), protests are merely the aggregate expression of attitude formation, coordination, and cooperation at the individual level. The protesters who flooded the streets of Niamey in 2009 and 2010 had grievances of some kind—possibly dissatisfaction with an ineffective government, fear of a bleak economic future, or a desire to defend constitutional democracy. They also found ways to coordinate with other citizens at the same time and place, with some protesters travelling



from the outskirts of the city to the seat of government. Finally, participants in the 2009-2010 uprisings overcame the temptation to stay at home and wait for their compatriots to protest on their behalf. Instead of free-riding, they forewent a day's worth or more of income-generating activities and braved potential government repression in order to contribute to a social movement whose outcome was uncertain. When a protest happens, it is because many individuals want some form of change and create the practical means to pursue it.

My main argument is that African protesters are driven largely by economic or material concerns, and less by ethnic antipathies or intrinsic preferences for democracy. Specifically, Africans are more likely to join protests if they have low prospects of upward mobility—that is, if they expect their living conditions to be no better in the future than they are today. This contradicts common perceptions of African conflicts as fundamentally “tribal” or stemming from ideological passions. Moreover, African protesters seem to care more about their future economic well-being than they care about their present levels of poverty or inequality: regardless of how well-off they view themselves today, Africans who expect their economic situations to deteriorate in coming years are more likely to protest than more optimistic Africans.

I also make the case that inequality has different implications for different forms of conflict. Earlier research shows inequality to have no significant effect on the likelihood of civil war in Africa (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier, 1999*a*; Collier and Hoeffler, 1996). I contend that inequality nevertheless affects the likelihood of civil protests, because protest presents different potential costs

and benefits to protesters than civil war presents to rebels. Would-be rebels and would-be protesters might be equally upset about inequality, but would-be protesters are relatively less concerned that inequality will advantage the government and other elites in an armed confrontation. Furthermore, the motivation to protest stems not just from grievances about inequality, but also from grievances about prospects of upward mobility: Regardless of present levels of poverty and inequality, people who expect no significant improvements in their economic well-being are more likely to protest than people who are more hopeful about one day benefiting from existing institutions and power arrangements. No previous research on conflict in Africa, to my knowledge, has identified prospects of upward mobility as an explanatory variable.

The final component of my argument addresses the practical (as opposed to the attitudinal) aspects of protest—that is, how citizens who have the will to change the status quo also surmount coordination and cooperation problems. Protest occurs at the intersection of grievance and opportunity. In other words, it is necessary but not sufficient for citizens to be upset about the regime or the economy; they must also be able to communicate with each other, arrive at the site of a protest, and overcome the inclination to free-ride on the participation of protesters who accept the sometimes mortal risks of opposing elites.

Echoing Scacco (2008), Putnam (1993), and many others, I argue that social networks are important for drawing people to the streets. Labor unions, student groups, and neighborhood associations create dense communities whose members can more easily sanction each other for not participating in a collective action. The tighter-knit a group, the better its members can com-

municate about protest logistics. I expand on earlier research by highlighting the tendency of civil society groups to mobilize protesters even beyond their own ranks. This tendency seems to be especially common in Africa, where the scarcity of wage employment and educational opportunities compels labor and student leaders to “diversify their portfolios” of supporters.

To summarize the various components of my argument, protests in Africa stem from economic grievances in the midst of overall economic growth. Inequality and low prospects of upward mobility, and not deep-seated ethnic hatreds, are the primary grievances correlated with protest events and individual-level protest participation. Urban Africans are able to collectively express these grievances because they are embedded in social networks that facilitate coordination and cooperation.

## **1.5 Plan of the Dissertation**

This dissertation focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa, where little research has been conducted on protest participation and where protests may have especially significant implications for democratic transition and consolidation. To more thoroughly introduce a topic that is unfamiliar to many students of African politics, Chapter 2 provides historical background on four major waves of protest in Africa: anti-colonial protests of the 1960s and 1970s, anti-austerity protests of the 1980s, democracy protests of the 1990s, and twenty-first century protests that recapitulate demands for improved economic conditions and democratic reform. This brief chronology provides anecdotal

evidence that African protesters increasingly care foremost about economic problems such as unemployment and inequality, despite Africa's recent unprecedented growth.

In Chapter 3, I describe the state of scholarly knowledge on protest in Africa. There are two general threads of the literature. One focuses on the macroeconomic and macropolitical determinants of protest events, including economic growth, income inequality, ethnic exclusion, and colonialism. The other examines micro-level determinants of protest participation, including grievances and social networks. Chapter 3 also summarizes research on protest participation beyond Africa.

This literature review highlights several important themes. First, the causes of protest may be different from the causes of violent collective action like civil war. This is because protest is less costly to participants and less threatening to the political-economic order than civil war, and hence may be the more attractive option for people to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Second, grievances are widespread, whereas protest is rare; grievances may be necessary for people to protest, but they are only one piece of the puzzle about why some Africans take to the streets while others do not. These themes frame the remainder of the dissertation. I examine protest as a dependent variable separate from the forms of collective violence that Africanists have traditionally studied, and my independent variables include grievances along with measures of social connectedness.

Chapter 4 systematically examines the empirical causes of protest events in contemporary Africa. Using recently available data from the Social Conflict

in Africa Database, it examines the hypothesis that inequality leads to social unrest. I find that inequality correlates with a higher frequency of protests in a large cross section of African countries from 1990 to 2009, even after omitting exceptionally unequal and conflict-prone countries like South Africa.

Chapter 5 moves from protest events to the individual-level attitudes and behaviors that produce them. Using Afrobarometer survey data from a sample of African countries over the period 1999 to 2009, I find that having low prospects of upward mobility is associated with a higher probability that a respondent reports having participated in a protest. Respondents are also more likely to have protested if they feel that their well-being has deteriorated over time. Regarding collective action and social networks, I confirm previous findings that attendance at community meetings increases protest propensity by helping protesters coordinate.

Chapter 6 introduces a case study of the 2009-2010 uprisings in Niger, in which I seek to explain why some Nigeriens turned out to protest against the Tandja regime while others stayed home. Niger is an ideal case for studying the causes of protest participation because the country has recently experienced large-scale protests nominally surrounding the president's attempt to outstay his mandate but coinciding with a protracted economic slump and food shortage. The coincidence of autocracy and economic strife allows me to exploit variation in grievances in order to ascertain which grievances are most politically salient: Did Nigerien protesters fundamentally want to defend constitutional democracy, as pundits assumed, or were their grievances primarily materially-based? Did ethnic antipathies play a role in the protests, as the

literature on African conflicts would imply?

After providing background on the political events leading up to the 2009 protests, Chapter 7 outlines hypotheses about protest participation that mirror those in earlier chapters. A statistical analysis then validates my cross-national findings with original survey data that I collected in Niger's capital city roughly a year after the uprisings. It reveals that attitudes about Tandja's anti-constitutional actions or ethnic affiliations did not significantly correlate with protest propensity, but that low prospects of upward mobility did. Also consistent with cross-national findings, members of community organizations were more likely than non-members to have protested.

This dissertation shows at multiple levels of analysis that Africans protest because they have low prospects of upward mobility and are members in community organizations. What does this matter for our broader theoretical and empirical understanding of protest? The final chapter of the dissertation addresses the implications of my findings for scholarship and real-world politics. Among these implications is that pro-democratic popular pressures can arise no matter citizens' ideological commitments to democracy. Even when citizens protest mainly for economically-oriented reasons, democracy can still result if autocrats are forced to cede power. This was evident in Niger, where economically frustrated citizens joined protests en masse, despite the fact that much of the population did not strongly oppose Tandja's anti-constitutional actions. The chapter ends with additional implications of my findings and an agenda for future research on protest participation in Africa and beyond.

## Chapter 2

# A Chronology of Protest in Africa

There have been four major waves of protest in Sub-Saharan Africa. The first reached its height in the 1960s and 1970s when students, peasants, and labor union members spearheaded the fight against colonial rule. The second wave consisted of anti-austerity protests during the 1980s in response to western-backed structural adjustment programs. The third wave peaked in the 1990s, when diverse coalitions of students, workers, and religious leaders called on autocrats to hold free and fair elections and institute multi-party politics. The most recent, ongoing wave of African protest has focused on the alleviation of poverty and the renewal of democracy amidst Africa's unprecedented economic growth and a rise in inequality. In this chapter, I describe each of these waves with the objective of illustrating qualitative variation in African protests. Subsequent chapters will quantitatively analyze the causes

of variation in protest frequency and participation over time and space.

## 2.1 Anti-Colonial Protests

On January 3, 1961, farmers walked off the fields of the Portuguese-owned Cotonang cotton plantation in Baixa de Cassanje, Angola. Fed up with miserable working conditions and low wages, they burned their identification cards and attacked Portuguese settlers. The colonial administration retaliated with bombs and napalm, launching Angola's thirteen-year war of independence. What began as a labor dispute escalated into a bloody nationalist struggle against all aspects of foreign rule. In the war's first year alone, up to 30,000 Angolan civilians died and 500,000 refugees fled to neighboring Zaire. In 1964, indigenous guerilla fighters in Portugal's eastern colony of Mozambique also revolted, setting in motion a second bloody conflict that would last until Mozambique's independence in 1975 (Hall and Young, 1997; MacQueen, 1997).

These wars in Lusophone colonies were exceptional; nearly all 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa shed colonial rule without fighting major wars of independence. Unlike many colonies in Asia and Latin America (and unlike European countries themselves), most African colonies achieved international sovereignty through referendums and diplomacy rather than through protracted battles against foreign invaders. French president Charles de Gaulle issued a referendum in 1958 allowing colonial subjects in French West Africa to vote for either complete and immediate independence or continued political



and economic ties with Paris. In British Africa, decolonization began as early as 1938, long before large anti-colonial protests erupted. British Colonial Office files indicate that decolonization was Britain's long-term economic plan and not initially a response to African nationalist demands (Flint, 1983).

The conventional wisdom is that colonial rule ended without much struggle. Not only were wars of independence rare, but after most African countries became independent in the 1960s and 1970s there were virtually no domestic or foreign challenges to those countries' borders or right to exist. Institutions like the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity declared any redrawing of inherited colonial borders to be illegitimate (Herbst, 1990*b*, 124). Further reinforcing territorial integrity, African elites found it in their interest to preserve the sovereign yet weak states that gave them authority and access to foreign aid (Englebert, 2009). In other words, "the gift of sovereignty was granted from outside rather than earned from within" (Englebert, 2010). Scholars argue that this path to statehood has weakened African states by reducing incentives for leaders to earn the privileges of sovereignty through the typical route of cultivating national unity, raising armies to ward off external threats, and collecting taxes to finance public goods (Englebert, 2009; Herbst, 1990*b*; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). In the long run, they claim, the good fortune of peaceful transition from colonial rule ironically resulted in the curse of political unaccountability.

However, this standard interpretation of history downplays the scale and importance of conflict in African decolonization. Colonial subjects in Africa might not have waged full-scale wars against European occupiers, but many

of them joined a global protest movement that began in the nineteenth century with demands for independence and continued into the 1980s with protests against neocolonialism (Nkinyangi, 1991). The anti-colonial movement spanned Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Asia, receiving support from civil rights activists in the United States. It was political and cultural, involving protests in the streets as well as liberation-themed music and literature (Alquawaizani, 2011). The collective actions of students, workers, and ordinary citizens eventually made it politically indefensible for European powers to maintain colonies in Africa, especially after Britain and France were themselves liberated from foreign occupation during World War II. Many of the first presidents of independent African countries began their political careers as protest leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea (Crummey, 1986; Freund, 1984; Schmidt, 2005). As heads of state, they represented their countries in the United Nations and other international organizations whose charters formally asserted the principle of self-determination.

Quantitative data on protest participation during the colonial era are extremely scarce, but virtually every African colony had a government that endorsed independence (Cooper, 1992; Rotberg, 1972). African politicians such as Nkrumah and Touré rose to power through their staunchly anti-colonial stance, and present-day African leaders have continued to glean political capital from their promises to fight neo-colonialism (Phimister and Raftopoulos, 2004). Even the widely unpopular President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe drew loud applause while addressing the World Summit on Sustainable Devel-

opment in September 2002, declaring that Zimbabweans would “shed [their] blood” to defend their hard-won independence from Great Britain (Phimister and Raftopoulos, 2004, 388).

Qualitative accounts indicate that anti-colonial protests were not limited to diplomatic statements from the politically-conscious elite. Even if anti-colonial movements often had elite roots, urban leaders “spread the gospel of nationalism” and mobilised support among the rural masses (Rasmussen, 1974, 40). This occurred throughout Africa but was especially common in Francophone colonies, where African civil servants with university educations became political entrepreneurs in a populist independence movement (Wallerstein, 1961; Morgenthau, 1964). “As the new African elite studied European history in the African schools . . . they became more and more aware of a great egalitarian movement occurring within European society itself. . . . [T]he doctrine of the inherent rights of all human beings to liberty and equality became a familiar story to them . . .” (Wallerstein, 1961, 45).

Schmidt (2005) documents the interaction between political-economic elites and military veterans, trade unionists, peasants, and women in colonial Guinea. Emboldened by France’s weakness after World War II, the nationalist Guinean RDA party grew its membership by branding itself as a broad-based coalition appealing to marginal ethnic groups and the poor. Rural resistance to colonial rule had begun even before these elite-based mobilization efforts, when Guinean peasants walked off the fields of colonially-appointed chiefs and refused to pay taxes to the colonial government. While some peasants resisted passively, others used more active tactics like petitioning the chiefs

for better treatment and protesting in the streets. Colonial administrators even dismissed five village chiefs in Upper-Guinea for failing to thwart popular uprisings (Schmidt, 2005, 100). The RDA's opposition to the chieftaincy, therefore, melded elite and rural interests in a nation-wide protest movement culminating in a post-war "crisis of chiefly authority" and national independence in 1958 (Schmidt, 2005, 95). Rasmussen (1974) gives a similar account of widespread participation in anti-colonial protests in Zambia.

Although the anti-colonial struggle unified diverse communities of subjugated people, it was divided between conservative and radical camps. Factionalism was especially pronounced in West Africa, where the French policies of direct rule and assimilation created hierarchies based on class, education, and political privilege. Dakar was the center of the French colonial empire and home to Paris-educated Senegalese "évolués" who stood to benefit from maintaining ties to the metropole, whereas most ordinary Senegalese suffered neglect or exploitation under colonial rule.

The clash between conservatism and radicalism was sometimes apparent even within individual figures of the independence movement. For example, Senegalese intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor was prominent on the anti-colonial Négritude literary scene and would ultimately become the first president of independent Senegal; yet, he also headed the conservative Union Progressiste Sénégalaise (UPS), whose members included university graduates, French-appointed chiefs, wealthy peanut traders, and religious elites. The UPS endorsed a "yes" vote on de Gaulle's referendum to prolong French guardianship of West Africa, consequently butting heads with more radical students

and trade unionists. The political climate was similar in Côte d'Ivoire, where chief, physician, and plantation owner Félix Houphouët-Boigny led the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire in containing leftist pro-independence forces.

In contrast, unionists outnumbered wealthy businessmen in the colonies of Guinea, French Soudan, and Niger (Schmidt, 2009, 9). Although comprehensive data on protest frequency and participation are unavailable for the colonial period, qualitative accounts suggest that protests were concentrated in areas with smaller populations of people who benefited from colonial rule (Henderson, 1973; Schmidt, 2005,0).

In colonial Africa, the people most dissatisfied with the status quo were generally labor union members. This is not because union members were the poorest members of society—on the contrary, they were among the privileged few Africans who received steady incomes—but rather because they felt disadvantaged relative to their co-workers of European descent. Instead of striking over poverty, African workers typically struck over workplace inequalities in pay and treatment from employers (Henderson, 1973). Their status as wage earners and their location in urban centers made inequalities more quantifiable and more visible than inequalities in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Aggrieved and embedded in well-organized social networks, union members were poised to lead anti-colonial protests. They already had a history of successful collective action, as in the famous French West African railway strike of 1947-1948 (Cooper, 1990). Consequently, many protests against colonial rule began as labor strikes. In Kenya in 1922, 21 strikers died in protests against the arrest of

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<sup>1</sup>Protests also occurred in rural communities, although they were less frequent than urban protests (Isaacman, 1990).

Harry Thuku, the chairman of the East African Association. In South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union held large assemblies and chanted slogans that non-union protesters later adopted in opposing British occupation. Strikes in Zambia's copperbelt compelled the British Colonial Office to initiate programs for improving human development in the colonies (Henderson, 1973). Labor unions also produced a number of African nationalist leaders, most notably postal worker and radical anti-French politician Sékou Touré of Guinea. The melding of workers' interests and national interests has continued after independence, with unions organizing pro-democracy demonstrators and leading general strikes against dictators in Guinea, Malawi, and elsewhere (Engeler, 2008; Cheeseman, 2012; McCracken, 1998).

The 1961 Baixa de Cassanje revolt, in which Angolan cotton farmers walked off the job and sparked the Angolan War of Independence, might give the impression that labor strikes evolved naturally into anti-colonial protests. Indeed, many scholars at the time expected the events in Angola to become a trend Africa-wide. Woodis (1961, xiii), for example, claimed that unions would “wake the lion” by unleashing anti-colonial sentiment in Africa:

“Each attempt by the African workers to organize and to secure better conditions has inevitably turned in an anti-imperialist direction, assuming the pattern of a national protest, to which have rallied ever wider sections of people . . . Everywhere it has been the mass actions of the [African] workers which have helped pave the way for the post-war upsurge of the national struggles and the

growth of the national political parties and organizations.”

In reality, however, the coalition between African workers and nationalists was precarious. Union leaders were often torn between focusing on traditional workplace issues and joining the broader push for independence. On the one hand, many of them resented receiving lower pay and fewer workplace privileges than European workers did. On the other hand, the issues that most affected union members—including wages and working conditions—usually did not affect the majority the colonized population. Fanon (1961/1967) noted that in colonial Africa workers were “in fact the most favoured section of the population, and represent the most comfortably off fraction of the people.” By one estimate, in 1971 only about 11 percent of Africa’s population earned wages (Henderson, 1973, 288). As a result, some African union members identified more closely with workers in distant countries than with their predominantly agrarian co-nationals. Adopting Marxist rhetoric of a universal workers’ struggle, they chose to concentrate on industrial matters and to avoid association with nationalist movements. Some nationalist politicians suspected unions of collaborating with the colonial economic elite. In Zambia, for example, the president of the African Mine Workers’ Union, Lawrence Katilungu, refused to support a day of national prayer against the colonial federation. The African National Congress, which had organized the protest, criticized Katilungu and his union for abetting Britain’s oppression of the Zambian people (Henderson, 1973). Although workers often provided models for anti-colonial protests, they did so despite sharp political differences with nationalists. Unions’ involvement in national social movements is arguably

higher in Africa today than it was during colonial times.

Like workers, students tended to see themselves as deserving upward mobility. Often denied civil service jobs after graduation, they actively challenged the colonial system that prevented them from advancing. For example, the Nigerian Union of Students protested on campuses in Ibadan, Lagos, Nsukka, and Ahmadu against the ratification of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, which would have allowed the British to build military bases in Nigeria (Nkinyangi, 1991). Numerous African nationalist leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Modibo Keita of Mali, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa, became politically active as students.

Participation in anti-colonial protests varied not only by class but also by gender and ethnicity. In Guinea, the nationalist Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) actively recruited women from both urban and rural communities and listed women on the party ballot. The RDA also included diverse ethnic groups, including Peul aristocrats and people of slave descent from the Futa region. The composition of anti-colonial protesters was different in Niger, where religious conservatism discouraged the participation of women. Nigerien civil society was also stratified by ethnicity: Hausa-speakers from the south-east tended to side with the MSA/Sawaba party, which represented the lower class, whereas Zerma speakers from the south-west supported the Parti Progressiste Nigérien, which was composed of the educated and the relatively wealthy. Like intellectuals in Senegal, the Zerma people had disproportionately benefited from opportunities to attend school in France and to assimilate into



the colonial civil service. Ethnic rivalries likewise divided the anti-colonial movement in the Ivory Coast, where the Baule and the Agni seldom protested side by side (Schmidt, 2009).

In sum, African anti-colonial protesters were not as unified as colonial administrators feared them to be. The nationalists would eventually succeed in expelling European occupiers, but only by forming unstable coalitions across lines of class, ethnicity, and gender. Many of these coalitions were temporary, but the legacy of anti-colonial protests would endure and inspire future waves of protest in Africa.

## **2.2 Anti-Austerity Protests**

If protest was key in ending colonialism, independence made protest an even more attractive option for Africans who were unsatisfied with the existing political economy. During colonial times, Africans typically expressed their discontent with politicians or economic circumstances by migrating. The abundance of land and the expansiveness of colonial territories made it easy for migrants to find new economic opportunities and political communities in distant places. Later, decolonization closed national borders and led to the creation of geographically-bounded economic institutions like the CFA zone in West Africa. Land became scarcer as populations grew, preventing farmers from relocating. These changes made it costlier for dissatisfied Africans to escape slow local economies or repressive governments. Therefore, instead of exiting unfavorable situations, Africans became more inclined to use their

voices and protest against the status quo (Herbst, 1990*a*).

The second major wave of protest in Africa occurred during the 1980s, when the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and western countries initiated structural adjustment programs to promote economic austerity. In the early years after independence, many African leaders had taken advantage of their newly won sovereignty to oversee wasteful state spending. Some “public” services, like the construction of monument sculptures in capital cities or in the president’s home town, were conspicuous ways for leaders to channel patronage to their supporters or to enrich themselves.<sup>2</sup> In Côte d’Ivoire, for instance, President Houphouët-Boigny spent \$145 million building a gilded replica of Saint Peter’s Basilica in his home village. Such ostentatious and wasteful projects became easy targets for western donors, who increasingly demanded austerity as a condition for foreign aid.

Other projects, like state-financed education, health care, and road construction, provided essential public goods and could not be slashed completely. Instead, donors encouraged leaders to privatize parastatal companies, which often entailed selling those companies to European, North American, and later Chinese investors. This resulted in significant political friction as African workers saw their jobs disappear or get reassigned to the employees of foreign firms. Government had been the primary source of wage employment for most of Africa’s modern history, creating a close-knit “state class” with a strong sense of entitlement to upward mobility (Keller, 1991). Wage employment increased dramatically when colonial administrators began employing Africans

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<sup>2</sup>A popular saying in Mali is, “You can’t eat a monument!”

in the civil service. In Nigeria, for example, wage employment increased more than tenfold between 1926 and 1959; in Tanzania it increased by a factor of nine between 1921 and 1948 (Sender and Smith, 1986, 53). In the colonial era and at the start of the independence era, members of the state class could usually climb the professional ranks through patronage networks. That lack of meritocracy was one of the World Bank's primary complaints to justify privatization and the general reduction of state budgets beginning in the late 1970s (Kirague and Mukandala, 2003). If African leaders hoped to receive foreign aid, they would no longer be able to distribute government jobs as patronage in exchange for political loyalty. Many sectors, including energy and transportation, would gradually transition to more competent private management. Other conditionalities for receiving aid included general restraint of government expenditures, currency devaluation and price reform, and import liberalization (Havnevik, 1987).

Given donors' focus on reducing government payrolls, anti-austerity protests initially erupted among African civil servants and aspiring civil servants. In Liberia in December 1985, teachers and students went on strike to protest President Samuel Doe's decision to cut salaries by 25 percent. That same year in Madagascar, the elimination of price controls on rice sparked demonstrations against the Ratsiraka government. In Niger throughout the 1980s, civil servants took to the streets to oppose foreign aid that they saw not as benevolent assistance, but as a sign of impending austerity reforms. Riots also shook Freetown, Sierra Leone amidst national currency devaluation and stabilization. Public services shut down almost completely in Sierra Leone

and Nigeria in 1980 during a general strike against wage freezes (Walton and Seddon, 1994).

These protests resembled anti-colonial protests in that labor unions and students were once again major players. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, students formed the National Organization of Pupils and Students, and went on strike to protest the elimination of students' and teachers' stipends (Nkinyangi, 1991). However, the involvement of unions and students varied by country. Countries with weaker traditions of union mobilization, such as Cameroon and Zaire, saw relatively little change in labor activity during economic liberalization. In many of these countries, protest participation was higher among churches and informal civil service associations Bratton and van de Walle (1992, 423). This variation reflects regional patterns of colonialism, including education policy, missionary activity, and industrial development. For example, the concentration of missionary influence in Zambia (Posner, 2005) likely explains why churches later became active in political protests, while Zambia's large copper mining industry explains the high involvement of unions.

Resistance to economic liberalization was more pronounced in Africa than it was in other regions undergoing rapid privatization and state budget cuts at the end of the twentieth century. Scholars documented numerous anti-austerity protests across Africa from the late 1970s through the early 1990s (Walton and Seddon, 1994; Hanson and Hentz, 1999; Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Ergas, 1987; Gulhati, 1987; Sandbrook, 1985), but relatively few in Eastern Europe, where "we have not observed the violent and turbulent political life characterizing a number of Third World transformations" (Greskovits, 1998,

1).

## 2.3 Democracy Protests

The anti-austerity protests of the 1980s transformed into pro-democracy protests of the 1990s, involving many of the same student and union actors. The failure of African rulers to alleviate the pains of economic reforms led opposition groups to demand political accountability. Pro-democracy protesters were also inspired by nascent democratization in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992, 419). In other words, political protests “signalled popular rejection of developmental dictatorship as a model of governance” (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992, 430). Political entrepreneurs, including labor union leaders and student leaders, seized upon economic concerns to advance political changes that were in their immediate interest as aspiring members of the political elite. Their organizing efforts eventually broadened participation in pro-democracy movements to the general population.

The history of the Association des Elèves et Etudiants de Mali (AEEM) illustrates this pattern of protest. The student group protested against the Malian government in 1993 for lower school fees, instructional improvements, and a host of other reforms. At first, the general public condemned the students’ violent tactics and praised the government for cracking down on the protesters. Two years later, however, the AEEM adopted a message stressing general political accountability instead of narrow economic concerns. When

the students protested again, they did so with broad public support (Smith, 1997).

The link between anti-austerity protests of the 1980s and pro-democracy protests was clear in the case of Zambia, where President Kenneth Kaunda faced persistent urban protests in the 1980s amidst foreign-backed austerity reforms. Kaunda initially tried to avoid reducing popular subsidies on staple goods like maize, but he was unable to resist pressures from foreign donors and eventually allowed price increases that ended years of urban bias. Angry urbanites flooded the streets, insisting that Kaunda step down. Kaunda restored the subsidies, but it was too late. The doubling of the price of maize in 1989 had devastated families nation-wide, and Kaunda's attempts to reverse the damage compelled donors to withdraw funding (Walton and Seddon, 1994). In 1991, Frederick Chiluba, the leader of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), won Zambia's first open election with over 80 percent of the vote and 123 out of 150 parliamentary seats (Mills, 1992; Wiseman, 1992). He ran on an anti-austerity platform, exploiting widespread exasperation with leaders who had seemed to be cutting public spending while enriching themselves. He boasted credentials to back up his populist message, having served as head of the Zambian Confederation of Trade Unions. Yet, Chiluba would struggle as president to reconcile domestic demands for higher public spending with external demands for the opposite. He gradually lost popularity by renegeing on his campaign promises, becoming a democratic version of the autocrat he had replaced. Protests resumed a few short years after Chiluba's election.

Despite the importance of economic grievances as the catalyst for pro-democracy protests, Bratton and van de Walle (1992, 430) warn that it would be a mistake to view the protests of the 1990s as purely economically-motivated. Over the course of the decade, protesters began to see corrupt African leaders, and not foreign donors, as the primary source of their hardships: “Rather than condemning the decline in commodity prices or western protectionism, they blamed patronage and nepotism for the economic crisis. Implicit in such a charge was the notion that sounder and more honest management would make economic austerity policies unnecessary” (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992, 430).

Unrelenting protests against corruption and ineffective leadership succeeded in loosening autocrats’ grip on power. In Benin, for example, President Mathieu Kérékou lost the March 1991 election and stepped down, declaring his “deep, sincere, and irreversible desire to change” into an honest politician. Just a year earlier, Kérékou had obstinately clung to power, vowing, “I will not resign, I will have to be removed.” However, 40,000 protesters marching through Cotonou were too many for the president to withstand, and opposition leaders went ahead with a nine-day national conference that instituted multi-party politics. Benin’s experience was not unusual. Constitutional conventions in Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and elsewhere provided African citizens with their first opportunity to have a direct say in their countries’ highest laws. From 1990 to 1999, 39 African countries held elections and transitioned to democracy. Even where elections were not entirely free and fair, the pro-democracy movement had a palpable effect on politics: most African

rulers in the 1960s through the 1980s left office through coups and assassinations, but after 1990 most African rulers left office through institutionalized procedures like elections and term limits (Posner and Young, 2007, 127). In an analysis of Minorities at Risk (MAR) protest data from African countries in the 1990s, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) show a statistical link between the likelihood of democratic transition and urban protests by workers and students. Replicating those findings, Scarrit, McMillan and Mozaffar (2001) show that protests by workers and students were more effective at promoting democracy than ethnic-based protests, indicating continuity over generations in the leadership of political protests in Africa.

## **2.4 Twenty-First Century Protests**

Protest activity in Africa calmed in the late 1990s as more countries became democratic (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997, 3). However, a fourth wave of protests began in the twenty-first century surrounding renewed calls for democratic reforms and poverty reduction. In 2006 and 2007, labor unions led Guineans in a general strike against the dictator Lansana Conté. Conté had remained in power for over 30 years despite failing to improve living conditions in one of the world's poorest countries and despite suffering debilitating health problems in his old age (Engeler, 2008). After Conté died of natural causes in 2008, 50,000 Guineans again rallied in the capital city of Conakry on September 28, 2009. This time, protesters were targeting junta leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, who had been serving as Conté's interim replacement



and had broken his promise not to run for president. The military opened fire on protesters in the national stadium, raping women in broad daylight and hiding the bodies of gunfire victims in mass graves (*“Dozens Killed’ at Guinea Protest”*, 2009). Guinea is not the only African country to have recently experienced a resurgence in protests. A general strike paralyzed Malawi in 2011, with the Red Army for Democracy and Peace demanding the resignation of President Bingu wa Mutharika, whom Malawians and foreigners alike had accused of “becoming ever more autocratic and intolerant of criticism” (Mapondera and Smith, 2011).

Figure 3.1 shows a general increase in social unrest in Sub-Saharan Africa after the turn of the century. The year 2000 saw a spike in total contentious events, following a levelling off in the late 1990s. Although the rate of protests, riots, and strikes fell after 2000, levels never dipped anywhere near the low of 97 events that occurred in 1990 across 48 Sub-Saharan African countries. On average, all forms of contentious politics have been more frequent in the first decade of the twenty-first century than in the last decade of the twentieth century. Trends across event categories have been similar, except briefly in 2010 when strikes became fewer despite a rise in the frequency of protests and riots.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars did not predict the observed rise in protest activity, because Africans in the twenty-first century ostensibly have more to celebrate than they have to protest. Africa has become not only more democratic, but also richer. Seventeen African countries have experienced at least 15 years of steady

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<sup>3</sup>The 2010 anomaly is insignificant if one considers that African labor unions have not historically limited themselves to strikes, but have also been involved in protests and riots.

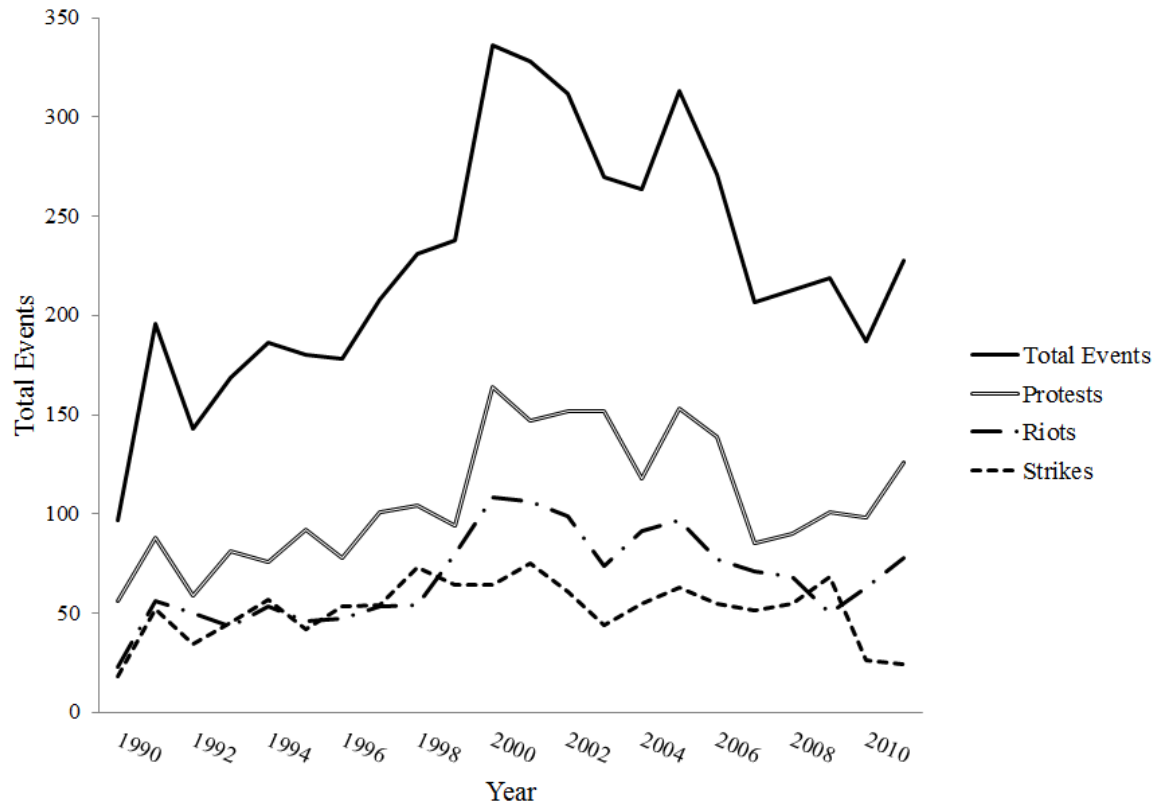


Figure 2.1: Contentious Political Events, 1990-2011

Note: Data are from the Social Conflict in Africa Database (2012).

economic growth (Radelet, 2010). In Ghana, not only has GDP per capita grown about five percent annually for over a decade, but investment has doubled, primary school enrollment has increased by a third, and the share of the population living in poverty has fallen from 50 percent to less than 30 percent (Radelet, 2010, 9). In Mozambique, annual growth has topped seven percent and the debt-to-GDP ratio has dropped from 330 percent to 40 percent (Radelet, 2010, 10). In 2010, South Africa became the fifth country to join the emerging “BRIC” markets (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). Even in countries where formal-sector employment was long limited to the civil service, African entrepreneurs have now built large-scale businesses and made fortunes in private industry. Alhaji Aliko Dangote of Nigeria has an estimated net worth of \$16.1 billion. His trading firm Dangote Group has an international presence, alongside African companies Ecobank, Orascom, and Sappi (Shaw, 2012). Despite continued poverty in Somalia, Chad, and Zimbabwe, there is burgeoning wealth in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Cape Verde. These trends are a sharp departure from the late twentieth century, when Sub-Saharan Africa remained largely closed to international trade and the region’s overall GDP per capita was more than six percentage points below the average among all low-income countries (Collier and Gunning, 1999, 64). By most accounts, Africans have less reason to protest today than they have had in any other decade since independence.

What, then, explains recent protests? A common explanation is spikes in food prices. Arezki and Brückner (2011) show that rising international food prices “significantly increased the likelihood of civil conflict and other forms

of civil strife, such as anti-government demonstrations and riots” in a sample of 120 countries from 1970 to 2007. Smith (2013) likewise shows using data from the Social Conflict in Africa Database that a sudden increase in consumer food prices in a given month correlates with an increase in the probability of social unrest in the same month. Rising food prices could affect Africans even amidst historic economic growth. Amartya Sen’s classic theory on poverty and famines emphasizes that hunger is a function not necessarily of low food production, but rather of low entitlement to food, which includes the ability to purchase food at an affordable price (Sen, 1981).

The 2005 food crisis in Niger exemplifies Sen’s theory. Mass starvation and roughly 47,700 related deaths seem to have resulted from unfavorable terms of trade rather than an overall economic slowdown (Rubin, 2009). Even while production levels did not plummet, the price for millet, sorghum and maize more than doubled to a point where gasoline was less expensive than cereal. At the peak of the crisis, the average Nigerien was paying more for grains at the local market than the average European or American was paying at the supermarket (Rubin, 2009). This was devastating in a country where well over half of the population lives on less than a dollar a day. The food crisis prompted mass protests in the capital city of Niamey and shone a spotlight on President Mamadou Tandja’s ineffective governance (Lacey, 2008). Niger is an extreme case, but price spikes have been devastating throughout Africa, given that the African poor devote over half of their income to purchasing food (Smith, 2013). Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Mauritania experienced large food riots in 2007 and 2008, and South Africans and Namibians recently protested over agricultural

and food policy (Bush, 2009; Harsch, 2008). Whereas African protests in past decades featured participation mainly among middle-class workers and students, protests in the twenty-first century indicate broader participation by the poor (Alexander, 2010).

The main hardship for many Africans today is continued poverty despite Africa's aggregate growth. For every business magnate like Dangote there are countless Africans who have seen only modest improvements, if any, in their day-to-day living conditions: An estimated 140 million Africans still live on less than a dollar a day (Artadi and Sala-i Martin, 2003, 7). Africa's new openness to trade has made some Africans much richer in recent years, but exposure to world markets has also made local prices more volatile. The economist Duncan Clarke argues that the concept of an African middle class is a myth, noting that less than five percent of Africans live at a global middle-class income level (Melik, 2012). Some African countries, like Uganda and Ethiopia, are still liberalizing their markets, loosening price controls and making food more expensive for the poor (Ahmed, 2013). There has also been a general shift away from agriculture to urban-based industries, which has hurt the rural poor in the short term (Kappel, Lay and Steiner, 2005).

Africa's inequality may be politically consequential. Nafziger and Auvinen (2002, 154), echoing Gurr (1970), theorize that a deterioration in living conditions is more likely to generate social unrest during periods of growth and high expectations. In South Africa under apartheid, incremental reductions in poverty sparked riots against the white ruling class by conditioning black Africans' expectations of social mobility (Nafziger and Auvinen, 2002, 157).

In other words, inequality can remain a salient grievance and a cause of protest even amidst economic development or democratization.

If the salient grievance in Africa has changed from political repression in the 1990s to relative deprivation today, then one might expect the targets of protests to have changed, as well. Figure 2.2 summarizes protest targets during the third wave (1990-1999) and the fourth wave (2000-present) of protest in Africa. Targets are classified as “government” and “other target”<sup>4</sup> based on coding in the Social Conflict in Africa Database. During the pro-democracy movement of the 1990s, 63 percent of all protests, riots, and strikes targeted the central government. After the turn of the century and widespread democratization, 56 percent of recorded protests targeted the central government—still a majority, but fewer than before. The Social Conflict in Africa Database also codes events according 14 “issue” categories. Consistent with historical accounts of pro-democracy demonstrations in the 1990s, the most common protest issue during the third wave was “human rights and democracy” (24 percent of all events). In the fourth wave, only 18 percent of events related to human rights and democracy; instead, the most common issue was “economy and jobs.”

This is only preliminary evidence of the grievances that motivate twenty-first century protests in Africa. Feeling aggrieved may be one reason why people take to the streets, but there are theoretically other reasons—including the many ways that aggrieved people coordinate and cooperate with their compatriots. Labels of protest waves such as “anti-colonial protests” and “democ-

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<sup>4</sup>“Other targets” include village governments and employers.

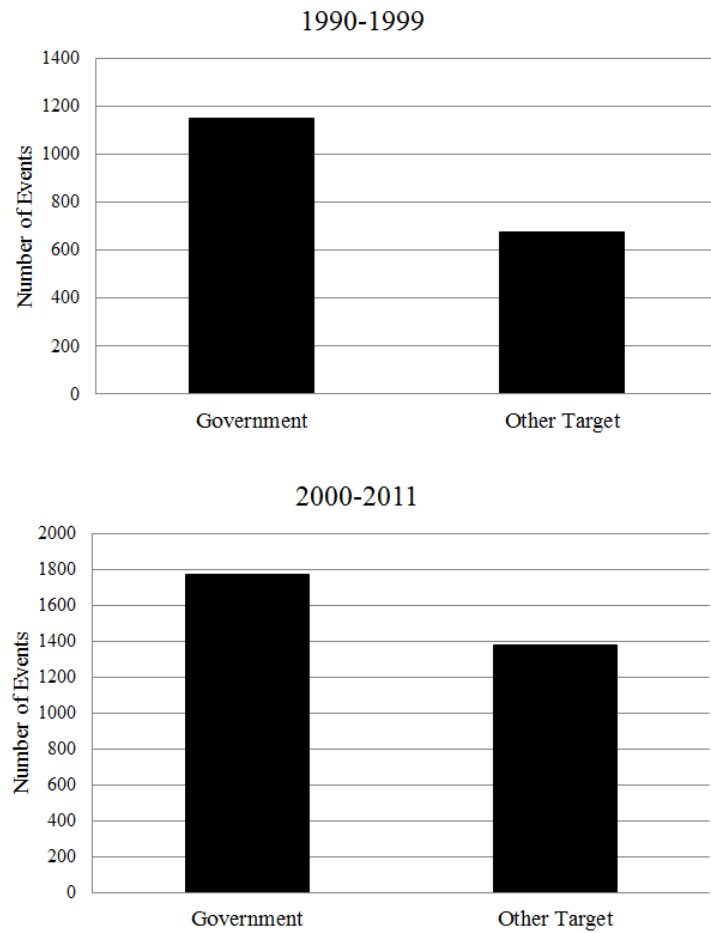


Figure 2.2: Protests Grouped According to Whether They Targeted the Government or a Non-Government Entity

Note: Data are from the Social Conflict in Africa Database (2012).

racy protests” understate these subtleties. The following chapter adds nuance and theoretical perspective to this chapter’s chronology of African protests, summarizing a rich literature on explanations for protest frequency and participation.



## Chapter 3

# What Do We Know about Protest in Africa?

This chapter provides an overview of scholarly knowledge about protest in Africa. First, I review influential studies on the country-level and regional-level roots of protest events, which I group into economic determinants, such as growth and inequality, and political determinants, such as ethnic exclusion and colonialism. I next review studies on the micro determinants of protest participation, addressing the individual-level decision calculus that leads some people take to the streets and others to stay home. Because research specifically on African protests is scarce, much of the research that informs current knowledge on protest in Africa stems from the broader literature on African civil wars, rebellions, and riots. A complementary literature, which I review in the final section of the chapter, consists of theoretical studies on protest participation beyond Africa.

Together, these bodies of research reveal two major gaps in scholars' knowledge. First, the literature does not clearly identify the causes of protest versus the causes of other forms of conflict. Do protests have the same roots as civil war, rebellion, and violent riots? Second, scholars know little about which specific grievances and opportunities drive protest participation and non-participation in Africa. Do Africans protest because they are upset about poverty, inequality, autocracy, or something else altogether? Do they protest voluntarily out of anger with the status quo, as Scacco (2008) suspects, or because political entrepreneurs incentivize and coerce protest participation, as Weinstein (2007) proposes? These are the questions that structure the remainder of the dissertation.

### **3.1 Macro Determinants of Protest Events**

In this section, I group country-level and regional-level variables into the two categories of “economic determinants” and “political determinants” of protest events. There is surely overlap between these categories: for example, colonialism was a profit-driven economic enterprise as well as a form of political rule. I distinguish between the economic and the political not to create a false dichotomy, but rather to conceptually organize an extremely broad literature that spans the fields of history, economics, anthropology, and political science.

### 3.1.1 Economic Determinants

The civil war literature examines large-scale collective violence, usually defined at a threshold of at least 1,000 battle-related deaths. Although protests and civil wars are different in destructiveness and scale, this literature can offer clues about the causes of protest in Africa. It indicates that low economic growth and poverty are the main roots of civil conflict, and offers two explanations. First, a slow economy lowers the opportunity cost of engaging in violence. Fighters have less to lose if they are poor, and a civil war can even create new opportunities to profit in the markets for arms, contraband, and private security—a perverse benefit of conflict that Chabal and Daloz (1999) term “the instrumentalization of disorder.” Second, a slow economy generates grievances about poverty and a lack of economic opportunities that lead people to stage coups and rebellions (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Collier, 2007; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Burke et al., 2009). Conflict in turn slows growth by reducing a country’s population size, destroying infrastructure, and discouraging foreign and domestic investment (Collier, 2007). Low growth begets war, which begets even lower growth, and so on. This constitutes a negative equilibrium that Collier (2007) calls “the conflict trap.”

Despite media depictions to the contrary, the rate of civil war onset from 1960 to 1999 was no higher in Africa than in other developing regions, possibly because high ethno-linguistic fractionalization and low ethnic dominance raise the costs of rebels’ coordination and cooperation (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002, 18). Still, the rate of civil war among African countries is discouragingly high at around seven percent (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002). Unlike wars in other

regions, African civil wars are unambiguously linked to economic variables. Economic performance, and not social characteristics like ethnic diversity, explains nearly all of Africa's risk of civil war (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002). As per capita income and growth fall, conflict rates rise. If African countries had achieved the same levels of economic growth that other countries did between 1970 and 1995, the risk of civil war in Africa would have fallen from seven percent to under five percent (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002, 25).

Do economic variables predict protest as well as civil war? Pilati (2011) analyzes protest participation in nationally representative Afrobarometer survey data from 18 African countries collected in 2005. Her dependent variable is whether or not a respondent attended a demonstration or protest march in the twelve months preceding the interview. Because protest participation is measured at the individual level, Pilati uses individual-level measures of economic well-being, including employment status and how easily a respondent can obtain primary school placement and medical treatment. In contrast with research on civil war that shows income and income growth to be key determinants of conflict in Africa (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002), Pilati does not find economic variables to be the most important. Instead, she observes that Africans are more likely to protest when they are engaged in civic organizations that help them to coordinate, and when they live in politically open environments that encourage competition and expression. The difference between her findings and findings in the civil war literature might result from Pilati's level of analysis (individual versus country) or dependent variable (protest versus civil war). My dissertation, which analyzes protest at multiple levels of analy-

sis and with multiple datasets, investigates whether protest and civil war have different roots.

Other research on the roots of African conflicts emphasizes relative deprivation rather than absolute derivation. Studies on conflict in predominantly agrarian regions like Africa tend to stress inequalities in consumption and land ownership as a major source of grievances (Peters, 2004; Russett, 1964; Midlarsky, 1982; Posterman, 1976; Huntington, 1968). Huntington (1968, 375) predicts, “Where the conditions of land-ownership are equitable and provide viable living for the peasant, revolution is unlikely. Where they are inequitable and where the peasant lives in poverty and suffering, revolution is likely, if not inevitable, unless the government takes prompt measures to remedy these conditions.”

However, Africa has urbanized considerably in recent generations (Fox, 2012), making land inequalities decreasingly salient. Migration to cities has reduced reliance on farming and therefore on land, and even Africans who remain on the farm have diversified their income sources. Roughly 40 percent of African rural household income derives from non-farm sources, amounting to the “depeasantization” of the African countryside (Bryceson, 2002, 730). Hence, income distribution has become more significant than land distribution in precipitating conflict in Africa. Muller and Seligson (1987) confirm this with an econometric study of land and income inequality in a sample of 63 countries from 1973 to 1977. They argue that land inequality does not necessarily lead to protests, because farmers tend to be geographically dispersed and deficient in communication technologies that would allow them to coordinate. In the

rare event that agrarian protests happen, it is usually with some involvement of urban people who are upset about income inequalities (Muller and Seligson, 1987; Bates, 1981). Muller and Seligson's work is important for highlighting the political relevance of income inequality over other forms of inequality, even in a region where many people still work in the agricultural and informal sectors.

### **3.1.2 Political Determinants**

In addition to economic variables like growth and inequality, political variables can influence Africans' desire and ability to protest. Scarritt and McMullan (1995) find that protest is more likely in African countries that are more democratic. They analyze data from Minorities at Risk (MAR), a University of Maryland project that monitors ethnic conflict around the world. Their main dependent variable is non-violent protest, coded on an intensity scale of the following five levels: verbal opposition to the regime, political organizing activity, demonstrations or strikes with participation of less than 10,000 people, demonstrations or strikes with participation of 10 thousand to 100 thousand people, and demonstrations or strikes with participation of over 100 thousand people. Their main independent variables are group grievances and regime type. Groups are ethnic groups, defined at the highest politically relevant level of aggregation within each country. Grievances are measured using three composite indices: "economic grievances" are demands for a greater share of public funds and services, greater economic opportunities, improved working conditions and higher wages, or protection of resources from other groups;

“social grievances” are demands for freedom of religion, tolerance of a group’s language or culture, or protection from threats from other groups; “political grievances” are demands for greater rights in a group’s home area, greater participation in the state, equal civil rights, or a change in local officials or policies. Regime type is coded on a scale of one to ten using criteria about the fairness of elections and constraints on executive power, with higher numbers denoting more democracy.

Scarritt and McMillan find that economic grievances are very prevalent in their sample: 65 percent of African groups experience at least some economic discrimination. This is less than the 70 percent of groups with economic grievances worldwide, but grievances are more intense in Africa than they are elsewhere: 70 percent are coded as “severe,” compared with only 48 percent in other regions (Scarritt and McMillan, 1995, 329). As prevalent and intense as grievances are, though, they do not seem to spur protest: no type of grievance in the MAR dataset has a statistically significant relationship with the incidence of any form of political action, including protests (Scarritt and McMillan, 1995, 336). Instead, regime type appears to be a stronger predictor of protests—implying that protests happen when angry citizens have the freedom to protest, not when citizens suddenly become angrier. States that had more constraints on executive power and more competitive politics in the 1970s experienced more protests in the 1980s. However, the authors’ model explains only 33 percent of variation in protests in Africa over the observed period. More research is necessary to identify additional causes of African protests, to update the analysis with data from years after 1989, and to disaggregate the

analysis below the level of ethnic groups.

Besides regime type, ethnic exclusion is a political variable that might explain variation in the risk of civil war. Wimmer, Cederman and Min (2009) validate other scholars' research showing that ethno-linguistic fractionalization alone does not spur conflict (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Roessler, 2011; Cederman, Gledditsch and Hug, 2009; Min, Cederman and Wimer, 2008). Using an original dataset of 7,155 country-year observations between 1946 and 2005, they show that armed rebellions tend to occur in states that are not necessarily more diverse, but where large portions of the population, on the basis of their ethnicity, are unable to access state resources. The risk of armed rebellion also rises when competing elites precariously share power and when a lack of ethnic cohesion leads to secessionist movements. Wars of secession are extremely rare in Africa (Englebert, 2010), but they are more likely when ethnic groups feel so excluded from power that their only option is to claim power in a state of their own. Finally, Min, Cederman and Wimer (2008) show conflict to be likely in states with relatively short histories of direct rule, in which citizens are less willing to accept the new application of state power. This points to the importance of colonial history. French colonizers generally used more direct forms of rule than British colonizers did, which might explain why former French colonies, on average, are less conflict-prone than former British colonies (Blanton, Mason and Athow, 2001).

Herbst (1990*a*) likewise stresses colonial history as a macro-political determinant of civil conflict in Africa. Focusing on non-violent protest rather than civil war, Herbst explains that protest has become an increasingly popular op-



tion for Africans who are upset with their leaders and institutions. He borrows a conceptual framework from Hirschman (1970), who theorized that dissatisfied citizens have two main choices for action: exit and voice. Exit involves migrating to live under different leadership and institutions; voice involves expressing one's grievances with the hope of spurring reform of the status quo. Herbst contends that exit was the modal option for Africans before the independence era. He documents many examples of voluntary political migration, including generations of traders in the pre-colonial Central Zaire Basin who established new villages to escape economic competition and local political conflicts (Herbst, 1990*a*, 184). This trend continued through colonial times, when Africans escaped subjugation by fleeing to areas where European authority did not extend. The historian Allen Isaacman (1976, 108) notes that in Mozambique "entire chieftaincies migrated across national boundaries to avoid Portuguese rule." Migration during pre-colonial and colonial times was possible because large areas of land remained politically and physically open. The territorial reach of traditional states and chieftaincies was generally short, and European occupiers typically concentrated their activities around coastal trading zones (Herbst, 2000).

Migration became less common once the end of colonial rule installed rigid state borders and citizenship laws that limited Africans' exit options. Porous frontiers and routine ethnic mixing gave way to legally-backed territorially sovereignty and camps where refugees awaited repatriation to their home states. Compounding this change, population growth made land scarcer and forced farmers to stay put despite droughts and exploitive government price

controls.<sup>1</sup> With fewer economic and political opportunities abroad, Africans in the post-colonial era ironically began seeking opportunities near the seat of the very leaders who under-served or oppressed them: “Today, instead of trying to escape political authority, large numbers of people across the continent are now migrating toward the cities, especially the capital city” (Herbst, 1990*a*, 183). Subsequently, urban Africans exchanged exit for voice, using protest as a lever to change the policies, leaders, and institutions that they dislike. Herbst does not address variation in protest frequency across African countries, but he does provide an explanation for the continent-wide rise in protest activity during the second half of the twentieth century (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992).

## 3.2 Micro Determinants of Protest Participation

A subset of the literature on conflict in Africa centers not on large-scale events like colonialism and economic growth, but instead on individuals’ decisions of whether or not to participate in collective action. Scacco (2008), for instance, studies the riots in Jos, Nigeria that erupted in 2001 after a Christian woman accused a Muslim man of slapping her. Many rioters and non-rioters were, apart from their riot participation, similar in terms of religion, age, gen-

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<sup>1</sup>For example, post-colonial African governments used the monopsony power of marketing boards to buy farmers’ crops at below world market prices. This hurt farmers while allowing politicians to subsidize food prices for urbanites who posed the greatest threat to the regime (Bates, 1981).

der, and neighborhood of residence. This raised the question of why some Nigerians took to the streets and committed violent acts whereas others did not.

Scacco hypothesizes that grievances alone do not make people riot; rather, social networks “pull” aggrieved people into the streets. Her empirical approach is to sample residents from two similar Nigerian towns, Jos and Kaduna, and to administer questionnaires about rioters’ and non-rioters’ biographical backgrounds and participation in the 2001 uprisings. In her fieldwork, Scacco used stratified random sampling and respondent-driven sampling, which involved randomly selecting 200 town residents to act as “seeds” who each found one rioter and one non-rioter to participate in the survey. She stratified the sampling areas according to whether or not they experienced riots in 2001, using original maps that she drew in consultation with local government officials. This approach over-sampled rioters: whereas Nigerian newspapers reported a riot participation rate of approximately four percent of the population, nearly one quarter of Scacco’s sample reported having destroyed property, damaged a church or mosque, physically harmed someone, or stolen property. Over-sampling allowed Scacco to achieve higher variation on the dependent variable of riot participation.

With data from focus groups and a survey,<sup>2</sup> Scacco confirms her hypothesis that Jos and Kaduna residents participated in violence because of a combina-

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<sup>2</sup>Scacco took precautions to make respondents feel comfortable sharing politically sensitive information. For example, she did not ask respondents to write their names on questionnaires. Instead, she assigned the respondents numbers that were matched to names only in a database stored back in the United States. Respondents wrote their answers to sensitive questions behind a screen so that enumerators did not know whether they were surveying a rioter or a non-rioter.

tion of grievances and neighborhood networks. Residents were more likely to have rioted if they perceived their economic conditions to be below average, although objective measures of economic deprivation had no measurable effect on the likelihood of rioting. They were also more likely to have rioted if they personally knew other rioters before violence broke out and if they had attended pre-riot community meetings. People who attended these meetings were no more aggrieved on average than other town residents, which suggests that meetings mobilized violence not by stoking grievances, but by providing attendees with information to help coordinate their collective action (for example, information on where looting would occur). There was little evidence that political entrepreneurs offered selective incentives or coerced people into rioting.

Weinstein (2007) views communal violence like rioting as a substitute for non-violent protest. He asks why some rebel groups, such as Renamo in Mozambique, inflict indiscriminate violence against civilians whereas others, like the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda, use less violent forms of protest against the regime and its supporters. Renamo was merciless in its military opposition to the socialist-aligned Frelimo movement during Mozambique's 16-year civil war beginning in 1976. By 1985 an estimated 100,000 people had died in the fighting and just as many had died from a related famine. Weinstein (2007, 80) points out, "It is widely accepted that Renamo was responsible for much of this destruction and violence." In contrast, the NRA showed constraint in its use of violence against supporters of Ugandan President Milton Obote. Between 300,000 and one million people died

in Uganda's civil war during the 1980s, but most of those casualties resulted from the brutality of government troops (Weinstein, 2007, 71).

What explains the different approaches of Renamo and the NRA? Why do some rebel leaders promote collective action in the form of war and riots, whereas others promote less violent protest? Weinstein argues that the answer lies in rebel leaders' access to resources. When leaders can loot valuable goods like diamonds or when they receive steady foreign aid, they can recruit soldiers and win over civilians with material selective incentives. With these "economic endowments," there is no need for rebel leaders to cultivate popular support by restraining their soldiers from using violence. On the other hand, leaders who lack economic endowments must earn public loyalty through non-material "social endowments" such as social networks and ideological appeals. Economically poor leaders tend to be relatively peaceful because they literally cannot afford to use violence. Weinstein illustrates his argument with micro-level ethnographies and case studies. He shows that Renamo received training and funding from the Rhodesian and South African governments to carry out strikes against Frelimo. The United States and its Western European allies encouraged counter-socialism in Africa, lending additional aid to Renamo's campaign. When patronage began to dry up with changing Cold War dynamics and an internal accord between Zimbabwe and South Africa, Renamo replaced foreign backing with revenues from selling goods that rebel troops violently looted from local communities. According to Weinstein's account, all rebels would prefer to use violence over peaceful protest. When protest occurs, it is because more violent collective action failed.

Weinstein's study resembles an argument in the civil war literature that war results from economic opportunities to engage in rebellion (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Grossman, 1999). Collier and Hoeffler (2004) explore the macro implications of Weinstein's micro-level observation that economic endowments fundamentally determine the outbreak of collective violence. They use a statistical model to predict the onset of civil war in 123 countries from 1960 to 1999, defining civil war as a domestic conflict with at least 1,000 combat-related deaths per year. They include several measures of rebels' economic opportunities: a country's natural resource wealth, donations from diasporas, and financing from hostile governments. "Opportunity" also encompasses a low opportunity cost of warfare, which the authors measure with the following proxy variables: male secondary school enrollment, income per capita, and a country's economic growth rate. Additional dimensions of opportunity include cheap conflict-specific capital (measured as the time since a country's most recent previous conflict), weak government military capability (measured as a country's proportion of forested terrain), and social cohesion (measured as ethno-linguistic fractionalization). In Weinstein's vocabulary, Collier and Hoeffler include quantitative measures of both "economic endowments" and "social endowments." Their qualitative case studies also echo Weinstein's analysis, citing South Africa's support of the Renamo rebellion in Mozambique (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, 568). Although Weinstein is mostly silent on rebels' grievances, Collier and Hoeffler's model also includes several measures of grievances: a ten-point scale of regime type (to proxy for the government's suppression of civil liberties) and inequality (measured with the Gini coeffi-

cient). Collier and Hoeffler estimate that economic opportunities are much stronger predictors of civil war than grievances are. This is consistent with Weinstein's ethnographic finding that rebels become violent only when the costs of violence are low.

### **3.3 Theorizing Protest Participation Beyond Africa**

The literature on protest participation extends beyond research on African politics. This section of the chapter draws from studies mostly about Europe and the United States, highlighting theories that are helpful for further explaining why some Africans join protests while others stay home. Although it focuses on non-African contexts, this literature reveals cross-regional commonalities in political behavior. Broadly speaking, people protest because they want to and because they can. Absent the will or the way, a protest will not materialize. Below I review theories on both preconditions of protest, which I classify as grievance theories and collective action theories.

#### **3.3.1 Grievances**

Grievance theories spotlight people's frustration, anger, alienation, and desire to change the status quo. They also address why some people, despite being objectively disadvantaged, feel relatively satisfied with the status quo. The authors of grievance theories generally assume that the ability to act collectively only matters if people have the will to act in the first place. They

espouse the view that the “Olsonian logic of collective action,” which focuses on people’s ability to overcome coordination and cooperation problems, “provides an explanation for why people do not participate, but fares poorly in explaining why people do participate” in protests (Klandermans, 2004, 363).

Some early theorists believed that protesters were socially deviant or insane. Le Bon (1886/2006) posited that protest participation is not a rational, calculated decision, but rather a “contagion” of a psychological disease that causes members of a crowd to lose their individuality and sense of personal responsibility. Whereas present-day journalists often herald protests as noble demands for democracy and improved economic conditions, Le Bon saw protests as uncivilized, destructive, and immoral. Also diverging from scholars who view social norms as crucial for mobilizing and empowering disadvantaged people, he thought that social norms were salient only insofar as protesters rejected them (Kazdin, 2000, 374-377). Channelling Le Bon, Zolberg (1972) described French protests from the Revolution to the 1960s as “moments of madness” in which political enthusiasm peaked and citizens acquired a sense that “everything is possible.”

### **Economic Grievances**

Protesting, like many behaviors once thought to be signs of insanity, eventually lost its stigma as popular movements sparked historic political transformations and as the field of psychology progressed. Marx famously praised revolutions as the antidote to the ills of capitalism, and anti-colonialists championed protests as a strategy for shedding European rule in Africa and else-



where. Accordingly, psychologists began to view the idea of a mad crowd as a myth (McPhail, 1991). They theorized contentious political activity not as deviant and insane, but instead as “part of the lives of many ordinary people” (Corrigall-Brown, 2012) and a way to vent grievances. Moving beyond the Marxist focus on objective material conditions, they examined how people experienced and thought about poverty, inequality, and disenfranchisement. Thompson, in his classic essay “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd” (1971), was one of the first to propose that it is not objective deprivation, but rather the subjective perception of deprivation, that causes protests:

“It is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractices among dealers, or by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action” (78).

Whereas Thompson highlighted absolute deprivation, Gurr (1970) stressed relative deprivation, or the disparity between “justifiable expectations” and “perceived value capabilities,” as a precondition of revolution. Gurr saw protest as a function not of resource availability or coordinated action, but of “the distribution of individual anger in society” (Abell and Jenkins, 1971,

85). In his later work, Gurr tested the hypothesis that grievances determine social groups' propensity for protest and rebellion, estimating that communal grievances have a greater effect on mobilization than any variable besides lost autonomy (Gurr, 1993).

Recent studies have retested Gurr's hypothesis that relative deprivation makes people more likely to protest. Some show that relative deprivation has little or no effect on protest (Newton, Mann and Geary, 1980; Sayles, 2007), while others show that only certain types of relative deprivation matter. Inspired by the theoretical literature distinguishing "egoistic" from "fraternal" relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976; Foster and Matheson, 1995; Olson et al., 1995; Runciman, 1966; Smith et al., 2012), Dubé and Guimond (1983) and Walker and Mann (1987) find that personal discontent with one's relative social position (egoistic relative deprivation) has less of an effect on protest behavior than discontent with the social position of one's identity group (fraternal relative deprivation). Some scholars also highlight "backward-looking framing effects," whereby individuals assess their well-being relative to their own well-being in the past (Shapiro, 2002, 121).

Shapiro (2002) summarizes additional psychological reasons for why the poor might tolerate inequality, even in democracies where the poor majority has the electoral means to "soak the rich":

- Empathy Gulfs: When inequality is especially high, people in lower socioeconomic strata find it impossible to imagine the wellbeing of those higher up. As a result, they do not envy the rich or aspire to upward mobility.

- Physical Gulfs: The poor are physically segregated from the rich, e.g. in agricultural hinterlands or urban slums and hence ignorant about the extent of inequality.
- Framing Effects: The poor will tolerate inequality if they feel they are at least better off than they were in the past (backward-looking framing effects), if they blame themselves for their inferior status (inward-looking framing effects), or if they compare themselves to those even worse off (downward-looking framing effects).
- Anecdotal Distractions: The poor develop inflated perceptions of their prospects of upward mobility by focusing on the few poor people who have gone from rags to riches, such as lottery winners, rap artists, and professional ball players from underprivileged communities. In the United States, “Horatio Alger stories” (stories of people who have become affluent by dint of their hard work) are common anecdotal distractions.

Developing the literature further, Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) pioneered the prospects of upward mobility (POUM) hypothesis, which states that people will be less inclined to resist the status quo if they expect their well-being to improve. To explain the intuition behind this hypothesis, they use an analogy of a two-lane tunnel with all traffic heading in the same direction and slow to a standstill. The tunnel is so long that nobody can see to the end. If a driver suddenly notices cars beginning to accelerate in the next lane, she will not initially be bitter, but will instead take this as a sign that her

lane might also start to move sometime soon. This acceptance of one's current suffering is called "the tunnel effect." However, if after a while the driver's lane does not begin to speed up, the driver will get angry and switch lanes, possibly even despite signs prohibiting lane switching. Hirschman and Rothschild (1973, 552) note that when the tunnel effect wears off, the immobile "experience the turnaround from hopefulness to disenchantment," a situation that "clearly contains much potential for social upheaval" and "might even qualify as a theory of revolution." As long as people have prospects of upward mobility, though, they will be disinclined to protest against the status quo. Using a formal model, Bénabou and Ok (2001) illustrate that this theory is compatible with rational choice.

Several studies have empirically validated the POUM hypothesis. Using survey data from Russia, Ravallion and Lokshin (2000) estimate that people with better expectations for their future welfare are less likely to support government limits on the incomes of the rich. This relationship held even if respondents' incomes are below average. Alesina and La Ferrara (2004) likewise observe that Americans who believe that their families will experience improved living conditions are less likely to support redistribution. Checchi and Filippin (2003) conducted a laboratory experiment in which subjects chose levels of income redistribution after viewing simulations of how different tax rates might change their incomes over time. Respondents who saw a matrix depicting higher prospects of upward mobility consistently preferred lower tax rates.

Earlier research has explored the effects of POUM on political preferences, but it has generally ignored the effects of POUM on political behavior. The relevance of the POUM hypothesis to the study of protest lies in the sources of grievances. Whereas relative deprivation theories attribute frustration to the disparity between a person's current well-being and the well-being of others, the POUM literature argues that grievances derive from the disparity between a person's current well being and that person's projected future well-being. It contends that even the most objectively dismal living conditions will not necessarily fuel people's desire to challenge the status quo if people believe that they will become better off eventually. This would help explain widespread political quiescence even in extremely poor societies.

### **Mass Attitudes and Democracy**

Democracy movements often involve passionate protests and messages about human rights, popular rule, and constraints on executive power. This gives the impression that societies are more likely to turn and stay democratic if their populations hold pro-democratic attitudes. Many scholars have espoused the belief that "in order to be motivated to support pro-democratic forces people must have a clear regime preference for democracy" (Welzel, 2007). They claim that preferences for democracy make people more likely to support activists, to become activists themselves, and to support a democratic regime once it is established (Almond and Verba, 1963; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Diamond and Plattner, 2008; Eckstein, 1966; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Muller and Seligson, 1994; Shin and Wells, 2005; Welzel, 2007). Although

“pro-democratic mass attitudes become an effective support factor only to the extent to which they motivate powerful mass actions” (Welzel, 2007, 399), it seems logical that a preference for democracy is necessary, if not sufficient, for citizens to protest against a dictator or a military regime.

Empirical studies have produced mixed findings on the correlation between attitudes toward democracy and regime type (Welzel, 2007; Teorell and Hadenius, 2007). Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that societies are more likely to be democratic if their populations have “emancipative attitudes,” meaning attitudes that emphasize trust, equality, and popular rule (Welzel, 2007).

There are two major weaknesses in these studies. First, measures of “emancipative attitudes” tend to confound attitudes about democracy with the behaviors that those attitudes theoretically determine (participation in protests, petitions, boycotts, and strikes) (Welzel, 2007, 401). Second, attitudes about democracy can vary in politically important ways (Diamond and Plattner, 2008). For example, whereas people in Western countries often value procedural aspects of democracy like constraints on executive power and protections against majority tyranny, people in South Asian countries prioritize equality and economic well-being in their understandings of democracy (Shastri and Palshikar, 2010). A main objective of this dissertation is to identify the different motivations subsumed under “preferences for democracy.” It is possible that some protesters are driven mainly by a desire for procedural reforms, whereas others are driven more by material concerns.

### 3.3.2 Collective Action

Collective action theorists reason “that grievances and deprivation always exist and therefore cannot explain the ups and downs of protest cycles” (Corn-ing and Myers, 2002, 705). They acknowledge that even the most aggrieved people will not protest if they cannot cooperate and coordinate around their collective goals. Olson (1971) popularized the idea that members of a group will “free-ride” if they expect others to bear the costs of mounting a social movement. If the collective goal is a public good such as democracy or an in-crease in the minimum wage, a rational person will prefer to consume the good without shouldering any cost associated with obtaining it. If all members of the community are equally rational, then collective action never occurs. Only if group members receive selective incentives or are coerced into participating will a protest materialize.

Other theories of collective action center on communication dilemmas (Kielbowicz and Scherer, 1998; Tarrow, 1998). Here, the problem is not co-operation but coordination. For people to work together toward a common goal, they must agree on a course of action—where to meet, which message to convey, etc. It can be especially difficult to coordinate protests in developing countries where the mail system is slow, internet service is limited, and cellular phone reception is sometimes unreliable.<sup>3</sup> Repressive governments compound communication problems by restricting the media. Under heavy censorship,

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<sup>3</sup>Cell phone coverage in Africa is improving, with implications for collective action. Pier-skalla and Hollenbach (2013) use data on cell phone coverage and the location of organized violence in Africa to show a correlation between access to coverage and the probability of conflict.

people might not even know whom to target with their demands, let alone how to coordinate the logistics of a demonstration. In societies with low levels of wage labor, less on-the-job socialization translates into less information-sharing and higher barriers to collective action (Ross, 2008, 108). Therefore, collective action can fail even provided a group's common desire to protest and the presence of mechanisms to prevent free-riding.

### **Collective Action under Authoritarianism**

According to North and Weingast (1989), Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), and other scholars, the main goal of collective action under authoritarianism is transition to democracy. Unlike in democratic systems, where citizens might attempt to promote their interests through policy changes, the projected payoffs of policy reform are low in authoritarian systems, because leaders can easily break their promises. Autocrats cannot credibly commit to deliver pro-poor concessions to the masses, because they are not constrained by rules, and because the reputational costs of renegeing are small. Therefore, a regime change—specifically one resulting in institutions like a constitution, a parliament, and independent judiciary—is the key collective good that citizens would pursue if they could act together in their best interest.

However, collective action under authoritarianism is actually quite varied in form and motivation. Although large-scale democratic revolutions capture headlines, citizens in autocracies also engage in smaller-scale, less-publicized acts of subversion that may have material as well as ideological motivations. These smaller-scale conflicts include food riots, labor strikes, and clandestine



political subversion like tax evasion (Scott, 1990). Regime change can sometimes be a path to economic improvements for the poor. Often, though, the poor lack the resources or the desire to pursue an overhaul of the political system. Even when regime change is the final outcome of an uprising, it might actually be a side-effect of protests that stem from pecuniary grievances.

Whatever their grievances, citizens commonly face logistical obstacles to joining together in a protest. One barrier to collective action under authoritarianism is coordination problems, which consist of individuals' inability to communicate or to decide whom to target with a protest (Olson, 1971). Coordination problems can result from restrictions on phone service, newspapers, the radio, and the Internet. In authoritarian systems, such restrictions are often politically motivated. Autocrats may use censorship and propaganda to prevent the spread of opposition literature, to mask their unpopularity, or to rally support for the incumbent regime. Magaloni (2006) and Gandhi (2008) explain how elections create illusions of invincibility, convincing citizens that the regime is stronger or more popular than it actually is. Although individual citizens have private information about the nature of the regime, this information is not common knowledge and thus cannot provide the basis for coordinated action. In a restricted environment, the circulation of subversive information must either be clandestine or occur through "informational cascades" in which a few bold early-movers protest and signal the malign nature of the regime (Lohmann, 1994). In sum, coordination against authoritarianism is most likely under the following conditions: voters perceive that the incumbent can be defeated; the opposition is not divided by ideology or ethnicity; citi-

zens can identify the most viable opposition party; and there are independent sources of information about people's preferences (Magaloni, 2006).

Even if autocrats do not deliberately create them, coordination problems can arise from citizens' geographic dispersion and from an underdeveloped communication infrastructure. For example, African farmers are typically spread across the hinterland and excluded from technological and employment-based information networks that might facilitate protest (Bates, 1981). The costs of communication, bargaining, and staffing organizations are often prohibitively high for these citizens (Olson, 1971, 47). Would-be protesters in rural communities also tend to be geographically far from the seat of government and political targets, which is why peasant protests—on the rare occasion that they occur—often rely on the involvement of urban political entrepreneurs who provide information, transportation, and other logistical support (Scott, 1987).

Another barrier to collective action under authoritarianism is the high risk of protesting against the regime. This is not a coordination problem, but rather a cooperation problem: if the potential cost of joining a protest is imprisonment or death, then citizens have a pronounced temptation to stay home and free-ride on the protest participation of other citizens. Because protesters' goals, including democracy, are often public goods (i.e. non-excludable and non-reducible), free-riders can enjoy the outcomes of a successful protest without having to bear any costs of obtaining them. In developing countries, poverty makes the marginal loss from injury or foregone income potentially life-threatening, further raising the temptation to stay home rather than take

to the streets. According to the Olsonian logic of collective action, individuals will only protest if they receive selective incentives or are coerced into accepting the costs of protesting (Olson, 1971). Collective action is especially difficult under systems in which rulers can wield discretionary military force and enjoy disproportionate access to selective incentives like political privilege and material goods. Citizens are therefore most likely to overcome coordination problems during periods of crisis, when momentary fluctuations in political power broaden access to arms and funds (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006).

Citizens' cooperation problems are compounded by the fact that the masses are a latent group. Latent groups are large enough such that one member's contribution to obtaining a collective good is so insignificant that no one member has an incentive to contribute (Olson, 1971). In large groups, it is also more difficult to identify and police free-riders. Because political power in authoritarian regimes is concentrated in the hands of a small elite, the majority of the population would benefit from democracy. Being such a large majority, however, no single citizen's effort to challenge the regime would have a noticeable impact on a regime change. All citizens being similarly rational and tempted to free-ride, collective action is therefore likely to fail.

Citizens might overcome this cooperation problem if they could form smaller groups that were better able to sanction shirkers and raise each individual's contribution to the collective effort. However, creating smaller, tight-knit groups is also difficult under authoritarianism, because autocrats have the incentive and often the ability to prevent the formation of civil society organizations. It is common for autocrats to prohibit people from assembling or from

forming organizations even for non-political reasons—ostensibly because they understand that political pressure groups can form as “by-products” of labor unions, student associations, and even football clubs (Olson, 1971; Putnam, 1993).

Another way that autocrats prevent collective action is by splitting the opposition and ensuring that would-be opponents remain invested in the status quo. Bates (1981) explains how incumbents can forestall coups by manipulating markets in ways that lower commodity prices for urban consumers (namely political opponents, union members, and students living at the government’s doorstep). Incumbents can get away with under-paying rural producers and biasing policies toward urbanites, because farmers are distant, dispersed, and hence unable to coordinate anti-government protests.

In some authoritarian systems, elections and legislative seats serve a similar purpose in co-opting potential opponents. Citizens face an additional cooperation dilemma wherein patronage and access to government office raise the expected losses of protesting against the regime and defecting to the opposition (Magaloni, 2006). Furthermore, incumbents distribute material rewards and political privileges in order to mobilize people into voting for the ruling party. Hence, selective incentives can both impede and encourage collective action in ways that abet dictatorships.

## **Organizations and Protest**

Autocrats do not always succeed at impeding the formation of opposition groups. Civic organizations remain vibrant in many autocratic and transi-

tional regimes, having played pivotal roles in anti-colonial movements and pro-democracy movements. Indeed, “using force to drive people off the streets can weaken governments fatally” (*The March of Protest*, 2013), as some leaders discovered when repression seemed to swell the ranks of angry protesters during the Arab spring. Organizations—whether formal or informal—can help individuals surmount collective action problems in multiple ways: by providing logistical resources, by tightening social networks that enable communication and prevent free-riding, and by instilling people with “civic skills” like negotiation and public speaking (Pilati, 2011, 352). Organizations can also influence people’s grievances by providing a “shared cultural frame,” as in African-American churches during the American civil rights movement, where “prayers often focused not on individual salvation but on the needs of the family, the neighborhood, and African Americans as a racial group” (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998, 770). In the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville, many scholars have theorized about the correlation between membership in organizations and other forms of civic involvement (Putnam, 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995).

Empirical studies illustrate the importance of organizations in facilitating protest. Gould (1991), for example, shows that formal and informal social networks spread protests through Parisian neighborhoods during the Comune uprising of 1871. National Guard battalions were more willing to escalate their resistance to the Versailles government and to accept the high risk of casualties if they were socially connected to other active battalions. Similarly, Hedström (1994) finds that spatial proximity and personal acquaintances accelerated

the founding of labor unions in Swedish districts. The spread of Swedish unions, like the spread of the United Auto Workers union in the United States, “resembled the spread of a contagious disease” (Hedström, 1994, 1170). In a rare study on protest behavior in Africa, Pilati (2011) shows using survey data from 18 African countries that the more people are involved in organizations, excluding religious organizations, they more they protest.

Organizations can be powerful channels for coordination and cooperation, because they connect their members to potential activists far beyond one small group. Many members of labor unions, student councils, and neighborhood associations are members of multiple such organizations. This creates overlapping networks that fosters solidarity among groups and “chains of group affiliations” among members (Diani, 2004). For example, 28 percent of activists in the Italian environmental movement of the 1980s belonged to multiple environmental organizations (Diani and Lodi, 1988), and 67 percent of activists in the Dutch environmental movement had personal ties to other participants (Kriesi, 1988).

Informal social networks can also be important for mobilizing protesters. Scacco (2008), McAdam (1986), and others emphasize “prior contact” and casual interactions with friends, family, and distant acquaintances, which is important for mobilizing protesters in recruitment contexts where political activism is not the norm. Studying the reasons for participation and non-participation in Christian-Muslim riots in Nigeria, Scacco (2008) finds that rioters fought alongside old acquaintances and relied on friends to learn about the time and location of riots. People who had attended pro-riot community

meetings were also more likely to have rioted. Scacco also observes a significant statistical interaction between community meeting attendance and grievances, implying that social networks compel people to riot not only by helping to solve collective action problems, but also by stoking dissatisfaction with the status quo.

### **Political Entrepreneurs**

If people need both the will and the way to protest, then the mechanism driving protest participation is a process that gives aggrieved people the logistical ability to join together in collective action. Klandermans (2004) defines this mechanism as mobilization—the process linking the demand for a change in the status quo with the supply of “mobilizing structures” (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). Political entrepreneurs provide these mobilizing structures, which include communication technologies and the social sanctioning that prevents individuals from free-riding. Often the leaders of civic organizations, political entrepreneurs are activists who use their special skills and ambitions to galvanize groups of people who would otherwise be unable to surmount barriers to collective action (Schneider and Teske, 1992). They make protests happen by supplying potential protesters with information, selective incentives, and coercion.

Political entrepreneurs are different from entrepreneurs in the conventional private-sector context, in that their main goal is to solve collective action problems rather than to protect private knowledge (Schneider and Teske, 1992, 738). Political entrepreneurs are risk-loving people with the communication

skills, social connections, and access to resources required to build civic organizations (Licht and Siegel, 2004; Popkin, 1988). They help citizens obtain public goods—such as redistribution or democracy—in return for “profits” derived from voluntary donations and looted goods (Frohlich, Oppenheimer and Young, 1971, 19). They also seek non-material benefits, such as prestige and agency (Jones, 1978, 500). Although average people are likely to desire these same things, political entrepreneurs possess an exceptional “impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself” (Schumpeter, 1934, 93). Besides being competitive, they are tenacious, creative, and willing to accept risk (Christopoulos, 2006). “In short, these actors can respond to exceptional challenges and rise above their peers by means of their strategic forethought and ability to manipulate their environment” (Christopoulos, 2006, 758).

Political entrepreneurs use various tactics to help people coordinate and cooperate. To facilitate coordination, they do the following:

- Disseminate political literature online, in print, or on radio.
- Provide communication technology.
- Provide transportation to protest events.
- Train protesters on how to withstand repression.
- Send signals before or during a protest about fluctuations in the strength of the regime. This helps potential protesters calculate the costs and risks of participating (Lohmann, 1994).



Political entrepreneurs facilitate cooperation in the following ways:

- Generate common knowledge about people's intentions to participate in a protest (Chwe, 2001). "An entrepreneur who can convince persons that everyone else is coming, or that everyone else will come if he comes, or who spreads the names of free riders, thereby raising the costs of free-riding, can leverage large collective action from his or her efforts" (Popkin, 1988, 21).
- Offer selective incentives such as cash, food, or positions in their organizations in exchange for participation in collective action.
- Monitor defections and punish people who fail to contribute to the collective effort (Popkin, 1988). This role is especially important in ethnically diverse societies, where people may lack the social ties that allow them to sanction one another for shirking.
- Activate unifying identities, link the like-minded, and represent group interests. For example, Bosnian Serb leaders brokered connections between Serbs in Bosnia and Serbs in Serbia by sharpening cultural differences with Muslims and Croats and advocating for the establishment of Serbian political institutions (Tilly, 2003, 34). Likewise, leaders of the Hutu Power movement in Rwanda used radio messages to unite Hutus against the Tutsi minority and to coordinate a countrywide genocide.
- Break up a large goal into smaller steps in order to increase the marginal importance of individual contributions and make results seem more immediate and attainable (Popkin, 1988, 21). If people believe that their

personal cooperation will make a difference, they will be less tempted to free-ride.

In sum, political entrepreneurs facilitate protest participation by using their skills and ambitions to provide aggrieved people with the resources they need to coordinate and cooperate. As local, insurgent “counter-elites” (Wood, 2001) who represent the poor vis-à-vis the more privileged elites of the “state class” (Keller, 1991), they aid protesters by “interpreting the rational, bureaucratic norms of the state to a society based on social networks and the moral economy” (Mitra, 1992, 12). Scholars have documented political entrepreneurship in diverse countries including India (Mitra, 1992), Vietnam (Popkin, 1988), El Salvador (Wood, 2001), and South Africa (Wood, 2001).

However, Scacco (2008) finds no evidence that political entrepreneurs mobilized Muslims and Christians in the 2001 Jos riots in Nigeria. Muslim and Christian rioters reported that they faced no coercion and received no selective incentives from community organizers to harm people and property; riot participation was voluntarily and enabled by informal social networks. This finding, which contrasts with evidence of political entrepreneurship from other countries, highlights the importance of studying contentious collective action in the specific contexts where it occurs. Accordingly, the remainder of this dissertation includes cross-national analyses of protest frequency and participation, along with a detailed case study of specific protests in a single country.

## Part II

# Cross-National Perspectives

The following two chapters present systematic, empirical analyses of protest frequency and protest participation across African countries. In Chapter 4, I use newly available data on 40 African countries over the period 1990 to 2009 to test the hypothesis that inequality increases the incidence of protest. My main finding is consistent with grievance theories outlined in the introduction: Inequality can incite protest regardless of base levels of poverty or prosperity. The chapter contributes new evidence to the empirical study of inequality and protest, and expands the literature on African conflicts by examining a form of conflict besides civil war.

Chapter 5 moves beyond a binary understanding of protest (i.e. protest versus no protest) to address the puzzle at the root of protest intensity: Why do some people join protests whereas others do not? I explain protest participation using Afrobarometer survey data from roughly one thousand respondents in 20 African countries from 1999 to 2009. My findings present a more nuanced picture of the various grievances that motivate individual Africans to take to the streets. Not all forms of relative deprivation are equally politically salient: All else equal, Africans are more likely to protest if they have low prospects of upward mobility or if they feel that their living conditions have deteriorated in recent months. Casting doubt on ethnic explanations for African conflicts, I find that Africans are no more likely to protest if they feel that their ethnic group is economically deprived relative to other ethnic groups.

# Chapter 4

## Inequality and the Frequency of Protest Events

### 4.1 Introduction

A major reason why economists and political scientists study economic inequality is that economic inequality supposedly leads to political instability (Lichbach, 1989, 431). Because the poor resent the fortune of those better off, they may vote for redistribution—or merely threaten to do so—and thereby prompt political retaliation by the elite (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). Economists also argue that inequality exacerbates poverty, because it depresses long-term rates of income growth by preventing a large portion of society from fully participating in markets (Fanta and Upadhyay, 2009; Ravalion, 1997; Sokoloff and Engerman, 2000). Hence, inequality may generate grievances about absolute as well as relative deprivation. In autocracies and

weak democracies, where citizens cannot effectively express their grievances at the ballot box, the poor might engage in protests, riots, and even revolutions (Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Hibbs, 1973; Gupta, 1990). In turn, these forms of unrest threaten economic growth even further: “The participation of the poor in crime and other antisocial actions represents a direct waste of resources because the time and energy of criminals are not devoted to productive efforts. Moreover, the threats to property rights deter investment” (Barro, 2000, 7).

Muller and Seligson (1987) confirm the link between inequality and protest. In a statistical analysis of 63 countries from 1973 to 1977, they observe a correlation between the share of personal income accruing to the richest quintile of a country’s population and deaths in domestic protest events: “Most countries with relatively low income inequality (an upper 20 percent share that is one-half of a standard deviation or more below the mean) have relatively low death rates from political violence (in the range of 0 to -1 standard deviation), whereas most countries with relatively high income inequality (an upper 20 percent share that is one standard deviation or more above the mean) have relatively high death rates (equal to or above the mean)” (Muller and Seligson, 1987, 434). Although there is scarce evidence about the precise mechanisms linking inequality and protest, one possibility is that inequality sparks jealousy and anger toward governments that fail to redistribute to the poor (Gurr, 1970; Shapiro, 2002). African protesters and rebels in Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa have specifically expressed dissatisfaction with income disparities, particularly across rural-urban lines (Cramer, 2003).

But the poor do not always protest inequality. In the United States, which

by most measures has significantly higher income inequality than other developed countries, the level of redistribution and the popular demand for redistribution are relatively insignificant (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2004). Although one could argue that the United States is exceptional in these respects, scholars have noted tolerance for high degrees of inequality in countries as diverse as Russia and Brazil (Kelley and Evans, 2009; Lambert, Millimet and Slottje, 2003; Ravallion and Lokshin, 2000).

Scholars have yet to fully answer the question of whether economic inequality is empirically related to protest. Muller and Seligson's 1987 study of inequality and political violence is dated and uses a dataset with very little coverage of Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, their dependent variable (the natural logarithm of the death rate from domestic conflict per one million population) is qualitatively different from peaceful protest. A study by Hibbs (1973) of mass political violence in 1948-1967 suffers from the same drawbacks.

To better answer the question of whether inequality causes protest, I take advantage of the new Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) (Hendrix and Salehyan, 2010), along with the best available measures of inequality. Until now, the state of the art in studying the relationship between inequality and conflict has been to use rule of law to proxy for sociopolitical unrest (Barro, 2000) or to use protest data measured at the level of ethnic groups (Østby, 2008; Østby, Nordås and Rødø, 2009; Scarritt and McMillan, 1995). However, a statistical correlation between rule of law and inequality is not evidence that inequality motivates people to protest. Furthermore, measuring protest at the group level precludes analyses of country-level characteristics like national

income inequality and economic growth. SCAD is the most comprehensive source of data on riots, strikes, and protests in Africa (or in any region) and includes documentation about the issues around which each event unfolded—namely, whether the event centered on grievances about the economy versus elections, ethnic divisions, or other issues. Hence, this database provides an unprecedented window into patterns of conflict beyond civil war, as well as the opportunity to systematically analyze the relationship between inequality and political disorder. It also provides a chance to study inequality and protest in a region where data limitations have heretofore made such topics difficult to study.

The main contributions of this chapter are to 1) investigate the determinants of conflict beyond civil war; 2) systematically analyze the relationship between inequality and political disorder; and 3) illuminate patterns of inequality and protest in a region where data limitations have heretofore made such topics difficult to study. I use SCAD data from 40 African countries over the period 1990 and 2009 to test the validity of the claim that inequality leads to political instability, along with other hypotheses about the tolerance for inequality. I examine macro-level implications of micro-level theories about grievances and collective action outlined in Chapter 3, complementing subsequent chapters on the individual-level correlates of protest participation. I find that inequality is associated with more frequent protests about economic issues. I also replicate the earlier findings that democracies are more protest-prone and that military repression or the threat of military repression discourages protests.



The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The first section reviews theories about the tolerance for inequality and protest behavior and outlines testable hypotheses. The second section describes data and statistical methods. The third section reports and interprets the main findings and robustness checks. The final section concludes and suggests avenues for future research.

## 4.2 Hypotheses

This chapter addresses not only how people feel about inequality, but also whether they respond to inequality by engaging in protests, riots, and strikes. The dependent variable is the behavioral—not merely the emotional—tolerance for inequality.<sup>1</sup> Hence, this chapter speaks to two general areas of research: one about the social tolerance for inequality, and the other about collective action. The former literature focuses on psychological grievances—in other words, people’s subjective or “emotional” interpretations of their material circumstances in relation to the material circumstances of others. The latter takes grievances as given and emphasizes people’s ability to overcome organizational challenges such as communication failures and free-riding. In this section of the chapter I review theories about the psychological tolerance for inequality and about collective action dilemmas, as well as theories that apply specifically to Sub-Saharan Africa. I use these theories to derive hypotheses that I test in later sections.

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<sup>1</sup>See Martin (1986) on this distinction.

### 4.2.1 The Social Tolerance for Inequality

In contrast with econometric research about the causes of inequality, research about the tolerance for inequality is largely theoretical and concentrated in the field of political psychology. Using data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Osberg and Smeeding (2006) describe attitudes toward inequality in 27 countries and challenge the conventional wisdom that Americans have a greater affinity for inequality than people in other countries. However, their study omits Africa and most of the developing world and does not explore reasons for variation in the tolerance for inequality.

Countering the idea that inequality causes sociopolitical instability, Lambert, Millimet and Slottje (2003) find that countries with low objective inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient) also have low tolerance for inequality. They find further associations between tolerance for inequality and female empowerment, public education expenditures, per capita income, economic growth, and population size. However, the inequality aversion parameter (Atkinson 1970) that they use as their dependent variable must be measured through indirect means—for instance, by inferring popular attitudes from government policies (Lambert 1989, 129).

To explain their main finding, Lambert, Millimet and Slottje (2003) cite a theoretical article by Bénabou (2000) illustrating why more industrial democracies with greater income inequality like the United States redistribute less than more egalitarian countries like Sweden. Bénabou focuses on actual redistribution and not the demand for redistribution, arguing that in unequal societies the rich have disproportionate influence over the political process and

hence block progressive policies and institutions. However, low levels of redistribution in highly unequal democracies do not explain why the poor would or would not demand more redistribution under autocracy. In contrast with research on countries of the OECD, most research on the relationship between inequality and protest in developing countries and transitional regimes predicts that higher inequality will translate into violent demands for reform (Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Barro, 2000; Hibbs, 1973; Gupta, 1990).

In one such study, Østby, Nordås and Rødøt (2009) analyze the relationship between group-level inequality and civil war in a sample of 22 African countries from 1986 to 2004. They construct a measure of inequality from Demographic and Health Surveys on household assets. Their inequality index, similar to a conventional Gini index of income inequality, measures the level of assets of each region compared to the overall level of assets in a given country. Conflict data are from the popular UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (2005), with conflict consisting of any armed conflict between a state government and an organized opposition group that results in at least 25 battle-related deaths per year. The authors estimate that African regions with higher levels of inequality experience more conflicts. Although this finding points to a more general link between inequality and non-violent protest at the national level, there is a strong theoretical justification for studying protest and civil war separately, namely that “the incentive structures and dynamics at work in civil and interstate wars are very different from those that we observe in shorter, more localized” collective action (Scacco, 2008, 5).

Lending comparative perspective to the study by Østby, Nordås and Rødøt

(2009), Kelley and Evans (2009) use survey data from 30 mostly non-African countries over the period from 1999 to 2000 to estimate socially acceptable levels of inequality. They observe that people in poor countries prefer more inequality than people in rich countries. They suggest—but do not systematically investigate—several possible reasons for this pattern: 1) the rich may eventually accept smaller income gains because of the diminishing marginal utility of income; 2) in complex economic systems it is hard to observe individuals' productivity, making it more difficult to justify large pay inequalities; and 3) apparent grievances about inequality are actually grievances about poverty, which diminish with higher per capita incomes.

In sum, earlier findings suggest the following testable hypotheses:

H1: Protests are more likely in countries with higher levels of objective inequality.

H2: Protests are less likely in richer countries.

H3: Protests are more likely in countries with more complex economies, where there are barriers to observing individual workers' productivity.

Although it may be impossible to study psychological phenomena like empathy gulfs or inward-looking framing effects with large sample sizes and outside clinical environments, there remain opportunities for systematic, country-level analyses of the above hypotheses. Information from the Social Conflict in Africa Database about the issues motivating civil disturbances makes it possible to more directly link country characteristics such as population size to aggregate attitudes about inequality and the behaviors that arise from those

attitudes.

### 4.2.2 Collective Action

Collective action theories assert that rational people will not necessarily rebel against inequality, regardless of how severe their dissatisfaction with the status quo (Lichbach, 1990). Bratton and van de Walle (1992, 430) remark that “it is ultimately misleading to interpret political protest in strictly economic terms,” because “there is little correlation between the intensity of political unrest, on the one hand, and the severity of economic conditions or austerity measures, on the other.” Africa seems to be unique in this regard: analyzing multi-regional data on ethnic minorities, Scarritt and McMillan (1995, 336) find that “the strong reciprocal linkage that exists between grievances and mobilization for protest on the global scale is largely absent in Africa.” To further highlight this peculiarity, Table 2 juxtaposes Africans’ attitudes toward inequality and propensity to protest issues related to inequality. Attitudes are measured using two rounds of nationally representative Afrobarometer surveys, which asked the following questions:

- Round 1 (1999-2000): Here are several pairs of statements. Please tell me whether you most agree with Statement A or Statement B?
  - A: People should be free to earn as much as they can, even if this leads to large differences in income.
  - B: Government should place limits on how much rich people can earn, even if this discourages some people from working hard.

- Round 2 (2002-2004): Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B.
  - A: It is alright to have large differences of wealth because those who work hard deserve to be rewarded.
  - B: We should avoid large gaps between the rich and the poor because they create jealousy and conflict.

Table 4.1 reports the percentage of people who agreed with Statement A across both rounds. A potential problem with comparing attitudes over time is that the question wording changes slightly: Round 1 asks respondents to consider government limits on earnings, which is more extreme than simply asking whether society should avoid large differences in wealth. This change may have increased the reported tolerance for inequality in Round 1, exaggerating the decline in tolerance over time. Keeping this limitation in mind, one can note that the decrease in the emotional tolerance for inequality was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in the behavioral tolerance for inequality (as measured by the frequency of protests about economic issues). In most countries, protest frequency remained the same or even declined. The differences in protest frequency and the sample size are small, making it difficult to compare levels over time with much confidence. Nevertheless, these preliminary findings help motivate an analysis using more comprehensive data.

What explains the lack of a connection between the emotional and behavioral tolerance for inequality? Olson (1971) theorized that members of a group will “free-ride” if they expect others to bear the costs of mounting a

Table 4.1: Emotional vs. Behavioral Tolerance for Inequality

| Country      | 1999-2001                       |                          | 2002-2004                       |                          | Change                          |                          |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | Percent<br>Accept<br>Inequality | Number<br>of<br>Protests | Percent<br>Accept<br>Inequality | Number<br>of<br>Protests | Percent<br>Accept<br>Inequality | Number<br>of<br>Protests |
| Botswana     | 48                              | 2                        | 38                              | 0                        | -10                             | -2                       |
| Ghana        | 70                              | 3                        | 43                              | 1                        | -28                             | -2                       |
| Lesotho      | 59                              | 1                        | 54                              | 1                        | -5                              | 0                        |
| Malawi       | 72                              | 1                        | 41                              | 0                        | -31                             | -1                       |
| Mali         | 65                              | 1                        | 46                              | 0                        | -19                             | -1                       |
| Namibia      | 65                              | 0                        | 29                              | 1                        | -36                             | +1                       |
| Nigeria      | 55                              | 9                        | 40                              | 9                        | -15                             | 0                        |
| South Africa | 64                              | 7                        | 36                              | 4                        | -28                             | -3                       |
| Tanzania     | 75                              | 0                        | 40                              | 0                        | -34                             | 0                        |
| Uganda       | 73                              | 0                        | 40                              | 0                        | -34                             | 0                        |
| Zambia       | 59                              | 2                        | 41                              | 6                        | -18                             | +4                       |

Sources: Afrobarometer (2008) and Hendrix and Salehyan (2010).

social movement. If the collective goal is a public good such as social security or an increase in the minimum wage, a rational person will prefer to consume the good without shouldering any cost associated with obtaining it. If all members of the community are equally rational, then collective action never occurs. Only if group members receive selective incentives or are coerced into participating will a protest materialize. Hence, “contrary to relative deprivation theory, larger magnitudes of inequality and stronger feelings of deprivation [may not be] not associated with greater willingness to engage in legitimate or illegitimate forms of collective behavior” (Martin, Brickman and Alan, 1984, 484).

One observable implication of collective action theories is that rural people will be less likely to assemble protests. First, rural people face cooperation

problems: it is harder to police free-riders in large groups (Olson, 1971), and farmers tend to be very large populations in most African countries.<sup>2</sup> Rural people also face coordination problems: they are excluded from technological or employment-based information networks, and their “scattered low-density pattern of settlement makes the organisation of any riot on a significant scale extremely difficult (Wiseman, 1986, 510).<sup>3</sup> Finally, rural people are geographically farther from protest targets (namely the government). Hence,

H4: The more rural a population, the less likely a population is to protest inequality.<sup>4</sup>

Another implication is that protests will be more frequent when the communication infrastructure is more developed, as this too can help people overcome coordination problems (Pierskalla and Hollenbach, 2013):

H5: The more developed a country’s communication infrastructure, the more likely a population is to protest inequality.

### 4.3 Data and Methods

To test the above hypotheses, I analyze data on protests, strikes, and riots in 40 African countries from 1990 to 2009, excluding countries with populations

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<sup>2</sup>Bates (1981) further documents this phenomenon in Africa, which remains predominantly rural despite recent industrialization.

<sup>3</sup>Rule (1988, 94) proposes that physical proximity may affect protest propensity also through emotional mechanisms: “The shared experience of reacting to a single source of stimulation, or sharing a strong emotion, almost irresistibly draws the exposed individual into the crowd state.”

<sup>4</sup>This hypothesis applies to non-African settings, as well. Bohstedt (1983) observes that riots in 18th-century England and Wales occurred almost exclusively in towns.



under one million (to avoid small outliers driving the results). The unit of analysis is country-years; missing values for several key variables prevent me from analyzing changes in protest frequency within countries over time.

The Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) categorizes political disturbances by issue, such as elections, religious discrimination, and human rights. I narrow the dataset to only those 1,031 events that had to do with the economy and jobs (and later repeat the analysis with other issue categories as robustness checks). Although the database's event descriptions do not denote which political disturbances surrounded inequality specifically, the notes often cite pay disputes and the involvement of labor unions, which are typically associated with grievances about relative deprivation. Moreover, the economics literature suggests that inequality causes protest by impeding poverty reduction and thereby generating grievances about absolute deprivation (rather than about inequality *per se*) (Fanta and Upadhyay, 2009; Ravallion, 1997; Sokoloff and Engerman, 2000). It is therefore possible to test hypotheses about the link between inequality and protest while knowing only that protests unfolded around economic issues, and not necessarily around inequality.

Nearly all of the recorded protests targeted the government and occurred in the capital city, which constitutes preliminary evidence that urban populations are more likely than rural populations to protest about economic issues. Most protests involve students and civil servants, which has historically been the case in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wiseman, 1986). Being near the top of the income distribution does not dissuade these actors from demanding redistribution, because a) they have higher prospects of upward mobility (and hence greater

Table 4.2: Examples of Protest Issues

| Country       | Year | Issue  |
|---------------|------|--|
| Angola        | 1995 | 1000 primary and secondary school teachers strike over pay.  |
| Burkina Faso  | 2002 | Nearly 2,000 striking workers take to the streets of Ouagadougou demanding higher wages to cope with hardships caused by Burkina Faso's structural adjustment program. |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 1998 | Telecom workers strike, protesting lower wages than expatriates.   |
| Guinea        | 2008 | Doctors strike, protesting their low civil servant status.   |
| Malawi        | 2005 | Roughly 4,000 civil servants block off access to government offices in Lilongwe on Friday at the launch of a strike to press demands for more pension benefits.        |
| Mozambique    | 1999 | Construction workers strike, demanding equal pay as South Africans.  |
| Togo          | 1992 | Police strike demanding better bonuses and special status.   |
| Zambia        | 1996 | Civil servants march, demanding a pay increase. Over 120,000 civil servants strike over government refusal to pay a salary increase.                                   |

potential for frustration) than peasants or the urban poor; b) they tend to be politically aware; and c) they have the capacity to overcome collective action problems (Wiseman 1986, 513). Table 4.2 displays several examples of issues included in the reduced dataset.

I construct my dependent variable by counting the number of political disturbances that occurred in each country in each year. There were zero disturbances in roughly half of the country-years, with one to three in most of the remaining country-years (Figure 4.1). The map in Figure 4.2 displays average annual protest frequencies from 1990-2009. The most protest-prone

countries are, not surprisingly, the most populous: in 2001, Nigeria experienced 24 protests about economic grievances; in five out of seven years between 1994 and 2001, South Africa experienced over 10. However, population clearly does not explain all variation in the incidence of protests: despite making headlines for its post-election riots, populous Kenya has experienced very little unrest surrounding economic issues; Niger, with a modestly sized population, has experienced frequent political disturbances. No particular years stand out as exceptionally volatile: political disturbances are distributed fairly evenly throughout the approximately 20 years that the database covers.

Because nearly half the observations of protest frequency take a value of zero, the dependent variable could be considered a rare event. Therefore, I estimate a negative binomial regression model, which is tailored for count variables. This is a generalization of the standard Poisson model that accounts for overdispersion, or violations of the assumption that the conditional variance equals the conditional mean.<sup>5</sup>

### 4.3.1 Explanatory Variables

My main explanatory variable is inequality, measured by the Gini index. The Gini index is the most widely accepted and provides the best data availability. All measures of inequality use slightly different equations for calculating the disproportionality of income or consumption among individuals or households in a society. Although most studies about inequality focus on income, I use Gini indices based on consumption (measured at the individ-

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<sup>5</sup>Goodness-of-fit tests (not shown) revealed that the Poisson model was inappropriate.

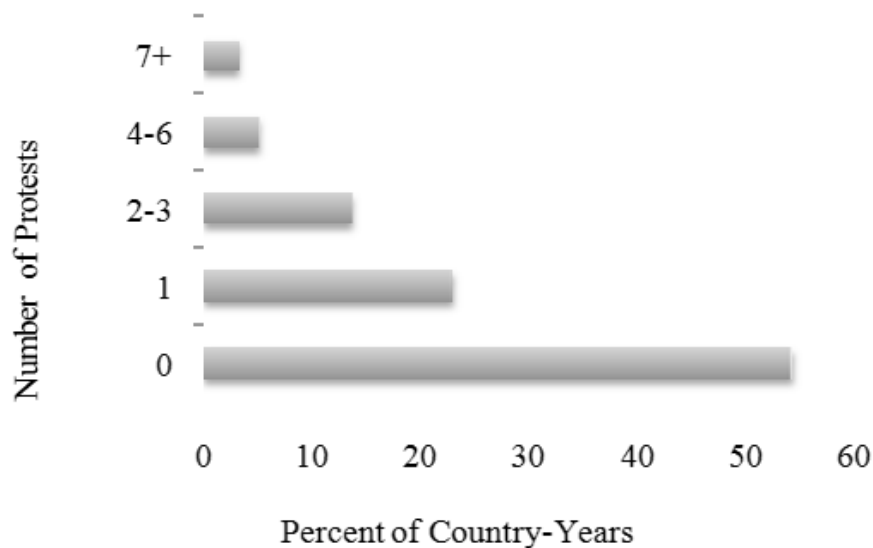


Figure 4.1: Protest Frequency Distribution over Country-Years  
 Note: Data are from the Social Conflict in Africa Database (2010).  
 Data cover 40 countries from 1990 to 2009.

ual level) for two reasons: first, most African countries have small formal economies, meaning that few people earn regular incomes and even fewer earn incomes that get recorded; second, consumption is arguably a better measure of how most Africans fare in their day-to-day lives, since “consumption-smoothing” (for example, relying on social networks to provide informal credit and insurance) can allow the poor to withstand unemployment and income volatility (Banerjee and Duflo, 2007; Deaton, 2006). The Gini index ranges from zero to 100, with zero representing perfect equality (where all members of society consume the same amount) and 100 representing perfect inequality (where one person consumes everything).

Missing Gini values pose a significant limitation on the sample size. When

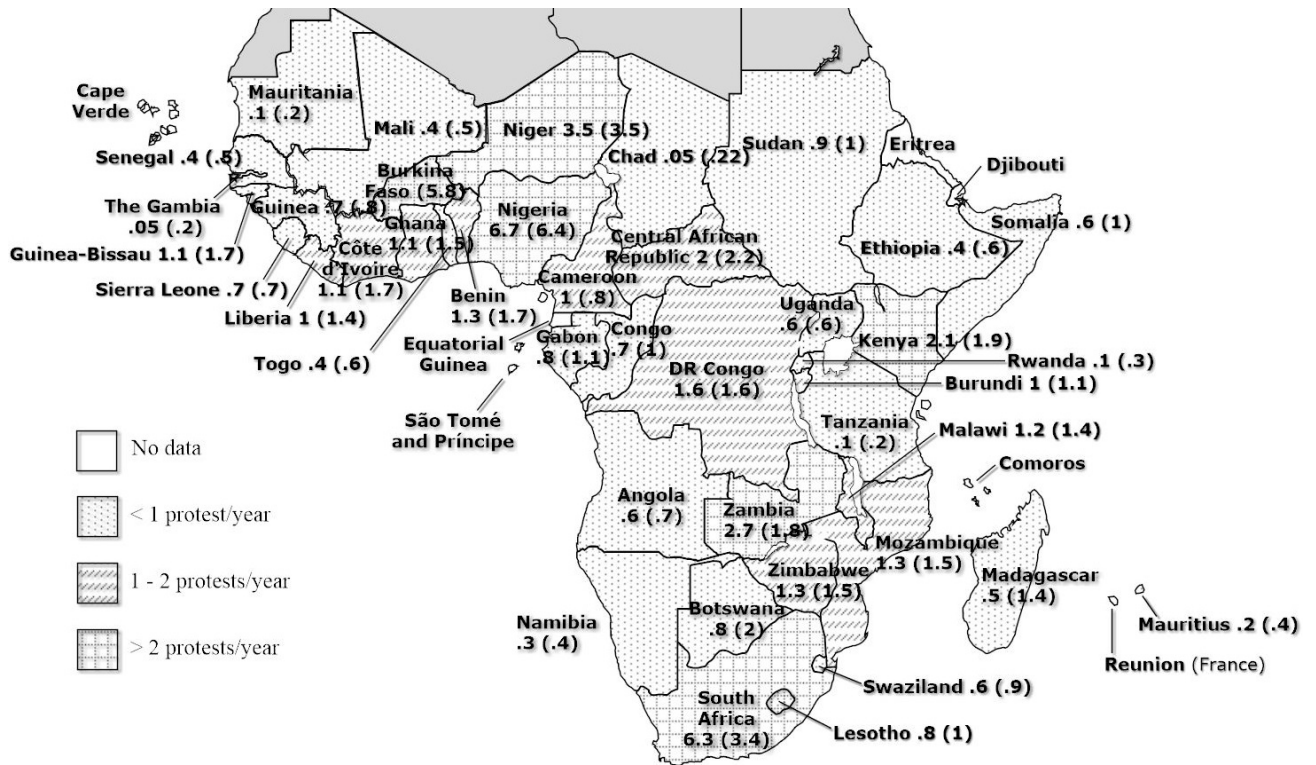


Figure 4.2: Average Annual Protest Frequencies, 1990-2009

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses. Data are from the Social Conflict in Africa Database (2010).

I combine data from the World Bank's Africa Development Indicators (2010) and the UNU/WIDER World Income Inequality Database (2010), there are only 250 observations of inequality across roughly 50 countries over a 10-year period. One reason for the number of missing data is that many African governments keep poor records of income and consumption. Another is the fact that inequality changes very gradually over time, and so it makes little sense to record Gini indices on an annual basis. Thus, the number of missing observations overstates the amount of information actually missing. In a later section on robustness checks, I interpolate missing values of the Gini index and re-estimate all models with an expanded sample size.

The scatterplot in Figure 4.3 provides a first look at the relationship between inequality and protest, as well as a rough test of the hypothesis that people are more likely to protest inequality given higher levels of objective inequality. Although there appears to be a positive relationship, this pattern may be driven by outliers such as South Africa and Nigeria. There is also much unexplained variation in protest propensity among countries with similar levels of inequality.

To help account for this variation, and to test additional hypotheses, the models include the following variables:

- Income, which is the log of GDP per capita.
- Inflation, which has been linked to protests in a number of African countries (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992, 422). Because governments in the CFA currency zone have less control over the value of their currency (with the CFA tied to the Euro), I control for CFA Zone Membership.

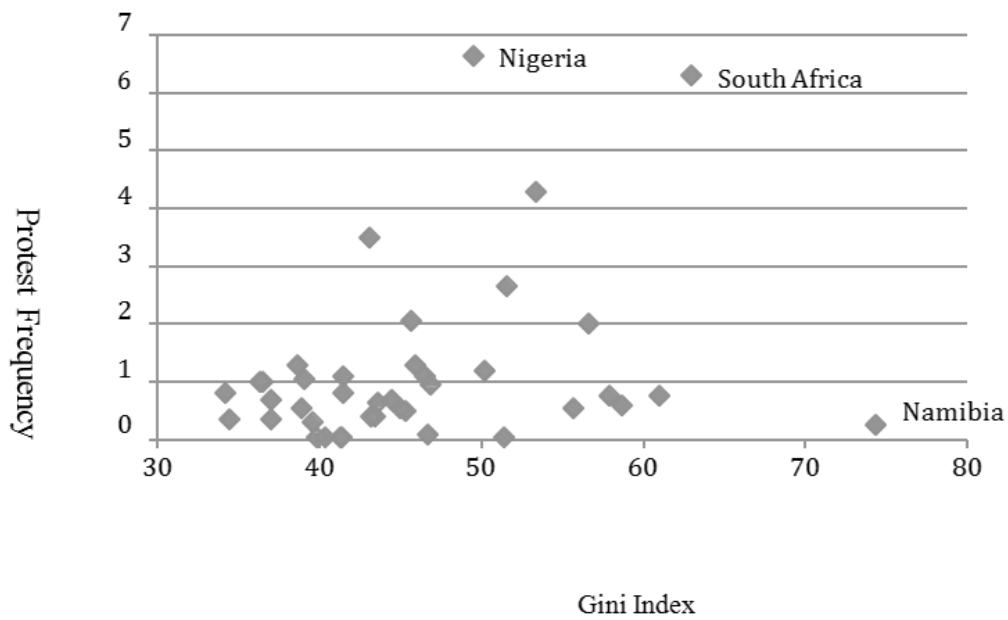


Figure 4.3: Protest and Inequality in Africa in Most Recent Years  
 Note: Protest data are from the Social Conflict in Africa Database (2010); inequality data are from the UNU/WIDER World Income Inequality Database (2010). N = 38.

- Export Concentration, which I use to measure the complexity of a country's economy. This is an index from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development calculated using the number and value of products that a country exports.
- Urban, which is the percent of the total population living in urban areas as defined by the World Bank.
- Phones, which is the number of telephone (mainlines and mobile phone) subscribers per 100 people and a measure of communication infrastructure development.
- Two measures of the strength of the state's coercive apparatus: Military Expenditure (as a percent of GDP); and Military Personnel (as a percent of the total labor force). I use both measures of state coercive strength to check the robustness of my results.

I also add the following control variables:

- Annual growth in GDP per capita.
- Population Size, in 10,000s, including people ages 15 to 64.
- Regime Type, measured using the Polity IV scale Marshall and Jaggers (2011), which ranges from -10 to +10, with higher-scoring countries being more democratic. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and Scarrit, McMillan and Mozaffar (2001) observe a positive relationship between democracy and protest in Africa, possibly because protest provides a way for groups to establish their priority on the policy agenda (Bruhn,



Table 4.3: Summary Statistics

| Variable             | Source         | Min. | Max.  | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|----------------------|----------------|------|-------|------|-----------|
| Export Concentration | United Nations | 0.10 | 0.97  | 0.47 | 0.20      |
| Income               | World Bank     | 123  | 33873 | 2623 | 3823      |
| GDP Growth           | World Bank     | 0    | 106   | 6    | 7         |
| Inequality           | UNU/WIDER      | 30   | 74    | 45   | 9         |
| Inflation            | World Bank     | -12  | 24411 | 98   | 1209      |
| Labor Participation  | World Bank     | 46   | 92    | 70   | 11        |
| Military Expenditure | World Bank     | 0    | 40    | 3    | 4         |
| Military Personnel   | World Bank     | 0    | 15    | 1    | 2         |
| Phones               | World Bank     | 0    | 126   | 9    | 18        |
| Population Size      | World Bank     | 6    | 8202  | 835  | 1195      |
| Regime Type          | Polity IV      | -10  | 10    | -0.4 | 5.5       |
| Urban                | World Bank     | 5    | 85    | 34   | 15        |

2008). Conversely, Kim and Gandhi (2010) find that countries with even nominally democratic institutions (such as legislatures) are less susceptible to protests, presumably because formal ways of expressing grievances provide an alternative to street politics.

- Labor Participation Rate, as a percent of the total population ages 15 and over. Higher labor participation may accompany lower economic grievances. Conversely, it might accompany a higher capacity of citizens to organize protests in the workplace (Ross 2008).

Table 4.3 presents summary statistics and sources for all variables.

## 4.4 Results

Table 4.4 displays the complete regression estimates, along with standard errors clustered at the country level. Inequality has a robust and statisti-

cally significant positive relationship with protest frequency, suggesting that inequality does in fact promote civil disorder. The magnitude of this effect is not negligible: simulations using Clarify estimate that a change in the Gini index from its minimum of 29.8 to its mean of 45 increases protest frequency in a country-year by almost one protest (holding other variables at their mean values). A 15-point increase in the Gini coefficient is large, but not unheard of: inequality increased by approximately that much in South Africa between 1987 and 1990 and in Kenya between 1997 and 1999. The first column of Table 5 includes only the basic control variables without which no model of protest frequency on inequality would be plausible. Subsequent columns gradually include additional variables (grouped by hypothesis) to test the models' stability.

Consistent with previous research on countries outside of Africa, export concentration, population, and regime type are also statistically significant in nearly every model. The coefficient for export concentration consistently has the largest magnitude: a one-unit increase in the export concentration index translates into at least a .87 net increase in the log of the expected protest frequency. The third column of Table 4.4 adds variables for urbanization and communication infrastructure to the basic model in order to test hypotheses about collective action. Neither of these variables is statistically significant.

The large and statistically significant relationship of export concentration with protest frequency suggests that people struggle to cognitively justify inequality in more complex economies where it is difficult to observe individuals' economic productivity (Kelley and Evans, 2009). Income, however, has no dis-

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis of Protest Frequency in Africa, 1990-2009

|                      | (1)              | (2)             | (3)             | (4)             | (5)             | (6)              | (7)             |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Inequality           | .08***<br>(.01)  | .06***<br>(.01) | .06***<br>(.01) | .06***<br>(.01) | .07***<br>(.02) | .03**<br>(.02)   | .06***<br>(.01) |
| Income (log)         | -.29<br>(.17)    | -.16<br>(.18)   | .06<br>(.34)    | .10<br>(.38)    | .71<br>(.41)    | .59<br>(.47)     | .40<br>(.40)    |
| GDP Growth           |                  | .00<br>(.04)    | .01<br>(.04)    | .01<br>(.04)    | .04<br>(.03)    | .03<br>(.03)     | .03<br>(.03)    |
| Export Concentration |                  | 1.10**<br>(.46) | 1.06**<br>(.50) | 1.14**<br>(.51) | 1.65**<br>(.79) | .78<br>(.50)     | .87*<br>(.50)   |
| Population (log)     | .53***<br>(2.57) | .32**<br>(.17)  | .32**<br>(.18)  | .35**<br>(.18)  | .16<br>(.24)    | .43***<br>(.15)  | .53***<br>(.13) |
| Regime Type          |                  | .06***<br>(.02) | .07***<br>(.02) | .07***<br>(.02) | .05*<br>(.03)   | .05**<br>(.02)   | .06***<br>(.02) |
| Labor Participation  |                  | -.01<br>(.02)   | -.01<br>(.02)   | .00<br>(.02)    | .01<br>(.01)    | -.02<br>(.02)    | .01<br>(.01)    |
| Urban                |                  |                 | .00<br>(.01)    | .00<br>(.01)    | -.02<br>(.02)   | -.01<br>(.02)    | -.01<br>(.01)   |
| Phones               |                  |                 | -.01<br>(.01)   | -.01<br>(.01)   | -.01<br>(.01)   | -.02**<br>(.01)  | -.01<br>(.01)   |
| Inflation            |                  |                 |                 | .00<br>(.00)    |                 | .00<br>(.00)     | .00<br>(.00)    |
| CFA Member           |                  |                 |                 | .12<br>(.33)    |                 | -.18<br>(0.40)   | .09<br>(0.33)   |
| Food Prices          |                  |                 |                 |                 | .00<br>(.00)    |                  |                 |
| Military Personnel   |                  |                 |                 |                 |                 | -.52***<br>(.21) |                 |
| Military Expenditure |                  |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  | -.11<br>(.12)   |
| Observations         | 166              | 166             | 164             | 163             | 139             | 157              | 157             |
| Countries            | 38               | 38              | 36              | 35              | 23              | 35               | 33              |

Negative binomial regression estimates with standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses. The dependent variable is the frequency of protests about jobs or the economy in a given country-year. Regime Type ranges from -10 to 10, with higher numbers denoting more democracy. \*Significant at .10; \*\*significant at .05; \*\*\*significant at .01.

cernible relationship with protest frequency, implying that grievances about absolute deprivation are less politically salient in Africa than earlier studies have proposed. The null finding for urbanization might stem from labor migratory patterns in Africa that make it difficult to distinguish urban from rural dwellers.<sup>6</sup>

The results in Table 4.4 provide mixed evidence for theories that coordination and cooperation problems prevent protests (Olson, 1971; Bates, 1981; Lichbach, 1990). The weak relationship between the number of telephone subscribers per 100 people and protest frequency suggests that coordination problems may be less of an obstacle to collective action than the literature predicts: a lack of access to telephone communication does not seem to hinder protests. The models in Table 4.4 are limited in their ability to estimate the effect of cooperation problems, because urbanization is an extremely rough gauge of the degree to which people exchange information about protests. The challenge of systematically observing people's ability to overcome cooperation problems means that omitted variable bias will invariably plague "large-n" analyses like this one. Field research, like that which I present in Chapter 7, is helpful for more thoroughly evaluating the decision calculus of individual protesters and non-protesters.

Although most of the other hypotheses likewise find no support, the strength of the state security apparatus (as measured by military personnel) has a significant and robust negative relationship with the incidence of protest.

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<sup>6</sup>To insure themselves against volatile agricultural yields and prices, farmers often relocate seasonally or have family members work in the city and send remittances (Lucas, 1997).

This lends external validity to micro-level evidence from India that would-be protesters incorporate the potential for state repression into their decision calculus (Wilkinson, 2004). Although African governments are generally perceived to be weak and to lack a monopoly on the use of force (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982), they have at times employed violence or the threat of violence to discourage protests. In 2005, for example, Zimbabwe’s government announced Operation Murambatsvina, a campaign designed in part to deter urban protest through military and police intimidation (Bratton and Masungure 2007). In 2007, Guineans faced military fire during a series of general strikes (Engeler, 2008). When double-digit inflation prompted Uganda’s opposition to denounce the high cost of living in April 2011, President Yoweri Museveni upheld a ban on protests and promised to suppress any attempted demonstrations with the police and the army (Ross 2011). In short, it appears that protests are less likely to occur where there is a larger military able to repress them. The negative relationship between Military Personnel and protest frequency could also indicate that African governments offer military employment to mollify young men, who are the most likely to join protests (Mueller, 2010, 5).

#### **4.4.1 Robustness and Limitations**

To check the robustness of my results, I re-estimate all models while omitting South Africa and Nigeria. This ensures that the two most populous and conflict-prone countries are not driving the results. The new estimates differ little from the original ones, although the coefficients for Export Concentration

and—as expected—population are no longer statistically significant. Hypotheses about the effects of objective inequality, regime type, and repression still find support.

I also repeat the analyses after interpolating missing values of the Gini index. This involves using Stata software to construct new data points between known observations, nearly tripling the sample size. Interpolation is justified by the fact that inequality varies little from year to year. Except for models where the sample size is severely restricted with raw data, results are robust to interpolation. However, standard errors associated with the effects of inequality on protest are slightly larger.

Finally, I re-estimate the models using different categories of protest as the dependent variable. If I am right that protests about the economy and jobs are a good proxy for protests about inequality, then the models should not do as well at predicting protests about other issues. Repeating the procedure for counting the number of protests in each country-year, I construct two new dependent variables measuring the frequency of protests surrounding the following issues (as coded in the SCAD database): 1) elections, and 2) ethnic discrimination and ethnic issues. I then re-estimate the original regression models with these new dependent variables (full results are presented in Appendix A). None of the alternative models shows the positive relationship between the Gini index and protest frequency from the original models. This suggests that the subset of protests about the economy and jobs has a unique relationship with inequality.

A limitation of this study is the lack of coding information for protest

events in the Social Conflict in Africa Database. Although the database includes numeric coding and qualitative descriptions of each event, there is no information about who coded each case or about what resources (such as newspapers and government reports) the coders used. Coding protest issues is a highly subjective process susceptible to the bias of source material as well as the coders themselves. Ideally, each case would undergo review by multiple coders to who could compare notes to converge on the likeliest issue around which a protest unfolded. This level of thoroughness is a worthy goal for the authors of future datasets.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the relationship between inequality and protest in African countries between 1990 and 2009, along with additional hypotheses about protest participation. Statistical analyses revealed that inequality is associated with more protests about economic issues, although the complexity of a country's economy seems to have a greater positive effect on protest frequency. In contrast with past studies that found statistical correlations between inequality and general social upheaval, I observed a robust relationship between objective measures of inequality and protests specifically about economic grievances. Knowing the issues around which protests unfold—which is possible given detailed event coding in the Social Conflict in Africa Database—makes it more reasonable to infer that the correlation between inequality and protest is causal. This chapter also replicated the earlier findings that democ-

racies are more protest-prone and that military repression or the threat of military repression discourages protests.



## Chapter 5

# Protest Intensity: Explaining Participation

Chapter 4 showed that African countries with higher income inequality experience more protests, all else equal, than countries with lower income inequality. However, this finding tells an incomplete story about protests in Africa; frequency is only one dimension of protests, alongside duration and intensity. Although research on civil war and labor strikes has long highlighted all three of these dimensions (Blattman and Miguel, 2010; Shorter and Tilly, 1971), the protest literature is less nuanced, often relying on data from news reports that do not distinguish between brief demonstrations by a handful of people and months-long uprisings of thousands (see, for example, Bratton and van de Walle (1992)).

News reporters tend to exaggerate minor civil unrest, because their profession socializes them to focus on sensational behaviors and to seek out “of-

ficial” institutional spokespersons whose accounts often portray protesters as more radical and numerous than they really are (Kluegel and Smith, 1986, 260). This masks actual variation in protest duration and intensity, limiting the usefulness of databases on event frequency. In coding protest events, scholars have typically paid scant attention “to the selectivity of the sources, the creation of fine-grained coding categories, and the development of well-documented rules and procedures” (Koopmans and Rucht, 2002, 232). That is an important oversight, because longer-lasting, more intense uprisings plausibly have greater potential than minor uprisings to affect government policy and regime transformation.

This chapter of the dissertation therefore moves beyond the conventional binary understanding of protest (i.e. protest versus no protest) to address the puzzle at the root of protest intensity: Why do some people join protests whereas others do not? Protest intensity, defined as protest participation,<sup>1</sup> is a meaningful measure of political instability, because protests threaten incumbents only if they draw many participants. Protesters are physically and symbolically stronger in numbers, even if their actions are very brief. Huge crowds almost instantly signal the malign nature of a regime to a country’s population and to the world, and a regime facing mass uprisings can collapse in a matter of hours (Lohmann, 1994). Dispersing across a city, disrupting traffic, and occupying buildings are crucial social movement strategies to counter incumbents’ efforts to maintain territorial sovereignty (Jansen, 2001; Cresswell,

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<sup>1</sup>Scholars usually define civil war intensity by the number of battle-related deaths (Blattman and Miguel, 2010). However, protests are by definition less violent than wars or riots; it is typical to measure protest intensity by participation instead of deadliness (Garay, 2007).

1996). For example, in the 1996-1997 Serbian protests against the Milosevic regime, controlling space became “an articulation of power: the dominating power of the regime aimed to keep people, information and goods *in place*, whereas the demonstrators relied on their being *out of place*” (Jansen, 2001, 39). In Kyrgyzstan, protest organizers routinely hire “professional activists” to pad the numbers in crowds (Druker et al., 2012). Larger throngs can also better withstand government repression and signal to intransigent leaders that thwarting the opposition will be impossible or very costly. Unlike peasant revolutions or rebellions waged in areas with low population densities, urban protests rely “primarily on the disruption generated by massing hundreds of thousands of civilians in central urban spaces in a concentrated period of time so as to generate pressure on an incumbent regime and induce key members of the ruling coalition to defect” (Beissinger, 2013).

In contrast, incumbents can ignore even very drawn-out protests by smaller groups, and can deploy propaganda to “frame” small demonstrations as the eccentric actions of a political fringe (Benford and Snow, 2000). Authoritarian and semi-authoritarian leaders “must continually reaffirm their rhetorical claims if they are to remain legitimate in the public’s eye” (Lyall, 2006, 411), and rhetorically painting protesters as radical extremists is increasingly difficult when protesters assemble in greater and greater numbers. This is evident in the failure of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian leaders to maintain a façade of strength amidst large-scale uprisings (Lyall, 2006). Intense protests likewise made it difficult for President Mamadou Tanja of Niger to convince citizens that his defiance of term limits was a response to popular demands that he

remain in office (Baudais and Chauzal, 2011). In short, incumbents face a more serious threat from thousands of protesters demonstrating for five hours than they do from five protesters demonstrating for a year.

Although duration is another important dimension of protest, it is not the focus of this chapter. That is because protests are nearly always short relative to civil wars, which last seven years on average (Collier, Hoeffler and Måns, 2010, 253). As Chapter 3 illustrated, protests sometimes occur in “waves” in which multiple protests unfold over hundreds of days. However, any individual protest typically lasts no longer than several days before government troops disperse protesters or before protesters’ fervor and willingness to participate wane (Edwards and McCarthy, 2005). Indeed, the short duration of protests is one of the selling points on which protest organizers capitalize to boost participation; “larger numbers of adherents can be mobilized for low-cost activities of short duration, such as attendance at a demonstration, than for higher cost ones that imply ongoing commitment of time and energy, such as agreeing to head an important committee” or agreeing to fight in a protracted civil war (Edwards and McCarthy, 2005, 141). Sixty percent of the nearly five thousand total protests in the Social Conflict in Africa Database lasted only one day; 91 percent lasted less than two weeks; none lasted more than a year. These numbers are consistent with research showing that longer protests are in fact no more effective than shorter protests at influencing government policy (Uba, 2005, 391). African protest organizers may have decided that drawn-out protests are not worth their investment in organization costs and incentives.

Given the low variation in the duration of protests, this chapter focuses

Table 5.1: Protest Participation Rates by Region

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 12.9% |
| Latin America      | 12.6% |
| East Asia          | 4.8%  |

Percent of survey respondents who said they had attended a protest in the past year. Sources: Afrobarometer (2009), Latinobarómetro (2008), Asian Barometer (2008).

on protest intensity, as measured by participation. The Social Conflict in Africa Database does not include comprehensive data on protest participation rates, but Afrobarometer surveys do. Afrobarometer enumerators administered questionnaires to nationally representative samples of roughly one thousand respondents in 20 African countries from 1999 to 2009. Approximately 13 percent of the nearly 70,000 respondents reported having attended a demonstration or protest march in the 12 months preceding the survey. This rate of protest participation is roughly equal to the estimated rate in Latin America, and almost three times higher than the rate in East Asia (Table 5.1). More pronounced than variation across regions is variation at the sub-regional level: According to Afrobarometer data, countries such as Zambia and Madagascar have in recent years exhibited protest participation rates lower than 10 percent, while others such as Tanzania and South Africa have exhibited rates of nearly 20 percent.

Why do some Africans protest and others do not? It is puzzling that many of the poorest and most politically vulnerable people in the world do not pressure their leaders for change. And yet, it is also puzzling that the Africans who do protest are willing to bear the sometimes mortal risks of opposing autocrats and their armies.

This chapter presents evidence that Africans protest not because they are faring poorly under current circumstances, but instead because they have low prospects of upward mobility and perceive prior declines over time in their living standards. Other grievances, including absolute deprivation, have no apparent effects on protest participation. These findings imply that it is not a lack of suffering that explains why fewer Africans are challenging the status quo than objective indicators of underdevelopment might lead one to expect; rather, Africans remain politically quiescent in part because they expect existing institutions and power configurations to serve them better in the future. This is admittedly counter-intuitive, because it suggests that Africans are not too oppressed and disenfranchised to challenge the status quo; they are too optimistic.

This chapter also offers a nuanced analysis of how protest participation correlates with different forms of inequality. Whereas Chapter 4 revealed an aggregate positive correlation between the Gini coefficient and the frequency of protest events, the present chapter shows that not all forms of inequality cause Africans to take to the streets. Low prospects of upward mobility (how one expects to fare economically in the future) and temporal relative deprivation (how one is faring today versus in the past) have greater mobilizing effects than egoistic relative deprivation (how one is faring relative to other individuals) and fraternal relative deprivation (how one's identity group is faring relative to other groups). This disaggregated analysis builds on Chapter 4 by highlighting subjective inequality (measured with surveys) as distinct from objective inequality (measured with the Gini coefficient).

The rest of the chapter proceeds as follows. Section 1 reviews theories about individual protest participation, including theories about different forms of inequality. Section 2 describes data and methods that I use to test hypotheses about protest participation in a sample of African countries. Section 3 presents results and robustness checks. The final section concludes.

## **5.1 Theories and Hypotheses**

This section reviews theories about protest participation and derives hypotheses from them. The theories fall into two categories: 1) collective action theories, which address Africans' ability to overcome barriers to coordination and cooperation problems, and 2) grievance theories, which address attitudes that spur Africans to act against the status quo. The hypotheses parallel those from the country-level analysis in Chapter 4, but with more focus more on the psychological mechanisms that link inequality and protest participation. They reflect the fact that not all individuals interpret or respond to objective income inequality in the same way. An advantage of Afrobarometer survey data over country-level economic and protest data is that survey data permit testing the individual-level implications of individual-level causal mechanisms.

### **5.1.1 Collective Action Theories**

As Chapter 2 documents, rural people are theoretically less likely than urbanites to assemble protests. First, rural people face cooperation problems: it is harder to police free-riders in large groups (Olson, 1971), and farmers tend

to be very large populations in most African countries. Second, rural people face coordination problems: they are geographically dispersed and excluded from technological or employment-based information networks (Bates, 1981). Moreover, rural people are geographically farther from the government, which is the typical target of protests in Africa. Hence,

H1: Rural people are less likely than urban people to participate in protests.

Addressing cooperation problems, Scacco (2007) finds that Nigerians who attend community meetings are more likely to participate in ethnic riots.<sup>2</sup> Using various tests, she shows that this relationship obtains not because rioters are already more likely to socialize or because community meetings drum up grievances, but rather because community meetings expose people to social networks that “pull” rioters to the front lines. By exerting social pressure that discourages free-riding (hence solving cooperation problems) and by facilitating the exchange of information (hence solving coordination problems), community meetings might likewise encourage protest participation:

H2: People who attend community meetings are more likely to participate in protests.

### 5.1.2 Grievance Theories

Theories about grievances acknowledge that Olsonian logic “provides an explanation for why people do not participate, but fares poorly in explaining

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<sup>2</sup>Although ethnic riots are violent whereas protests are relatively peaceful, potential rioters and potential protesters face similar barriers to collective action.



why people do participate” in protests (Klandermans, 2004, 363). Whereas most collective action theories focus on the ability of aggrieved people to stage protests, grievance theories spotlight frustration, aggression, and people’s desires to change the status quo. This literature argues that the ability to mount collective action is only relevant insofar as people want to act collectively in the first place. The most basic grievance theory is the theory of absolute deprivation, which the following hypothesis summarizes:

H3: People who perceive their living conditions to be bad are more likely to participate in protests.

The relative deprivation theory of protest gained prominence with the 1970 publication of Ted Robert Gurr’s *Why Men Rebel*. Gurr identified relative deprivation, or the disparity between “justifiable expectations” and “perceived value capabilities,” as a precondition of revolution. He viewed collective unrest as a function not of selective incentives or coerced cooperation, but of “the distribution of individual anger in society” (Abell and Jenkins, 1971, 85). In his later work, Gurr tested the hypothesis that grievances determine social groups’ propensity for protest and rebellion, estimating that communal grievances have a greater effect on mobilization than any variable besides lost autonomy (Gurr, 1993).

Recent studies have retested Gurr’s hypothesis that relative deprivation makes people more likely to protest. Some researchers estimate that relative deprivation has little or no effect on protest (Sayles, 2007), while others find that only certain types matter. Motivated by the theoretical literature distin-

guishing “egoistic” from “fraternal” relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976; Olson et al., 1995; Runciman, 1966), Dubé and Guimond (1983) and Walker and Mann (1987) find that personal discontent with one’s relative social position (egoistic relative deprivation) has less of an effect on protest behavior than an individual’s discontent with the social position of her or his identity group (fraternal relative deprivation). Some scholars also highlight “backward-looking framing effects,” whereby individuals assess their well-being relative to their own well-being in the past (Shapiro, 2002, 121). In short, the effects of relative deprivation on protest behavior are ambiguous and suggest several hypotheses:

H4: People who feel that they are less advantaged than other people are more likely to participate in protests. (Egoistic Relative Deprivation Hypothesis)

H5: People who feel that their social group is less advantaged than other social groups are more likely to participate in protests. (Fraternal Relative Deprivation Hypothesis)

H6: People who feel that their current living conditions are worse than their living conditions in the past are more likely to participate in protests. (Temporal Relative Deprivation Hypothesis)

The difference between “relative deprivation” and “inequality” is significant. Gurr’s definition of relative deprivation as the disparity between justifiable expectations and perceived value capabilities distinguishes relative deprivation—a subjective phenomenon—from objective inequality between in-

dividuals or groups. Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch (2001, 481) have more recently reiterated that perceptions of inequality are the critical mechanism linking structural disparities in income or consumption to contentious collective action: "...objective political and economic asymmetries can be transformed into grievances through a process of group comparison driven by collective emotions." As they note, this mechanism is emotional, and implicitly has different effects from person to person. In other words, grievances at the individual level are the key ingredient in protest, even if those grievances are about one's social group.

The individual subjectivity of economic grievances likely explains why social conflict does not always accompany objective inequality, even if it does on average (as the previous chapter showed). Research about support for redistributive policies in Latin America and OECD countries reveals that some people in objectively unequal societies perceive inequality as being fairly low, whereas some people in objectively egalitarian societies perceive inequality as being fairly high (Graham and Pettinato, 2002). Langer and Mikami (2012) detail why there is sometimes a mismatch between objective and subjective inequalities:

1. Manipulation of perceptions by elites: It can advantage political elites to rhetorically exaggerate horizontal (group-based) inequalities in order to cultivate loyalty among the members of an in-group. The perception of fraternal relative deprivation generates a shared interest in selecting a leader who will pursue redistribution on the group's behalf. The rhetoric of fraternal relative deprivation was common in Hutu propaganda against

Tutsis in the run-up to the Rwanda genocide (Stewart, 2002, 12).

2. Inaccurate media reporting: Even absent political manipulation, media might misreport the degree of inequality across individuals, groups, or regions. Journalists tend to sensationalize, and their source material and economic analysis are sometimes flawed (McLeod and Hertog, 1992).
3. Low access to information: Information on objective inequality is extremely scarce even for scholars with wide access to online databases. Poor people living in rural areas with limited communication infrastructure have even worse access to comprehensive measures of disparities in consumption, income, education, and other goods. In these conditions, the politics of inequality revolves almost exclusively around subjective inequality.
4. Community-specific indicators of inequality: Different communities have different indicators or “yardsticks” for measuring differences in well-being (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Local politicians, school teachers, religious officials, and other community leaders can focus community attention on differences in dress, assets, income, housing, and political representation. Objective measures of inequality, which often focus on a single dimension of well-being, thus tend to poorly reflect the most pronounced subjective inequalities in different locales.

“Egoistic relative deprivation” and “fraternal relative deprivation” are therefore distinct from their objective equivalents of “vertical inequality” and “horizontal inequality.” It is surprising that subjective deprivation has received

relatively little attention in the literature on inequality and collective action, given that “it is ultimately perceptions of reality that drive people to take certain actions or display certain behavior” (Langer and Smedts, 2013, 4). The analysis of individual-level survey data in this chapter tests the plausible hypothesis that subjective grievances about inequality, and not just inequality per se, motivate protest participation.

Finally, Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) pioneered the prospects of upward mobility (POUM) hypothesis, which states that people will be less inclined to resist the status quo if they expect their well-being to improve. Using a formal model, Bénabou and Ok (2001) illustrate that this theory is compatible with rational choice. Several studies have empirically corroborated the POUM hypothesis. Using survey data from Russia, Ravallion and Lokshin (2000) estimate that people with better expectations for their future welfare are less likely to support government limits on the incomes of the rich. This relationship held even if respondents’ incomes are below average. Alesina and La Ferrara (2004) similarly observe that Americans who believe that their families will experience improved living conditions are less likely to support redistribution. Checchi and Filippin (2003) conducted a laboratory experiment in which subjects chose levels of income redistribution after viewing simulations of how different tax rates might change their incomes over time. Respondents who saw a matrix depicting higher prospects of upward mobility consistently preferred lower tax rates.

Although earlier research has explored the effects of POUM on political preferences, it has generally ignored the effects of POUM on political behav-

ior. The relevance of the POUM hypothesis to the study of protest lies in the sources of grievances. Whereas relative deprivation theories attribute frustration to the disparity between a person's current well-being and the well-being of others, the POUM literature argues that grievances derive from the disparity between a person's current well-being and that person's projected future well-being. It contends that even the most objectively dismal living conditions will not necessarily fuel people's desire to challenge the state of affairs if people believe that they will become better off eventually.

H7: People with low prospects of upward mobility are more likely to participate in protests than people with high prospects of upward mobility.

## 5.2 Data and Methods

I test these seven hypotheses with an analysis of survey data from the Afrobarometer research group. Afrobarometer enumerators conducted four rounds of surveys in 20 African countries from 1999 to 2009, although not every country was surveyed every year, as evident from the information presented in Table 5.2. These surveys are nationally representative and include approximately one thousand respondents each. Because three of the four survey rounds included standard questions about each respondent's economic grievances and protest involvement, it is possible to analyze nearly 70,000 observations.

In addition to a large sample size, Afrobarometer data offer several advantages over the data that researchers typically use to study protests. First, because the enumerators employed random sampling procedures, these data

Table 5.2: Countries and Years Included in the Regression Analyses

| Country      | Years            | Observations |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Benin        | 2005, 2008       | 2,398        |
| Botswana     | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,600        |
| Burkina Faso | 2008             | 1,200        |
| Cape Verde   | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 3,788        |
| Ghana        | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 3,597        |
| Kenya        | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 4,780        |
| Lesotho      | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,561        |
| Liberia      | 2008             | 1,200        |
| Madagascar   | 2005, 2008       | 2,700        |
| Malawi       | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,600        |
| Mali         | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 3,759        |
| Mozambique   | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 3,798        |
| Namibia      | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,599        |
| Nigeria      | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 7,115        |
| Senegal      | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 3,600        |
| South Africa | 2002, 2006, 2008 | 7,200        |
| Tanzania     | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,735        |
| Uganda       | 2002, 2005, 2008 | 7,231        |
| Zambia       | 2003, 2005, 2008 | 3,598        |
| Zimbabwe     | 2004, 2005, 2009 | 3,352        |

avoid the pitfall of selection on the dependent variable that is prevalent in the literature. Second, analyzing individual-level data provides greater leverage on psychological theories about the links between grievances and protest behavior than analyzing protest events at the municipal or national level, or the protest behavior of groups (Bruhn, 2008).

The dataset has the disadvantage of over-representing democracies and Anglophone countries relative to the distribution of Anglophone and democratic countries in Africa. Among the 19 countries sampled, over half are democracies, six are partial democracies, and four are autocracies (Marshall and Jaggers, 2011). Thirteen of the countries use English as their primary

official language, while five use French and two use Portuguese. These distributions are not fully representative of Africa as a whole, where only 31 percent of countries are democratic and a minority Anglophone. I address this problem by including country-level fixed effects in all statistical models. This controls for heterogeneity across countries, thereby avoiding the omitted-variable bias that would result if variables such as regime type or national history were correlated with economic grievances and prospects of upward mobility. Including country dummies also controls for state capacity to intervene in protests, which Wilkinson (2004) argues can enter into potential protesters' decision calculus.

Below I estimate a logit regression model to analyze how key variables influence the likelihood that a survey respondent reports having participated in a demonstration or protest march.<sup>3</sup> A logit model accounts for the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable: respondents receive either a score of "1" if they say they have protested or "0" otherwise.<sup>4</sup> I also estimate versions of the models with time fixed effects to account for the sometimes dramatic variation from year to year in levels of grievances.<sup>5</sup> Regression results were robust to the omission of fixed effects.

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<sup>3</sup>A common concern about survey data on protest participation is that respondents will be unwilling to disclose politically sensitive information. Afrobarometer enumerators take care to ensure candid responses, including conducting surveys in private or semi-private settings. Nevertheless, it is impossible to discount the possibility that some responses were dishonest.

<sup>4</sup>Afrobarometer enumerators take care to ensure the confidentiality of interviews so that respondents feel comfortable divulging sensitive information about their political activities. Although it is still possible that respondents under-reported their protest participation, reporting bias should work against finding that the explanatory variables increase the chance of protest, and hence make any positive finding more convincing.

<sup>5</sup>For example, the percentage of Zimbabweans who expected their living conditions to worsen leapt from 21 percent to 84 percent between 2004 and 2005, likely because of a contested parliamentary election and the displacement of nearly 700,000 shanty dwellers in the government's Operation Murambatsvina (Vambe, 2008).



### 5.2.1 Variables

The dependent variable is Protest Participation, which is measured using respondents' answers to the following Afrobarometer survey question:

“Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance: Attended a demonstration or protest march?”

Response options included the following:

- No, would never do this.
- No, but would do if had the chance.
- Yes, once or twice.
- Yes, several times.
- Yes, often.
- Dont know.

Because the outcome of interest is protest participation (rather than the intention to protest) and because of the low response rate in several categories, I recoded responses into a dichotomous indicator of whether or not people said they had participated in a demonstration or protest march. Although one could argue that the intention to protest is qualitatively different from the resolve never to protest, any bias resulting from dichotomization should work against supporting my hypotheses.

Afrobarometer surveys also provided data for the following dichotomous independent variables:

- Rural: whether a respondent lives in a rural instead of an urban area.
- Attendance at Community Meetings: whether a respondent has attended a community meeting in the past year.
- Absolute Deprivation: whether a respondent considers her or his present living conditions to be either bad or very bad.
- Relative Deprivation (Egoistic): whether a respondent considers her or his living conditions to be worse than those of co-nationals.
- Relative Deprivation (Fraternal): whether a respondent considers the living conditions of her or his ethnic group to be worse than those of other ethnic groups in the country.
- Relative Deprivation (Temporal): whether a respondent considers her or his living conditions to be worse now than they were twelve months ago.
- Low Prospects of Upward Mobility (POUM): whether a respondent expects her or his living conditions to be worse in the future.

With the exception of Rural and Attendance at Community Meetings, all independent variables capture how respondents perceive their living conditions or prospects of upward mobility.<sup>6</sup> Subjective measures of well-being have two advantages over objective measures such as caloric consumption: they offer a

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<sup>6</sup>These variables are not highly correlated, so including them in the model does not compromise the estimation.

glimpse into the psychology of potential protesters; and they account for the gaps that researchers have observed between people's subjective and objective levels of deprivation (Graham and Pettinato, 2002, 239) and the weak relationship between objective deprivation and protest (Ford and Moore, 1970; Jiobu, 1974; Lieske, 1978; Spilerman, 1970). Bratton and van de Walle (1992, 430) agree that "it is ultimately misleading to interpret political protest in strictly economic terms," because "there is little correlation between the intensity of political unrest, on the one hand, and the severity of economic conditions or austerity measures, on the other." Afrobarometer data verify the lack of correlation between subjective and objective measures of deprivation. Some of the countries in which low prospects of upward mobility are relatively prevalent, including Senegal and South Africa, have relatively high levels of economic and human development (Table 5.3). Conversely, people are more optimistic about their future living conditions in extremely underdeveloped and conflict-stricken countries such as Zimbabwe and Liberia. Education might explain the variation across countries in prospects of upward mobility, because education might condition young people's early expectations about career prospects. For this reason, regression analyses control for education.

The graph in Figure 5.1 illustrates the appropriateness of focusing on subjective grievances. It plots protest participation rates in African countries against countries' income per capita, which is a common, albeit rough, objective measure of well-being. Based on theories about grievances and protest, the relationship is counter-intuitive: protest participation increases as countries become richer. There is also wide variation in protest rates among coun-

Table 5.3: Grievances by Country (% Affirmative Response)

| Variable     | Absolute Deprivation                          | Relative Deprivation (Egoistic) | Relative Deprivation (Fraternal)         | Relative Deprivation (Temporal)    | Low POUM                                       |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Description  | Present living conditions “bad” or “very bad” | Worse off than others           | Ethnic group worse off than other groups | Past living conditions were better | Expect living conditions to be worse in a year |
| Benin        | 61  | 40                              | 42                                       | 29                                 | 20   |
| Botswana     | 53  | 45                              | 24                                       | 31                                 | 19   |
| Cape Verde   | 27  | 30                              | 25                                       | 28                                 | 4  |
| Ghana        | 49  | 32                              | 36                                       | 48                                 | 9  |
| Kenya        | 66  | 51                              | 48                                       | 21                                 | 47   |
| Lesotho      | 75  | 51                              | 19                                       | 20                                 | 44   |
| Madagascar   | 42  | 32                              | 14                                       | 30                                 | 17   |
| Malawi       | 55  | 44                              | 55                                       | 42                                 | 29   |
| Mali         | 57  | 32                              | 30                                       | 39                                 | 9  |
| Mozambique   | 32  | 36                              | 34                                       | 41                                 | 8  |
| Namibia      | 38  | 38                              | 30                                       | 36                                 | 13   |
| Nigeria      | 31  | 29                              | 29                                       | 51                                 | 5  |
| Senegal      | 68  | 38                              | 22                                       | 23                                 | 37   |
| South Africa | 43  | 34                              | 34                                       | 30                                 | 30   |
| Tanzania     | 54  | 52                              | 48                                       | 26                                 | 39   |
| Uganda       | 52  | 54                              | 56                                       | 26                                 | 32   |
| Zambia       | 58  | 46                              | 21                                       | 35                                 | 31   |
| Zimbabwe     | 46  | 38                              | 22                                       | 66                                 | 6  |
| Burkina Faso | 49  | 33                              | 29                                       | 52                                 | 10   |
| Liberia      | 50  | 34                              | 23                                       | 39                                 | 15   |
| Total        | 49  | 39                              | 33                                       | 36                                 | 21   |

Source: Afrobarometer 2009.

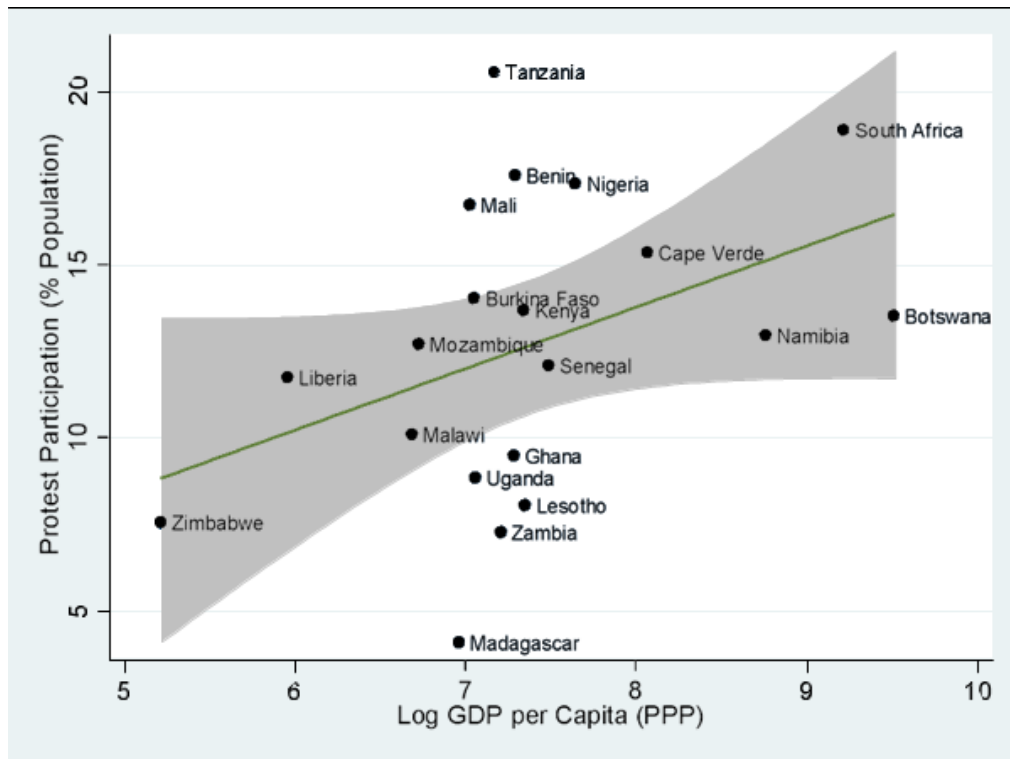


Figure 5.1: Protest and Income

Note: Shaded regions denote the 95% confidence interval.

tries with middling incomes per capita, indicating that aggregate, objective indicators of prosperity tell very little about how many people will protest.

The statistical model also includes the following control variables:

1. Contact with Religious Leaders: Scheve and Stasavage (2006) show that religion and social insurance are substitute mechanisms for coping with adversity. I therefore control for whether respondents have recently contacted a religious leader “about some important problem” or to share their views. This variable is more appropriate than alternative measures of religiosity like self-reported piety or attendance at religious services,

because it directly gauges the extent to which people turn to religion specifically to solve their problems. Although I expect this variable to show a negative relationship to protest participation, contact with religious leaders could also promote protest if religious leaders act as political entrepreneurs by providing “mobilization goods”—such as means of communication and selective incentives—that facilitate collective action.

2. State Legitimacy: In an analysis using earlier rounds of Afrobarometer data, Kirwin and Cho (2009) find that people were more likely to say they had protested if they regarded the state as illegitimate: “Without positive perceptions about state legitimacy, people do not believe that they ought to follow rules or commands issued by their state. As legitimacy of the government decreases individuals become increasingly less likely to follow the rule of law which could lead to higher levels of violence” (Kirwin and Cho, 2009, 7). Consistent with Kirwin and Cho’s coding rules, I measure state legitimacy with a composite score from 3 to 15 based on how strongly respondents agreed with the following statements:

- (a) The courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by.
- (b) The police always have the right to make people obey the law.
- (c) The tax department always has the right to make people pay taxes.

3. Sex: In Sub-Saharan Africa, men are more visible in political life than women and, presumably, more likely to join protests. I therefore include

a dummy variable that takes a value of “1” if the respondent is female and “0” if the respondent is male.

4. Age: In Africa’s independence and pro-democracy movements, students and other young people were often the most active protesters. In general, youth tend to be free from family and occupational obligations that deter people from protesting. I therefore control for age, with the expectation that younger people will be more likely to participate in protests than older people.
5. Education: Although Schussman and Soule (2005) find no influence of education on protest participation in the United States, Sears and McConahay (1970) find systematically higher education levels among participants in the Watts riots as compared to non-rioters. Studying Africa, Kirwin and Cho (2009) observe that education has a significant and positive effect on protest participation (which they suspect is because better educated people are more politically aware than less educated people). Afrobarometer data allow me to categorize respondents according to the highest level of education they have completed: no formal schooling, primary school, secondary school, or post-secondary school.

### 5.3 Results

Using data from 20 African countries from 1999 to 2009, I test the aforementioned seven hypotheses about the determinants of protest participation in Africa. Results appear in Table 5.4. Validating findings by Scacco (2007), peo-

ple who attend community meetings are more likely to participate in protests (as indicated by the significance coefficient for Attended Community Meeting). This effect is both statistically and substantively significant: controlling for the other variables in the model, attendance at community meetings increases protest propensity approximately threefold. This effect is greater than the estimated effect of any grievance, suggesting that collective action theories explain more about protest behavior than grievance theories.

Regression estimates do not produce statistically significant coefficients for Absolute Deprivation, Relative Deprivation (Egoistic), or Relative Deprivation (Fraternal). These results fail to support the hypotheses that people are more likely to protest if they 1) perceive themselves to be poor in absolute terms, 2) perceive themselves to be poor relative to their peers, or 3) perceive their identity group to be poor relative to other identity groups. These findings run against the conventional wisdom that poor people are more likely to rise up in demand for redistribution and that conflict in Africa stems from ethnic rivalries.

Respondents are more likely to report having protested if they feel that their well-being has deteriorated over time. Holding all other variables at their mean values, respondents who feel that their living conditions are worse today than they were a year ago are about two percent more likely to say they had attended a demonstration or protest, all else equal.

In assessing the costs and potential gains of protesting, people look to the future, as well as to the past. Having low prospects of upward mobility versus high prospects of upward mobility is associated with slightly more than a two-



Table 5.4: Logit Model of Protest Participation in Africa, 1999-2009

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Rural   | <b>0.059</b>  |
|   | (0.028)       |
| Absolute Deprivation                          | 0.025         |
|   | (0.026)       |
| Relative Deprivation (Egoistic)               | -0.033        |
|   | (0.027)       |
| Relative Deprivation (Fraternal)              | 0.014         |
|   | (0.027)       |
| Relative Deprivation (Temporal)               | <b>0.076</b>  |
|   | (0.025)       |
| Low POUM                                      | <b>0.093</b>  |
|   | (0.032)       |
| Contacted Religious Leader                    | <b>0.377</b>  |
|   | (0.024)       |
| Attended Community Meeting                    | <b>1.420</b>  |
|   | (0.032)       |
| State Legitimacy                              | <b>-0.025</b> |
|   | (0.004)       |
| Female  | <b>-0.291</b> |
|   | (0.024)       |
| Age   | <b>-0.013</b> |
|   | (0.001)       |
| Primary Education (vs. No Formal Schooling)   | <b>0.170</b>  |
|   | (0.041)       |
| Secondary Education (vs. No Formal Schooling) | <b>0.438</b>  |
|   | (0.042)       |
| Post-Secondary Education (vs. No Schooling)   | <b>0.761</b>  |
|   | (0.048)       |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                | 0.092         |
| N   | 67,922        |

Logit estimates using country and year fixed effects, with standard errors in parentheses. Bold type indicates statistical significance at the 1% level or better. Data are from Afrobarometer (2002-2009).

percent net increase in the probability that a respondent says she or he has participated in a protest. Although this increase is small in magnitude relative to the effects of attendance at community meetings, it is consistent with the theory that grievances about present circumstances will have less bearing on policy preferences if people anticipate changes in their standards of living: one's present self might be better off under a different political economy, but the same might not be true of one's future self. Like stock traders who adjust their behavior based on expectations about future market trends, Africans seem to be refraining from protest because they anticipate improvements in their living conditions.

All but one of the coefficients for the control variables are significant and in the expected directions. The only surprise is that the coefficient for Rural is positive and statistically significant, indicating that rural dwellers are more likely than urbanites to protest. This runs against the hypothesis that urbanites are better able to surmount collective action problems due to their dense living arrangements and superior access to communication technology. However, the unexpected result might stem from measurement error: labor migration patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa have long blurred the lines between rural and urban communities, making rural identity hard to define (First, 1983; Seddon and Zeilig, 2005). It might also be that urbanites systematically under-report protest involvement for fear of police action.

In sum, the above results imply that both grievances and opportunity are important for mobilizing Africans to protest. First, the results show that Africans who care about certain issues are more likely to protest, all else equal.

Contrary to journalists' assumptions that "empty bellies bring rising anger" (Lacey, 2008), the most politically salient grievance in Africa is apparently not absolute deprivation, but rather relative deprivation in two forms: temporal relative deprivation and prospects of upward mobility. However, attendance at community meetings has a larger net effect than any other variable on whether or not a respondent protested. This implies that the absence of protests in certain African contexts does not necessarily reflect a lack of grievances, but rather a lack of social networks to help would-be protesters surmount collective action problems. As protest theories note, grievances may be widespread despite the infrequency of uprisings (Corning and Myers, 2002; Scacco, 2008).

### **5.3.1 Robustness**

The large number of observations in the Afrobarometer dataset allows me to run separate regressions for each country to see whether any individual cases are driving the observed relationships between grievances and protest participation. The statistical results in Table 5.5 reveal that not all countries in the sample display a positive relationship between protest and low prospects of upward mobility or temporal relative deprivation. Countries that do display these relationships exhibit effects of different magnitudes. For instance, low prospects of upward mobility have over twice the estimated effect on protest behavior in Liberia as they have in Nigeria. In Burkina Faso, people who feel that their living situations have declined over time are surprisingly less likely to protest than people who do not perceive declines in their well-being.

These results may be artefacts of small sample sizes in each individual

country. Nevertheless, it is possible that the particular grievances that become salient in a given society depend on national narratives (such as “the American Dream,” which emphasizes prospects of upward mobility) or on how political entrepreneurs discursively frame grievances (for example, opposition candidates may try to convince voters that economic conditions have worsened under the incumbent’s tenure). It is also possible that shared experiences of economic fluctuations raise people’s sensitivity to prospective and retrospective changes in economic conditions. Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, and Nigeria have volatile economies that are sometimes depressed and other times on the upswing (Aryeetey and Urdu, 2000; MacFarlan and Sgherri, 2001; Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, 2001; Pitcher, 2002; Kraus, 2002). Adults in these four countries have thus witnessed economic fluctuations that could make them focus on how their economic situations have changed over time or might change in the future. Compare this with life in Niger, Guinea, or Zimbabwe, where the economy is more predictably bad and where expectations about one’s economic situation may consequently be relatively stable and less politically mobilizing.

These explanations are largely speculative, as there is no conspicuous reason why low prospects of upward mobility would be more salient in Botswana, Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria than elsewhere in Africa. Despite sharing the experience of fluctuating economies, these four countries are quite diverse: They are located in different regions of Africa, have different colonial histories, and exhibit different levels of political competition. Ethnographic studies and research on national culture—including literature, music, and oral traditions—

Table 5.5: Logit Models of POUM and Temporal RD Effects by Country

| Country      | Low POUM | Relative Deprivation (Temporal) |
|--------------|----------|---------------------------------|
| Benin        | -0.143   | 0.443***                        |
| Botswana     | 0.324*** | 0.020                           |
| Burkina Faso | 0.530*   | -0.394**                        |
| Cape Verde   | 0.050    | 0.150                           |
| Ghana        | 0.378**  | 0.061                           |
| Kenya        | -0.178   | 0.112                           |
| Lesotho      | 0.340**  | -0.024                          |
| Liberia      | 0.755*** | 0.125                           |
| Madagascar   | -0.283   | -0.147                          |
| Malawi       | -0.008   | 0.260**                         |
| Mali         | -0.035   | 0.034                           |
| Mozambique   | 0.333**  | 0.180*                          |
| Namibia      | 0.090    | 0.091                           |
| Nigeria      | 0.296*** | -0.040                          |
| Senegal      | 0.181    | 0.171                           |
| South Africa | -0.081   | 0.143**                         |
| Tanzania     | 0.117    | 0.005                           |
| Uganda       | -0.058   | 0.195***                        |
| Zambia       | -0.246   | 0.122                           |
| Zimbabwe     | -0.047   | -0.204                          |

“Low POUM” stands for “low prospects of upward mobility.” “Relative Deprivation (Temporal)” refers to whether a respondent considers her or his living conditions to be worse now than they were twelve months earlier. \* denotes significance at the 10% level, \*\* at the 5% level, and \*\*\* at the 1% level.

will be necessary to more thoroughly analyze why different grievances become salient in different countries.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Complementing research on the incidence of protests, this chapter examined variation in protest participation at the individual level. Regression

analyses of Afrobarometer survey data revealed that some grievances mobilize protest participation more than others do. Contrary to popular expectations, Africans' perceived levels of absolute deprivation do not have a measurable correlation with the likelihood of protesting, whereas perceived levels of relative deprivation do. Furthermore, only some forms of relative deprivation are politically salient. Survey respondents are more likely to have protested, all else equal, if they have low prospects of upward mobility or if they feel that their living conditions have deteriorated in recent months. I find no support for ethnic explanations of African protests, as the regression coefficient for "fraternal relative deprivation" is statistically insignificant. Finally, attendance at community meetings does correlate with protest participation, implying that grievances alone are not enough to mobilize collective action. The proceeding chapters, featuring a case study of protest participation in Niger, further explore the mechanisms whereby social networks mobilize protests. They also present additional tests of the hypothesis that Africans are more likely to protest when they perceive their economic opportunities as contracting instead of expanding.

## **Part III**

### **The Roots of the 2009-2010**

### **Uprisings in Niger**

This part of the dissertation adds micro-level perspective to the macro-level studies of Part II. It examines whether political or economic grievances were the main driver of the 2009-2010 mass demonstrations in Niger, which occurred at a time of famine and the president's attempt to defy the constitution and seek a third term in office. Using original survey data from a quasi-random sample of Niamey residents, I show that low prospects of upward mobility are associated with a higher likelihood of protest participation, whereas opposition to the president's anti-constitutional politics is not. Membership in civic organizations is also associated with higher protest participation, but not because these groups are effective at framing the issues: what matters is the capacity of organizations to mobilize individuals. This suggests that civil society<sup>7</sup> may have a galvanizing effect on citizens, even if efforts to win hearts and minds fail. The study reveals that the uprisings were driven mainly by economic grievances, thus contradicting international perceptions of the protests as a public cry for democracy and casting doubt on the motivations behind supposedly pro-democracy movements, especially in contexts where autocracy and poverty coincide.

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<sup>7</sup>There are many definitions of civil society, but a common one in the African politics literature is "the public space between the household and the state" (Azarya, 1994, 88).



## Chapter 6

# Individual Grievances and Collective Action in Niger: Introduction to the Case Study

What motivates people to join a protest? Might the motivations of most participants in a given protest differ from the “master narratives” of prominent scholars, journalists, and even protest organizers themselves?<sup>1</sup> I address these questions by analyzing original survey data from Niger, a transitional regime that recently underwent simultaneous economic and political upheaval. In seeking to distinguish between “economic” and “democratic” motivations, I start from the assumption that assessments of the quality of democracy are not solely motivated by economic considerations. Although it is possible that people equate democracy and material gains, Bratton and Mattes (2001) find

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<sup>1</sup>I echo Beissinger (2013), who posed similar questions regarding participation in Ukraine’s 2004 Orange Revolution.

that in reality the majority of Africans do not value democracy for instrumental reasons; rather, they understand democracy in terms of the political rights that it confers. I adopt this procedural definition of democracy and extend Bratton and Mattes' analysis to explore the possibility that some participants in Niger's pro-democracy movement had separate economic motivations. I also examine why people choose to protest rather than pursue other forms of resistance or remain apathetic.

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for the systematic analysis of survey data that appears in the next chapter. I provide the intuition behind my finding in Chapter 7 that Nigerien protesters are motivated by several grievances, but first and foremost by concerns over material conditions. I also build on preceding chapters, in which I demonstrated at the country and individual levels that protest in Africa correlates with economic grievances and opportunities to overcome collective action problems through social networks. These findings painted a picture that is different from conventional portrayals of African conflicts as being mainly about ethnicity (Annett, 2000; Esteban and Ray, 2011; Muller, 2008; Rothchild, 1997; Taras and Ganguly, 2006; Adekanye, 1995; Reynal-Querol, 2002; Collier, 1998). Ethnic divisions have not replaced pronounced material inequalities and low prospects of upward mobility.

The evident primacy of economic grievances also contradicts recent portrayals of African conflicts as part of a global pro-democracy movement. A spate of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2009 drew renewed attention to protests south of the Sahara, with onlookers declaring that southern unrest reflected a "democratic fervor" emanating from the north

(Sly, 2011; Gelvin, 2012). After popular pressures unseated autocrats in Egypt and Tunisia, protests broke out in Sudan, Uganda, Burkina Faso, and many other countries (Clark, 2012; Harsch, 2012; Manji and Ekine, 2012). Some of the demonstrators cited the Arab Spring as their inspiration, leading Ernest Harsch, a senior scholar of African protests, to interpret the events as “the contagion of revolution” and “an African Spring in the making” (Harsch, 2012). Journalists and activists concurred that Africans were now rising up because they had finally mustered the “the courage to invent the future” of democratic governance (Manji and Ekine, 2012).

The “African awakening” of 2009-2011 (Manji and Ekine, 2012) was reminiscent of the wave of democratization that swept Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. During that decade, 19 of the African countries that instituted multi-party politics held their first-ever competitive elections, and in many cases democratic reform came in the wake of demonstrations led by labor unions and student organizations. Although many of Africa’s new democracies remain weak and some have reverted to authoritarianism (Kapstein and Converse, 2008), research suggests that the constraints on heads of state have tightened for good (Posner and Young, 2007). Staffan Lindberg asserts that elections in Sub-Saharan Africa, even if not perfectly free and fair, have promoted democratic behavior among rulers and “democratic culture” among citizens (Lindberg, 2006). This might explain why Africans seem ready to defend their hard-won democracies against abuses of executive power. Leaders seeking extra-constitutional means of extending their terms in office, such as Guinea’s Dadis Camara and Niger’s Mamadou Tandja, often face public

outrage and coup attempts.

However, transitional regimes<sup>2</sup> with high protest participation rates tend to have other characteristics—such as bad economies and young populations—that could also account for uprisings. They are also often subject to foreign donors’ conditions of democratic and market reforms. It could be that some or most of the people who join pro-democracy movements see a political opening to pursue material gains, especially amid austerity measures that constrict social programs and public employment opportunities. If “democratic fervor” is weaker than it appears, then optimism regarding the prospects for democratic consolidation in Sub-Saharan Africa could be misplaced.

My analysis underscores the tendency for people to express multifarious grievances in the common behavior of protest participation. Goldstone (1994, 148) observes that “in both social movements and revolutions most groups are motivated by specific goals for that group, rather than the ‘general good’ or the overthrow of the regime.” Groups that form for the express purpose of challenging a regime, such as guerrilla organizations and vanguard parties, are unusual. Instead, most groups that mobilize during protests are pre-existing bodies such as mosques, student associations, and labor unions (Goldstone, 1994, 148). The members of these groups may have grievances that are only loosely connected with dominant protest narratives, as was the case when Ukrainians joined the 2004 Orange Revolution en masse despite surveys showing that protesters shared no commitment to basic democratic

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<sup>2</sup>In contrast with stable democracies, new democracies, and stable non-democracies, transitional regimes “have experienced a major change in regimes, but are currently coded as only partly free or unfree.” For details on transitional regimes, see Mishler and Rose (2001, 308).

values (Beissinger, 2013, 9). Ukraine's so-called democratic revolutionaries were a diverse coalition of people who were upset over issues ranging from living standards to concerns about generational mobility (Beissinger, 2013, 12). It is reasonable to expect that protesters in Arab and Sub-Saharan African countries have similarly diverse motives.

In decomposing the grievances driving protest participation, I build on the literature about protest in Africa, which offers rich descriptions of specific social movements but not systematic explanations for why some people protest and others do not. For instance, Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel's collection of essays on social movements in Sub-Saharan Africa (2009) opens with a comprehensive review of theories about protest participation, but subsequent chapters consist of case studies that do not rigorously test those theories or explore beneath the surface of collective action. Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel's collection on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa (2011) follows a similar format. The literature on protest in Africa also has a limited substantive focus, as much of it concentrates on post-colonial movements (Crummey, 1986; Freund, 1984; Schmidt, 2005) or on pro-democracy movements of the 1990s (Bratton, 1994; Diseko, 1992; Harsch, 1993; Lange, 1999; Smith, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The first section describes protests in Niger in 2009 and 2010 that followed Mamadou Tandja's attempt to change the constitution and outstay his presidential mandate. The second section details the context of these events, identifying aspects of Niger's

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<sup>3</sup>For an exception, see Resnick and Casale (2011).

political history, ethnic make-up, and economy that might have generated grievances leading people to protest. The final section describes Nigerien civil society and the social networks that give voice to popular grievances.

## 6.1 The Uprisings of 2009-2010

Former army officer Mamadou Tandja became Niger's president in late 1999 through elections that international observers widely deemed to be free and fair, raising hopes that he would finally reverse decades of economic and political turmoil. During his early years in office, Niger returned to civilian rule after decades of military control, underwent government decentralization, and held municipal elections. Tandja was freely elected to a second term in 2004 while pledging to revitalize an economy in the grip of a dire food shortage.

Tandja belied his early promise by failing to alleviate hunger that peaked with a locust infestation and severe drought in 2005. Under his watch, thousands of children died and malnutrition reached 13.4 percent in some regions. USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network estimated that 2.7 million Nigeriens were highly to extremely food insecure, with an additional 5.1 million people at risk for moderate food insecurity (Tsai, 2010). Tandja forbade public debate on the emergency and accused journalists covering the topic of being anti-patriotic (Nossiter, 2009). The foreign media nonetheless criticized him for denying Niger's urgent need for relief and for refusing to distribute grain from state warehouses (Nossiter, 2009).

Tandja flouted opprobrium and announced in 2008 that he would seek

a third term in office to, as he put it, “satisfy the popular will” and “finish some projects” (Baudais and Chauzal, 2011; Miller, 2011). In 2009 he launched a public relations campaign to raise support for a referendum on revising the constitution’s two-term limit. This attempt, known as tazartché (or “continuity” in Hausa), prompted lawmakers and judges to invoke Article 49 of the constitution, which prohibits referenda on constitutional amendments. Tandja defiantly dissolved the National Assembly and began ruling by decree, effectively dismantling the democratic institutions established at the National Conference of 1991. He eventually held and won a purportedly fraudulent referendum to change the constitution, mocking renewed condemnation from the international community (*“Freedom in the World 2012 - Niger”*, 2012). Opposition groups boycotted the vote, denying legitimacy to the ruling MNSD party’s sweep of local and parliamentary elections and the 92.5 percent of ballots cast in favor of the constitutional revision (Miller, 2011, 45).

After the referendum, around 10 thousand anti-government protesters streamed into the streets of the capital and labor unions declared a 48-hour nationwide strike (*“Thousands Rally in Support of Niger Coup”*, 2010; *“Thousands Demonstrate to Back Niger President”*, 2009). The government dispersed crowds with tear gas (*“Tear Gas Disperses Niger Protest”*, 2009) and declared strikes illegal (*“Strikes over Referendum Declared Illegal”*, 2009), drawing sharp criticism from diplomats and regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While reprimanding Tandja, foreign governments were also quick to praise the protesters and striking workers as defenders of democracy. A former United States ambas-

sador to South Africa and Nigeria implored the international community “to commend the Nigeriens for continuing in this fight to sustain and return democracy to Niger” (“*Ecowas to Meet over Niger as Protests Continue*”, 2010). Painting Nigeriens as democratic revolutionaries, foreign journalists published quotes from opposition members admonishing Tandja and denouncing tazartché. “This isn’t good at all for democracy,” reported a Nigerien street vendor to *The New York Times*. “We don’t want a president for life here. Yes, democracy is in serious, serious trouble.” Another vendor put things more bluntly, and in terms that hinted at the multiplicity of grievances driving the protests: “Tazartché is no good. The country doesn’t agree with it. There’s nothing to eat, and there are loads of problems” (Nossiter, 2009).

On 18 February 2010 an army faction calling itself the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy stormed the presidential palace during a cabinet meeting, seized Tandja, and dissolved the government. The faction consisted of four colonels, including leader Salou Djibo, who appeared on television late the same night and announced their intention to “make Niger an example of democracy and good governance” and to “save Niger and its population from poverty, deception and corruption” (Perry, 2010). They promised to address food insecurity and to hold free and fair elections, using rhetoric that was “eminently well adapted to international democratic standards” (Baudais and Chauzal, 2011, 299). “What we did was in the best interest of Niger,” military leader Harouna Djibrilla Amadou reassured citizens. “We ask you to stay calm, we’re here for you, we’re listening and we assure you that we will never let you down” (“*Thousands Rally in Support of Niger Coup*”, 2010).



True to their word, the junta leaders held elections nine months later and ceded power to the winners. Although Niger's military had its detractors, including United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (*"Deploring Coup in Niger, Ban Calls for Peaceful Resolution"*, 2010), the international community overwhelmingly regarded Tandja's ouster as a "corrective coup" that had restored some semblance of democracy to Niger (Baudais and Chauzal, 2011; Barnett, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Thousands of Nigeriens again poured into the streets of Niamey, this time to celebrate Tandja's ouster (*"It Seems Popular, So Far"*, 2013). Ali Adrissi, the president of a coalition of Nigerien NGOs, alluded to democratic values in his cautious praise of the coup: "As democratic people, we can't cheer a military coup d'état. But in reality, deep down, we are cheering it. For us, it's a good coup d'état" (Armstrong, 2010). Opposition spokesman Bazoum Mohamed was more candid: "We say thank you to the junta for their intervention. We are for the restoration of democracy and we are committed to joining the army in this mission" (*"Thousands Rally in Support of Niger Coup"*, 2010). The public reaction to the coup reinforced the image of Nigeriens as committed democrats and of Niger as "a compelling test case for the viability of meaningful democracy in the poorest countries" (Davis and Kossomi, 2001, 87).

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<sup>4</sup>For a counter-argument, see Miller (2011) on "Debunking the Myth of the 'Good' Coup d'Etat in Africa."

## 6.2 Decomposing Grievances surrounding the Uprisings

The uprisings had an apparent catalyst in the autocratic maneuvers of Mamadou Tandja. Viewed in the broader context of Niger's history, though, they could have stemmed from any combination of grievances about politics, social cleavages, and economics. Since achieving independence from France in 1960, Niger has endured political instability, ethnic-based inequality, and extreme economic underdevelopment. This section of the chapter details three possible sources of public dissatisfaction expressed in the mass protests of 2009 and 2010.

First, it could be that many Nigeriens harbored latent frustration with half a century of unaccountable leaders and democratic backsliding; Tandja was not an aberration, but merely the latest in a long line of autocrats. This interpretation would be consistent with the assumption that the protesters were democratic revolutionaries defending the constitution on principle.

An alternative explanation for the uprisings is that ethnic antipathies earned Tandja rivals who sought to replace him with a co-ethnic ally—a scenario that would square with conventional wisdom about the ethnic roots of conflict in Africa. Niger's experience recalls a coup in nearby Guinea one year earlier in which ethnic minorities removed a president of the dominant Sousou group.

A third possibility is that Tandja's actions coincided with mounting economic grievances that were ripe for opposition leaders to exploit. In 2009,

the food emergency of 2005 was still fresh in citizens' minds. Even if protest organizers had grievances that were chiefly political, they may have succeeded in recruiting thousands of protesters thanks to general pessimism about the prospects of material gains under existing rulers and institutions.

It is, of course, likely that all categories of grievances—political, ethnic, and economic—were present in society simultaneously and even overlapped in the minds of individual protesters. The goal of this chapter and of the next is to investigate which grievances were most salient in the uprisings of 2009-2010.

### **6.2.1 Sources of Political Grievances**

History was repeating itself in 2009. Since national independence in 1960, the Republic of Niger has had seven constitutions, two long periods of rule by decree, and four military coups. Tandja mirrored the country's first president Hamani Diori, as much as he tried to distinguish himself from his Gallophile counterpart by displacing French nuclear power companies with Chinese-operated uranium mines (Burgis, 2010). Diori succumbed to a welcomed putsch in 1974, largely because of his closeness with Niger's former colonial rulers, but also because of his autocratic leanings and inattention to near-famine conditions especially in rural regions. Niger's first constitution conferred on him virtually absolute executive power (Raynal, 1993), which Diori wielded for seemingly every purpose except to address a three-year drought that had plunged the country into misery. Historical accounts of Diori's downfall are interchangeable with recent accounts of Tandja's final days in office: "Obvious as the drought problem in general was as a factor for

instability for Diori's régime, of greater political damage was the not only incompetent, but blatantly corrupt handling of the relief aid by members of the [ruling party]" (Higgott and Fuglestad, 1975, 390). In a damning postscript to Diori's overthrow, inspectors uncovered 3,000 tons of grain that the president had been hoarding in warehouses while waiting for prices to rise (Higgott and Fuglestad, 1975, 390). This history bears resemblance to reports of Tandja's refusal to distribute grain stores in the darkest hours of Niger's 2005 hunger crisis (Nossiter, 2009).

Diori's successors, including Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché (in office 1974-1987) and Colonel Ali Saïbou (in office 1987-1993), made few democratic concessions or economic improvements. Saïbou's most significant legacy was founding the National Movement for a Developing Society (MNSD) as the country's sole legal political party. Under the eventual helm of Mamadou Tandja, the MNSD would outlast several coups, constitutional revisions, and the institution of multi-party politics in 1990.

On 8 February 1990, students in Niamey boycotted classes to protest structural adjustment measures that threatened school budgets and a long-standing system of automatic public-sector employment for graduates (Gervais, 1995). The civil disobedience reached a turning point when government troops opened fire on a crowd of students marching toward the John F. Kennedy Bridge that spans the Niger River. The bridge, which the United States financed during the Cold War to cultivate support for western liberalism (Bloise, 2001), became on that day a monument to home-grown democracy forged in the blood of three unarmed student protesters. The Saïbou regime, despite paying lip

service to democracy with theatrical elections in 1989, showed its autocratic proclivities in the heavily publicized massacre.

The event that would become known as Black Friday opened the floodgates to a pro-democracy movement (Ibrahim, 1999*b*, 194). Niger's first independent newspaper, *Haske*, launched four months later and shattered the regime's veneer of popularity. The Union of Syndicates and Workers of Niger (USTN) awoke from three decades of government co-optation and "responsible participation" to stage a general strike and the largest public demonstration since anti-colonial protests of the 1950s (Ibrahim, 1999*b*, 194). Openly challenging the ruling party for the first time, the USTN recruited an estimated 100,000 protesters to file through Niamey chanting, "Down with the IMF," "Down with the Second Republic," and "Down with Whiskey" (referring to President Saïbou's drinking habit) (Ibrahim, 1994).

Saïbou finally acquiesced to demands for a constitutional overhaul. A national conference convened on 29 July 1991, lasting almost 100 days and involving 1,200 representatives from the incumbent government, nascent opposition parties, labor unions, student groups, and civil society (Moestrup, 1999).<sup>5</sup> The participants adopted semi-presidential government and a proportional representation electoral system that accommodated a national assembly of nine parties, six of which formed a majority coalition. The beleaguered MNSD emerged with 29 seats as the largest opposition party, although its disgraced founder Ali Saïbou surrendered leadership (Moestrup, 1999).

The transformation of the MNSD "from an authoritarian sole party to

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<sup>5</sup>This was one of many national conferences that took place in West Africa during the 1990s (Robinson, 1994; Nzouankeu, 1993; Heilbrunn, 1993).

an effective player in the democratic game” and back again paralleled Mamadou Tandja’s political transformation (Ibrahim and Souley, 1998, 152). A former colonel in the Kountché regime, Tandja climbed party ranks as a well-connected businessman and an attractive alternative to the party’s other heir apparent, Adamou Djermakoye. Djermakoye had also served in the Kountché administration, but in a very different capacity from Tandja, as a member of the Zarma ethnic group’s reigning oligarchy. Tandja won the biggest endorsement in MNSD succession deliberations because he was from neither of Niger’s dominant Zarma and Hausa groups. This positioned him to broker ethnic cooperation within an already fracturing party whose very survival hinged on cohesion.

The MNSD’s gamble paid off. In the post-Saïbou era, Tandja restored not only cohesion, but also the party’s active role in politics. He made a bid for the presidency in elections following the National Conference, winning the initial round of votes but not the run-off. Playing by the rules of Niger’s fledgling democracy and foreshadowing nothing about his future ploys, he congratulated Mahamane Ousmane on the victory, even ignoring his own party’s nudging to contest the results. This earned Tandja international kudos and allowed the MNSD to remain a viable opposition player throughout the rule of the AFC coalition. Biding his time, Tandja became the savior of the MNSD, in one instance even deploying his military prowess to fight back an armed attack on the party’s campaign caravan (Ibrahim and Souley, 1998, 151).

Tandja was an inveterate opportunist and took advantage of a fissure in the government to advance his party’s political position and his own. In Septem-

ber 1994, President Ousmane stripped nearly all powers from Prime Minister Mahamadou Issoufou amid personal disagreements, violating a constitutional provision for power sharing. The prime minister swiftly resigned and retaliated by withdrawing from the AFC coalition and defecting to the MNSD despite having battled the opposition for years. This was a boon to Tandja both as MNSD chief and as a presidential hopeful, because it loosened the AFC's hold on the parliamentary majority and eroded Ousmane's legitimacy. Foreseeing a political opening, Tandja redoubled his efforts to remain prominent in a party on the rise.

The now-minority president inevitably buckled under a vote of no confidence and desperately called parliamentary elections. The MNSD won a plurality of the seats in parliament and assumed its long-awaited position in the majority coalition, with Secretary-General Hama Amadou assuming the prime ministry in a tenuous co-habitation with Ousmane. Eager to completely purge the government of Ousmane's incompetence, Colonel Ibrahi Baré Maïnassara staged a coup d'état on 27 January 1996 and placed Ousmane under house arrest. This marked a "rebirth of authoritarianism" in Niger (Ibrahim, 1999*a*), albeit one with substantial domestic support. Western heads of state and leaders of international organizations, on their part, were appalled that Niger had reinstated military rule merely six years after forming its first democratic institutions. They watched in disappointment as Maïnassara won allegedly fraudulent elections and overturned elements of Niger's constitution that he blamed for the outgoing regime's failures. The constitution of the Fourth Republic instituted a presidential system and first-past-the-post electoral rules

that concentrated executive power and facilitated majority party dominance.

The public's enthusiasm for Maïnāsara's reforms was fleeting. Opposition leaders, including Tandja, organized anti-government demonstrations outside the National Assembly on 11 January 1997. The protesters braved tear gas and beatings at the hands of government troops (*"Harassment of Government Opponents Has Become Systematic"*, 1997). Tandja again became a hero of the pro-democracy movement when Maïnāsara jailed him and several other adversaries for two weeks, notwithstanding the Niamey Appeal Court's call for the prisoners' release (*"Niger: A Major Step Backwards"*, 1996). Snubbing legal and popular resistance, Maïnāsara finally died in an "unfortunate accident" on 9 April 1999 (*"The People of Niger Have the Right to Truth and Justice"*, 2000). A referendum in July reversed most of his radical amendments to the constitution, and five months later interim leaders held parliamentary and presidential elections. Tandja at last claimed the return on his patience and laid his palm on the Qur'an to take the oath of presidential office on 22 December 1999. This was a victory lap for the MNSD, which had already swept most of the parliamentary seats in November and elected Tandja to the National Assembly—a post that Tandja happily declined in order to serve as president.

These outcomes were sweeter for Tandja than for the average Nigerien. A change in leadership offered no perceptible relief for the ill effects of natural disasters or structural adjustment. Whereas Tandja had once led students in dissent against Maïnāsara, in 2011 he himself became the target of violent protests at the University of Niamey that recapitulated complaints about



funding cuts (Francis, 2007, 148). Tandja withstood students' ire and a 10-day mutiny of underpaid soldiers in 2002 by dispensing an influx of foreign aid to mollify his critics ( "*Troops Put Down Niger Mutiny*", 2002) . Ironically, the aid that donors had sent as a reward for a clean election allowed Tandja to pay 40 thousand civil servants without reforming a still debt-ridden economy (Elischer, 2013, 15). Tandja won a second term in 2004 and remained Niger's democratic hope up until tazartché and the constitutional crisis of 2009. Despite an auspicious start in his role of opposition leader, as president Tandja ultimately gave citizens as much to lament as did any of his predecessors. Chapter 7 of the dissertation investigates whether unrest in 2009-2010 truly arose from popular anger over Tandja's politics, or whether the protests merely had "a semblance of democratic revolution" (Beissinger, 2013).

### **6.2.2 Sources of Ethnic Grievances**

It is intriguing to weigh the counterfactual scenario of Niger under different leadership. Would Niger's citizens have enjoyed greater peace and prosperity without Tandja? There is no doubt that Nigeriens suffered enormously as a result of the president's blasé attitude toward profound food and debt crises. Tandja is also responsible for stalling democratic consolidation by trying to extend his tenure. At the same time, he may have provided Niger with something that MNSD bosses sought in him early on: a safeguard of peace among Niger's ethnic groups. In the following paragraphs I identify ethnic grievances that might have fomented unrest in 2009, and I consider whether Tandja might have played any significant part in tempering them.

Few scholars still espouse the view that ethnic identities are primordial or “in the blood” (Posner, 2003, 127). Nevertheless, it would be naïve to claim that ethnicity plays no role whatsoever in African politics. Convincing research on diverse African countries shows that ethnic cleavages can become politically salient when institutions such as electoral rules give politicians incentives to “play the ethnic card” (Posner, 2005). Incumbents commonly distribute public goods along ethnic lines (Franck and Rainer, 2012), voters prefer co-ethnics at the polls (Carlson, 2010), and resource-strapped rebel leaders exploit ethnic identities as “social endowments” for recruiting fighters (Weinstein, 2007). Ethnicity might not be the primary spark of conflict in Africa on average, but in certain contexts it might be. It is thus worthwhile to explore the possibility that ethnic divisions precipitated the uprisings of 2009-2010 in Niger, as Graham (2010, 527) has proposed.

Graham IV’s assessment reflects a prevailing notion that ethnic power-grabbing is to blame for African “coup traps.” (Harkness, 2012). Conflict surrounding a 2008 coup in nearby Guinea hints that the coups and unrest plaguing Niger have also had ethnic origins. Almost exactly one year before soldiers deposed Tandja in Niamey, former United Nations peacekeeper Captain Moussa Dadis Camara filled a power vacuum that ensued from the death by natural causes of long-time Guinean dictator Lansana Conté (Camara, 2008; Arieff and Cook, 2009). Camara, from the small Guerze group, became the darling of various minorities from Guinea’s “forestier” region who resented the long-time dominance of Conté’s Sousou group. “Dadis was chosen by God to lead Guinea,” extolled one forestier. “He must come back to lead”

(Valdmanis and Samb, 2009). On 14 July 2013, amid preparations for elections meant to finally restore civilian rule, nearly 100 Guineans were hacked with machetes, beheaded, or shot to death in clashes between the Guerze and Korianke communities (*“Ethnic Violence Simmers in Guinea”*, 2013). Although the president insisted that this incident had no link to politics, the violence broke out soon after the government announced the 24 September election date (*“Scores Killed in Guinea Ethnic Violence”*, 2013). Ethnic tensions in the run-up and aftermath of the 2008 Guinean coup are ostensibly a version of recent upheaval in Niger, albeit a more brutal one.

On the surface, Niger has all the essential ingredients for ethnic strife. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) show that conflict correlates with ethnic dominance (ethnic dominance meaning that a society’s largest ethnic group constitutes 45 to 90 percent of the population). They estimate that a society’s risk of conflict nearly doubles under conditions of ethnic dominance, whereas ethnic fractionalization actually makes a society safer.<sup>6</sup> Niger’s Hausas fit the criterion for a dominant group, making up approximately 56 percent of the national population. The Hausas are concentrated in south-central and eastern Niger along the border with Nigeria that splits a region once known as Hausaland. Niger’s next largest group is the Zarma/Songhai people at 22 percent of the population, followed by at least 30 smaller distinct groups (Charlick, 1991, 8).

The Hausas have reason to feel aggrieved due to their marginalization during colonial times. French occupiers favored the Zarmas, whom they considered easier to dominate under a system of direct rule given the Zarmas’ internal di-

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<sup>6</sup>This is likely because social cohesion is necessary for rebellion.

visions and lack of strong state structures like the Hausas' (Charlick, 1991, 9). Two-thirds of the Zarma people were slaves who saw potential emancipation in the French army and colonial workforce, whereas many Hausas were merchants who thrived in the markets along the Niger-Nigeria border (but ended up financing their own oppression through taxes) (de Sardan, 1984, 27). The site of the 2009-2010 protests is itself a symbol of ethnic favoritism; French administrators moved Niger's capital in 1927 from Zinder in Hausaland to Niamey in Zarma territory (Fuglestad, 1983, 93). A school that the French founded in the new capital in 1930 groomed a cohort of Zarma "évolués" who would go on to monopolize a generation of post-independence politics (Ibrahim, 1994, 18). Many urban and rural Hausas backed the Sawaba guerrilla movement, which mounted a campaign in the 1950s for complete national independence (van Walraven, 2013). French authorities and eventually Niger's Zarma government persecuted the Sawabists and drove them underground. It is telling of the close-knit relationship between colonial rulers and the Zarma elite that President Hamani Diori remained so loyal to Paris that he provoked nationalists to remove him from power in 1974 (Higgott and Fuglestad, 1975).

And yet, "Niger has been spared the levels of ethnic hostility seen in many other countries" (Davis and Kossomi, 2001, 81).<sup>7</sup> Even if ethnic favoritism influenced Diori to side with France, Diori's ouster was not ethnically charged, as coup leader Seyni Kountché was the president's co-ethnic (Ibrahim, 1994,

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<sup>7</sup>A complete analysis of ethnic relations in Niger must acknowledge sporadic insurgencies by the nomadic Tuareg of northern Niger and Mali (Idrissa, 2001). However, "Le Problème du Nord" does not figure prominently in my analysis, because the Tuareg's main grievances are about a lack of autonomy from the central state and not, as in the case of the Hausas and Zarmas, about claims on power in Niamey. A 1994 proposed constitution for an autonomous Tuareg region explicitly excluded Niger's largest ethnic groups (Krings, 1995, 62).

25). Geographic and cultural boundaries between Hausa and Zarma communities are increasingly fluid, with people commonly changing their ethnicities by adopting each other's languages and practices (Charlick, 1991, 8). Inter-marriage across all of Niger's ethnic groups—including even the separatist Tuareg—is widespread (Turshen, 2010; Gosselain, 2008). Ethnic blending might be somewhat less common in more isolated and homogeneous rural regions, but the uprisings of 2009-2010 occurred in a metropolitan area where many residents are multilingual and of mixed heritage. Niger has endured nothing akin to the Biafran war in neighboring Nigeria, in which clashes between the Hausas and the Igbos killed roughly a million people between 1967 and 1970 (Madiébo, 1980).

What explains this contrast? There are three plausible answers: First, different modes of colonial rule—British in Nigeria and French in Niger—created distinct power structures that affected the risk of conflict. Second, society in Niger features several pronounced identities that cut across ethnic divides, including nationalism, Islam, and “cousinage.” Finally, Niger's leaders have taken deliberate steps to downplay ethnicity as a basis for political competition.

### **Ethnic Politics under Colonial Rule**

Historians have tended to exaggerate the distinction between French “direct rule” and British “indirect rule” in colonial Africa and to ignore considerable variations in the practice of both models (Kiwauka, 1970). Nevertheless, the French policy of replacing traditional chiefs with imported administrators

palpably suppressed ethnic politics in Niger, whereas the British policy of buttressing chiefs as proxy rulers in Nigeria instilled chronic resentment and provoked resistance by less favored groups (Miles, 1987, 239). At decolonization, Hausa chiefs in Niger failed to reclaim authority from the privileged Zarmas due to their lack of political experience in the colonial administration.

“Although the military rulers have shown a progressive tendency to revitalise the chieftaincy by granting it a formal and respectable institutional role in the country’s governance, the chiefs of Niger—and particularly those in Hausaland—still obligingly occupy an unambiguously subordinate position within the political hierarchy in contrast to the autonomy or collective assertiveness that their counterparts have managed, at least in part, to retain in Nigeria” (Miles, 1987, 250).

In independent Nigeria, on the other hand, Hausa chiefs immediately ascended to prominence and used institutions like Sharia law to dominate their rivals. A comparison of schools in former British and former French Hausaland illustrates the enduring legacy of colonial differences: In the town of Yardaji, Nigeria, teachers emphasize local culture and Koranic verses; all instruction is in the Hausa language and most students struggle with English. Across the border and just a few kilometers to the north in Yekuwa, Hausa children salute the flag of Niger every morning and dutifully recite, in fluent French, a secular curriculum designed by the Ministère de l’Education Nationale (Miles, 1994, 238).

## Cross-Cutting Identities

This anecdote also illustrates the unifying identities that distinguish Niger from many African countries with more volatile ethnic politics. The French colonial approach of assimilating and “civilizing” African subjects denigrated indigenous cultures, prohibited native languages in schools and government, and dismantled traditional institutions (Bokamba, 1991). Immortalized in the literature of Chateaubriand and Flaubert, “French imperialism was upheld as an opportunity for cultural rejuvenation” (Dallal, 2000). As abhorrent as this mission was, it may have been responsible for imbuing Nigeriens with a strong nationalist identity that transcended ethnic cleavages. Miles and Rochefort (1991) found in a survey of neighboring Hausa villages that people on both sides of the Niger-Nigeria border placed national identity above Hausa identity, but that national identity was more salient in Niger than in Nigeria. Studying state language and education policies in Tanzania, Miguel (2004) argues that nationalism can help diverse societies cooperate across ethnic lines, improving outcomes ranging from civil peace to public goods provision. State policies—like those instructing school children to salute Niger’s flag—are powerful tools to foster nationalism, but Englebert (2009, 203) stresses that “African nationalism is not only engineered from above; it is also produced at the grassroots of society, in everyday interactions.” Nigeriens have exhibited fervent nationalism in protest marches, independence commemorations, and especially at the National Conference of 1991.

Islam is another identity that seems to bind the people of Niger, in stark contrast with Nigeria’s bloody Muslim-Christian riots (Scacco, 2008). Mus-

lms in both Niger and Nigeria prioritize religion ahead of all other identities (Miles and Rochefort, 1991, 396), but Muslims comprise as much as 98 percent of the population in Niger and only about half of the population in Nigeria (*“International Religious Freedom Report”*, 2010). There are many variants of Islam in Niger (Masquelier, 1999; Charlick, 2004), but it is common to see believers of different stripes praying together in the streets of Niamey.

Additionally, Niger retains a pre-colonial tradition of “cousinage,” or “joking kinship,” in which families of different ethnicities form deep social ties (Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Aboubacar Yenikoye, 2007; de Sardan, 1984). Dunning and Harrison (2010) provide experimental evidence that cousinage helps explain why ethnicity is a poor predictor of vote choice and party formation in Mali, which has a similarly diverse ethnic composition and a similar colonial history to Niger’s. Their work borrows from a classic sociological theory of how cousinage, nationalism, and religion can diffuse social tension: “The interdependence of antagonistic groups and the crisscrossing within such societies of conflicts, which serve to ‘sew the social system together’ by canceling each other out, thus prevent disintegration along one primary line of cleavage” (Coser, 1956, 72).

### **Ethnic Politics after Independence**

Niger has maintained a “culture of peace” (Aboubacar Yenikoye, 2007) partly by luck, but also by deliberate political design. Its first several presidents discouraged research on ethnicity in order to forestall divisiveness during a long period of Zarma dominance (Charlick, 1991, 8). Later, the proportional



representation and semi-presidential systems that delegates adopted at the National Conference ensured that multiple ethnic groups could join the government. In many African countries, the switch to multi-party democracy has caused ethnic politics to flare by raising electoral competition and politicians' incentives to make ethnic appeals.<sup>8</sup> In Niger, however, ethnicity has influenced but not defined politics after the country's initial attempt to democratize. For example, the Democratic and Social Convention (CDS) party began as a civic association in Zinder, the seat of Hausa resistance to the Zarma oligarchy. "Yet, although the party was built to have a strong Hausa nationalist orientation, many of its top leadership are not 'ethnically' Hausa" (Ibrahim and Souley, 1998, 152). The party's leaders have been diverse—Hausa, Kanuri, and Tuareg. The MNSD, a rival to the CDS, hand-picked Mamadou Tandja as the face of the party precisely because he was "the most 'de-tribalised' frontline politician in the country" (Ibrahim and Souley, 1998, 151). Tandja, of mixed Kanuri and Fulani ancestry, ensured that the MNSD would not become yet another Zarma-dominated outfit. That made the former party of politically toxic President Saïbou a palatable choice for voters weary of bygone regimes. Tandja enjoyed immense popularity during his first and even second terms, in large part because his ambiguous ethnic loyalties did not incite fear of either a reversal into Zarma hegemony or a radical Hausa backlash. In this sense, he played a crucial role in preventing Niger from meeting the same fate

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<sup>8</sup>Analyzing public opinion surveys from over 35,000 Africans in 10 countries, Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2010*b*) show that respondents are 1.8 percentage points more likely to identify in ethnic terms for every month closer their country is to a competitive presidential election.

as Guinea.<sup>9</sup> It is highly unlikely that any animosity directed toward Tandja during the 2009-2010 uprisings stemmed from ethnic grievances.

### 6.2.3 Sources of Economic Grievances

A combination of unplanned historical circumstances and political design has seemingly spared Niger from ethnic turmoil. Simultaneously, though, a mix of bad luck and ineffective leadership has provided endless sources of economic grievances. This section describes Niger's economic underdevelopment and its most plausible environmental and political causes. It concludes by linking economic grievances to recent protests.

As a landlocked and semiarid country whose neighbors include Nigeria, Libya, and Chad, Niger is one of the least developed countries in the world. Its uranium-based economy thrived through the 1970s, but a drop in uranium prices in 1981 caused GDP to plummet (Graybeal and Picard, 1991, 286). Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show that the economy has never come close to recovering, but the average Nigerien received little benefit from uranium sales even during price booms. Although Niger has shown slight improvements in its Human Development Index (a composite measure of various dimensions of living standards) and infant mortality rates have fallen (Figure 6.3), it consistently ranks far below global averages and even the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. Life expectancy is 53 years; less than a third of the population is literate; and two-thirds of the population lives below the international poverty line of US\$1.25

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<sup>9</sup>The outcome could have been even worse than recent ethnic riots in Guinea. In Rwanda in 1994, Hutus reclaimed power and promptly waged genocide against the once-privileged Tutsis.



Figure 6.1: GDP per Capita in Niger, 1980-2012  
 Source: The World Bank’s World Development Indicators (2012).

per day (“*At a Glance: Niger*”, 2012). Population growth has offset a fall in the poverty rate from 64.4 percent in 2005 to 60.8 percent in 2007. The absolute number of poor Nigeriens actually increased during that same period, to 8.159 million (Dabalén et al., 2012).

Desperation and international pressure prompted the Kountché administration to cooperate with IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs starting in 1983 (Gervais, 1995). Aid was conditional on comprehensive public sector reforms that did not live up to their purpose of reducing government debt and stimulating investment. The main outcomes of privatizing public enterprises and shrinking the civil service by 38 percent were mass

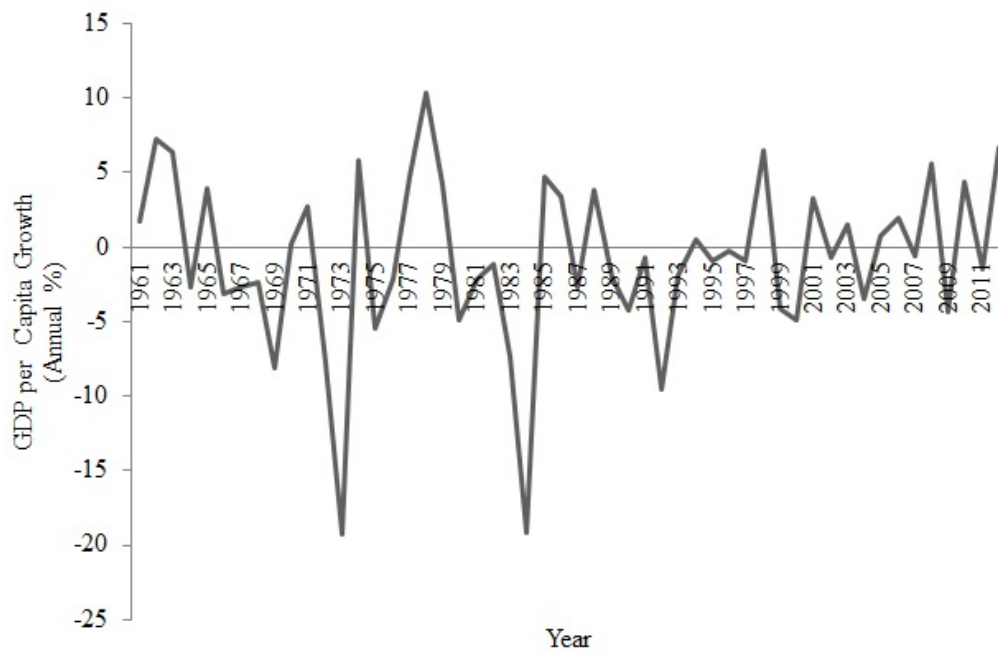


Figure 6.2: Annual Growth in GDP per Capita in Niger, 1961-2012

Source: The World Bank's World Development Indicators (2012).

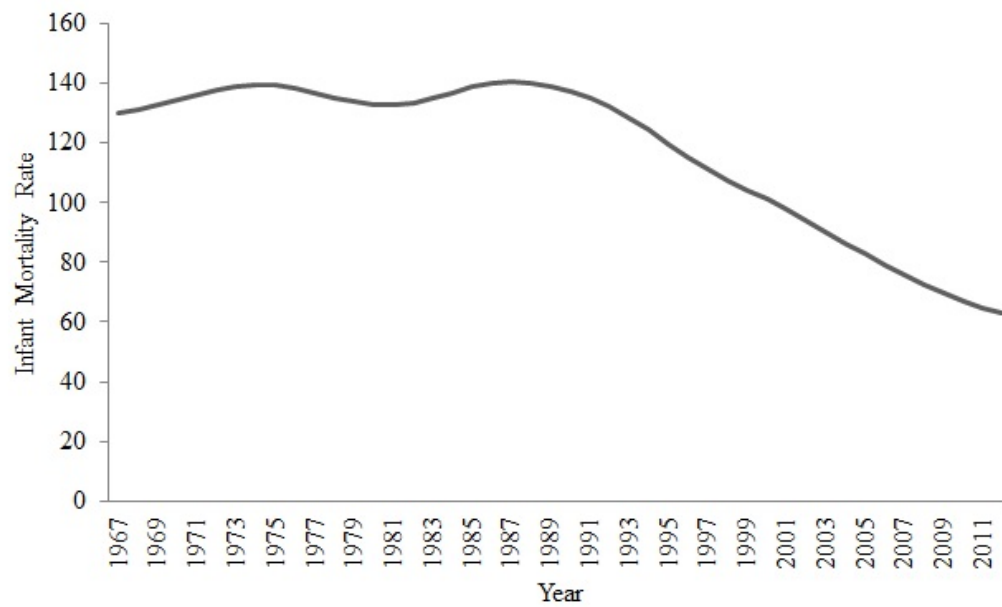


Figure 6.3: Infant Mortality Rates in Niger, 1967-2012

Note: Infant mortality rates are deaths per 1,000 live births. Data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2012).

demonstrations in the early 1990s (Graybeal and Picard, 1991, 293).

One problem that doomed structural adjustment to failure was the lack of increased revenues to counterbalance the pains of austerity. Many African governments lack the capacity to raise tax revenue (Stotsky and WoldeMariam, 1997), and Niger's government is no different. Ninety percent of Niger's population works in subsistence agriculture, but the informal nature of this work means that agriculture accounts for only 40 percent of GDP (Dabalén et al., 2012). The uranium price collapse reduced tax revenues to as low as nine percent of GNP in some years (Barlow and Snyder, 1993). Increasing reliance on borrowing has triggered a debt crisis that no government has yet resolved (Gazibo, 2005). Figure 6.4 reveals a significant rise in external debt during structural adjustment of the 1980s, as well as a drop starting in 2000 that resulted more from IMF debt relief than from incumbents' volition (Sacerdoti and Callier, 2008). Commitments rebounded under Tandja and continued to rise after the World Bank displayed its support for Tandja's removal by lending to the new military regime (*"Niger: Country Profile"*, 2012). Niger's leaders have occasionally supplemented loans with aid from Libya, which has alarmed Europe and the United States and made nationalist Nigeriens fear for their country's sovereignty (Gazibo, 2007, 32).<sup>10</sup>

The government's incompetence and indifference have precluded solutions to ongoing food insecurity that results from incessant natural disasters. Even

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<sup>10</sup>Not all Nigeriens oppose Libyan aid. Buildings constructed with tens of millions of Libyan dollars dot the Niamey landscape, and deposed Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi remains very popular. Gaddafi's son enjoyed a comfortable exile in Niamey, protected from extradition and fêted by DJs playing Tuareg songs in his family's honor (*"Niger Resists Libyan Demands for Extradition of Moammar Gaddafi's Playboy Son"*, 2012).

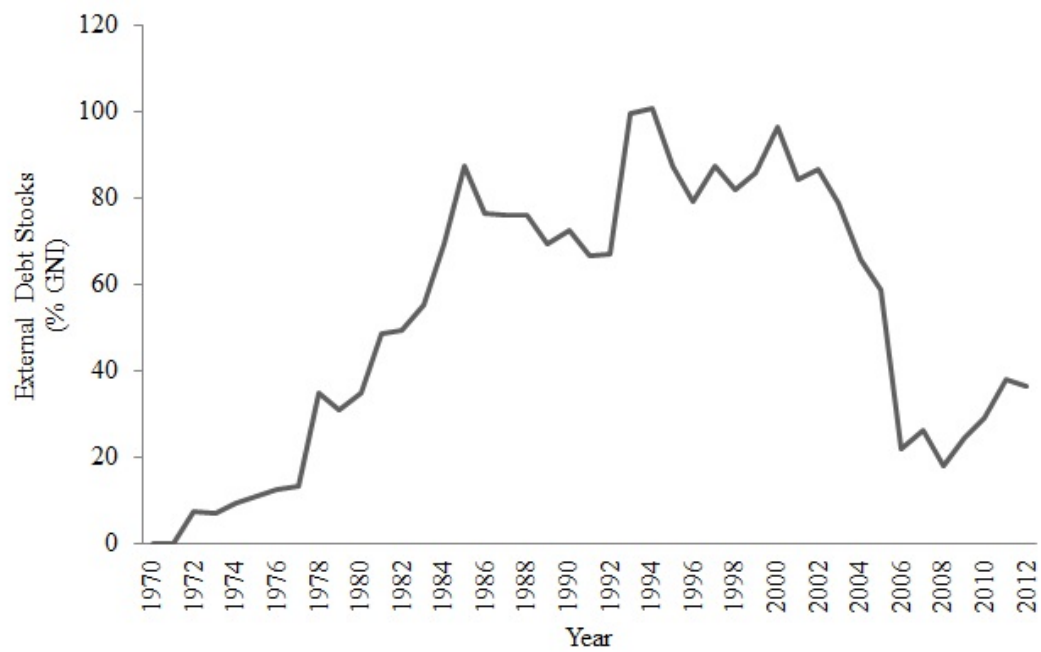


Figure 6.4: Niger's External Debt, 1970-2012

Note: Total external debt is the sum of debt owed to non-residents, including IMF credit, public debt, and private non-guaranteed long-term debt. Data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2012).

in relatively bountiful years, Niger's food producers struggle with drought and volatile markets. Supplies are often imported over long distances from coastal ports and more fertile regions, making the little food that is available extremely expensive for the average citizen. Niger has experienced successive food shortages as a result of droughts and locust invasions, including a shortage that reached its height in 2005 and continues to the present day (*"The Worst is Over"*, 2005; Tsai, 2010). Although the 2005 crisis was not officially a famine according to the Howe and Devereux famine scale, it approached famine proportions: Malnutrition accounted for an estimated 52 percent of deaths among children under five years old, and 22 percent of children's caregivers lacked strategies for coping with food shortfalls (Reza et al., 2008). International food aid has been unable to compensate for government inaction—a fact that Niger's leaders have tried unsuccessfully to conceal (*"Niger's President in Famine Zone"*, 2005). Ample research shows an empirical link between food scarcity and political unrest, both across and within countries (Barrett, 2013; Smith, 2013; Bellemare, 2011; Arezki and Brückner, 2011; Bush, 2009; Adam, 2008; Walton and Seddon, 1994). The food crisis is thus a plausible source of economic grievances in the 2009-2010 uprisings. Indeed, a second drought shocked the country just before the protests began (Dabalén et al., 2012, 27).

Niger suffers from not only absolute deprivation, but also inequality, which other chapters of this dissertation have revealed to correlate with protest Africa-wide. Weather shocks naturally affect rural dwellers more than urban dwellers, saddling farmers with a greater share of the misery in times of scarcity: In 2007, half of rural households ranked weather shocks at the top



of their list of concerns, compared to less than 15 percent of urban households (Dabalen et al., 2012, 29). Price shocks, however, generate stronger concern in cities: Over half of urban households ranked rising food prices as the most devastating shock, compared to 38 percent of rural households. Inequality, like poverty, has political causes. The government taxes formal-sector incomes much more heavily than informal-sector incomes of the same size, creating a thorn in the side of urban business owners who hope to benefit from increased visibility and formal credit and insurance (Barlow and Snyder, 1993, 1184). This distortion offsets progressive features of the tax system, such as the higher rates of value-added taxation on luxury goods. In 2005, during Tandja's presidency, the wealthiest 30 percent of the population accounted for 63.3 percent of total household consumption, while the poorest 30 percent accounted for only 9.3 percent (Dabalen et al., 2012, 11).

Inequality is a graver problem in the minds of some Nigeriens than it is objectively. In a 2005 survey, nearly half of Niamey residents, including 41 percent of people in the first quartile of earnings, placed themselves in the range of moderate poverty (Aboubacar Djimrao and Madaï Boukar, 2005). The survey's authors highlight a disparity between perceptions and reality: "... the fact that the most privileged people do not realize that their status is better relative to most can be problematic. This fact reveals a weak awareness of the real extent of mounting absolute poverty in the Nigerien capital" (Aboubacar Djimrao and Madaï Boukar, 2005, 31). Inequality in Niger has actually declined slightly in the past decade, even amid Tandja's lackadaisical response to food shocks. The poverty gap index, measuring the mean income

shortfall required to reach the poverty line, fell by just over eight percentage points in 2007-2008. The national Gini index of income inequality fell from 48 in 2005 to 37 in 2007, also dropping in both urban and rural subsets of the population (Dabalen et al., 2012). Growth slowed at the same time, indicating that gains for the poor have stemmed mainly from redistribution. Using methods from Ravallion and Datt (1991), World Bank analysts estimate that growth accounted for only one percentage point of a 3.7 percentage point drop in the poverty headcount in 2005-2006 (Dabalen et al., 2012, 12). This implies that Tandja could have claimed some credit for inequality not becoming even worse than it was. Mobility has also objectively improved, with only a quarter of the population remaining in poverty during all years between 2007 and 2010 (Dabalen et al., 2012, 46). This is far lower than my own estimates of subjective mobility in Niger's capital: In a survey that I conducted in 2011, 46 percent of 300 respondents expected their economic situations to be no better in five years. The next chapter of the dissertation details this survey, further discusses the gap between objective and perceived well-being, and analyzes how attitudes correlate with protest participation.

### **6.3 Civil Society and the Potential for Collective Action**

The preceding sections outlined political, social, and economic grievances in Nigerien society; in section I describe Nigerien social networks and their capacity to transform collective grievances into collective action. I propose that

improved communication infrastructure and a vibrant civil society<sup>11</sup> helped citizens come together and accept the risks of speaking out against Tandja. This section provides additional background for the systematic study in Chapter 7.

The Tandja administration oversaw a massive expansion of mobile communications infrastructure—an investment that ironically contributed to the president’s downfall by allowing the opposition to coordinate. Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) signal coverage is still far below the world average at 50 percent, but the degree of expansion under Tandja is a remarkable achievement given that coverage was almost nonexistent as late as 2000. Mobile phone subscribers increased from 2.4 per 100 people in 2005 to 12.8 in 2008, and phones are as common a sight in Niamey as in any African capital (Dominguez-Torres and Foster, 2011, 31). There are even accounts of protesters using Niger’s still-limited Internet service to coordinate (Azizou, 2010). Conventional technologies also remain an important part of civil society’s operations. Starting with the launch of Niger’s first independent newspaper in 1990, several more newspapers have begun to circulate widely and openly criticize the government.

These advances empowered an already well-organized civil society whose roots long pre-dated the renaissance of autonomous opposition groups in the lead-up to the 1991 National Conference. Student associations and especially labor unions posed a serious threat to French occupiers and were instrumental in eventually winning independence for many African countries (Kraus, 2007;

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<sup>11</sup>I understand civil society as “the public space between the household and the state” (Azarya, 1994, 88).

Freund, 1984; Schmidt, 2005; Bates, 1972; Davies, 1966; Lubeck, 1994). Although some Nigerien anti-colonial organizations, like the Sawaba movement, no longer exist (van Walraven, 2013), some have evolved to carve out a place in contemporary politics. For example, the Nigerien Progressive Party-African Democratic Rally (PPN-RDA) takes part of its name from a pre-independence organization, the African Democratic Rally (RDA), which allied colonies in French West Africa with a strong bent toward syndicalism. The Nigerien Trades Union formed an important wing of the RDA and emphasized a connection between labor rights and self-determination that prevails in Nigerian civil society (Charlick, 2007). Niger's early presidents did not succeed in completely stifling the labor movement with a 30-year ban. Unions have had two major "awakenings" involving strikes and protests: one in the 1980s when President Saïbou violated workers' trust by complying with donors' condition that he reduce the civil service, and another in the 1990s when new democratic institutions gave unions the freedom to openly engage in political debates (Gazibo, 2007; Adji, 2000; Elischer, 2013). Unions have been fixtures in protests of the past 20 years, including those in 2009-2010. However, it is unclear whether workers and their student allies are fully committed to democratic values, or whether they are primarily interested in traditional union and university concerns like jobs, wages, and tuition. Adji (2000, 11) notes that the Union of Workers' Trade Unions of Niger (USTN) has built alliances with democracy advocates, but Elischer (2013) counters that organized labor "did not become a champion of inclusion and participation" and that "economic motives were truly at the heart of union agitation." I adjudicate between these conflicting

interpretations of history in Chapter 7.

Some civil society groups formed in 2009 and 2010 expressly to challenge the Tandja regime. The military Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy more or less dissolved after accomplishing its goal of staging a coup, but some new civil society outgrowths continue to engage in politics. About six months before protests erupted, an ad hoc group calling itself the Coordination of Democratic Forces for the Republic rallied sundry civil society groups, political opposition parties, and defectors from Tandja's sphere of influence (Azizou, 2010, 125). Complementing pre-existing student and labor groups, this coalition represents "a new type of actor capable of animating political life in the long term" (Azizou, 2010, 127).

However, it is impossible to read the goals and constraints of individuals from the statements and behaviors of groups. Beissinger (2013, 2) criticizes the tendency to construe large numbers of citizens as "the people" and "to interpret their motivations through the lens of the master narratives that oppositions articulate to mobilize them." It is reasonable to assume that activists who form and lead opposition groups are ideologically committed to the mission stated in their group's name; it is less clear whether the rank-and-file protesters who respond to activists' recruitment efforts are true devotees or "contingent democrats" (Bellin, 2000). The following chapter systematically explores the roots of the 2009-2010 uprisings at the individual level, including the grievances and social networks of protesters as well as non-protesters.

## Chapter 7

# Democratic Revolutionaries or Pocketbook Protesters?

At first glance, it is clear why Nigeriens protested in 2009: They were unhappy with Mamadou Tandja's attempt to continue ruling, also known as *tazartché*. However, a crowd does not have a single mind, and individuals' decisions of whether to protest or stay home plausibly result from a complex combination of factors that push them to challenge the status quo and pull them into collective action. Indeed, there is a weak empirical correlation between participation in pro-democracy movements and support for the principle of democracy, although scholars do not yet fully understand the psychological orientations and structural factors that do drive protest participation (Beissinger, 2013).

There is good reason to believe that the demonstrations stemmed at least as much from economic as from political concerns. Not only has Niger recently

suffered an economic crisis, but it also has a long historical precedent of protest against hunger. Vincent Bonnecase challenges the assumption that Nigeriens remained quiescent during the food shortages of the 1970s and 1980s: "... the fact that there were not overt riots does not suggest fatalism or resignation ... [T]here were popular actions that ... conditioned institutional responses to hunger" (Bonnecase, 2010, 11). Bonnecase also highlights the government's autocratic tendencies during the same period. However, he cannot assess the relative salience of political and economic grievances with anecdotal evidence alone. The uprisings of 2009-2010 and a survey that I conducted in their close aftermath offer a chance to weigh Bonnecase's portrayal of Nigeriens as pocketbook protesters against the more common portrayal of Nigeriens as democratic revolutionaries (Baudais and Chauzal, 2011; Barnett, 2010; Davis and Kossomi, 2001; Armstrong, 2010).

This chapter presents a systematic, quantitative analysis of participation in Niger's 2009-2010 uprisings to complement the qualitative analysis in the previous chapter. Employing logistic regression analysis of individual level survey data, and using protest participation as the dependent variable, I find that economic grievances—namely, low prospects of upward mobility—had a more significant overall influence on Nigeriens' decisions to protest than dissatisfaction with Tandja's attempt to circumvent presidential term limits. People were also more likely to protest at the urging of civil society leaders, which suggests that protest participation stems from a combination of grievances and factors that compel people to bear the individual costs of collective action.

My dataset, based on a quasi-random sample of over 300 Nigerien

protesters and non-protesters, allows me to overcome several limitations of the existing literature on protest in transitional regimes. First, the study of political transition (i.e. from autocracy to democracy or from single-party rule to multi-party politics) has traditionally occurred at a macro-institutional level rather than an individual-behavioral level. Second, studies on why some people protest and others do not tend to focus either exclusively on economic grievances or on political grievances in countries that are already democratic, which precludes researchers from comparing the salience of economic and regime-related grievances, making it difficult to explain protest behavior in the developing world. Third, few studies about attitudinal variables simultaneously consider structural variables like membership in communication networks (which can affect the ability of would-be protesters to overcome collective action dilemmas). Finally, surveys conducted during protests often overlook the possibility that different citizens might be protesting or not protesting for different reasons.

My finding that many Nigeriens actually supported the extension of Tandja's tenure contradicts international perceptions of the 2009-2010 uprisings as a public outcry for democracy. It also casts doubt on the motivations behind other supposedly pro-democracy movements, especially those that unfold in contexts where autocracy and poverty coincide. While political and economic grievances are not mutually exclusive, economic grievances are sometimes more politically salient than dissatisfaction with autocracy, even in the most repressive autocratic regimes.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section reviews theories about



grievances and collective action and derives hypotheses from them. The second section describes my survey methodology and data and provides definitions of the variables in a regression analysis of protest participation. The third section summarizes and discusses the main findings. A final section concludes.

## **7.1 Hypotheses**

Echoing earlier chapters, the following paragraphs outline hypotheses based on two general categories of protest theories: grievance theories and collective action theories. Together, they address the circumstances under which people have both the will and the way to protest.

### **7.1.1 Grievance Theories**

At the most basic level, people protest because they are upset. The prevailing wisdom is that Nigeriens protested in 2010 because they were unwilling to accept Tandja's efforts to revise the constitution and remain in power. However, as the next chapters details, a sizeable portion of the population actually thought that Tandja's unconstitutional move was justified. By exploiting variation in attitudes toward tazartché, it is possible to systematically test the following hypothesis:

H1: People who oppose tazartché are more likely to protest than people who support it.

In addition to political grievances, Nigeriens may have been motivated by grievances related to their poverty and the ongoing food crisis:

H2: People who perceive their living conditions to be bad are more likely to protest.

Some research, as outlined in Chapter 2, suggests that it is not absolute, but rather relative deprivation that drives protests. This points to additional hypotheses:

H3: People who feel that they are less advantaged than other people are more likely to protest (egoistic RD Hypothesis).

H4: People who feel that their social group is less advantaged than other social groups are more likely to protest (fraternal RD Hypothesis).

H5: People who feel that their current living conditions are worse than their living conditions in the past are more likely protest (temporal RD Hypothesis).

Finally, based on my findings in cross-national analyses, Nigeriens may have also had grievances about perceived low prospects of upward mobility.

H6: People with low prospects of upward mobility are more likely to protest than people with high prospects of upward mobility.

### **7.1.2 Collective Action Theories**

Collective action theories acknowledge that even the most aggrieved people will not protest if they cannot cooperate and coordinate around their collective goals. Protesters are not psychological deviants with a visceral urge to challenge the status quo, but rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of acting on their psychological impulses under practical constraints. Scacco

(2007) finds that Nigerians who attend community meetings are more likely to participate in ethnic riots. Using a variety of tests, she shows that this relationship obtains not because rioters are already more likely to socialize or because community meetings drum up grievances, but rather because community meetings expose people to social networks that “pull” rioters to the front lines. By exerting social pressure that discourages free-riding (hence solving cooperation problems) and by facilitating the exchange of information (hence solving coordination problems), community meetings might likewise encourage protest participation.

However, it is often difficult to determine whether people protest because they attend community meetings or the other way around. To avoid this problem of causal inference, one can examine another measure of community involvement that is less likely to be endogenous to protest participation. In the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville, numerous studies have cited correlations between membership in organizations and other forms of civic involvement (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). Being a member of a group such as a student organization or a labor union is typically less ad hoc than attending community meetings. Whereas community meetings may be organized specifically around a protest event, civil society groups generally exist to address ongoing grievances apart from those that inspire a given protest. Therefore, to the extent that protesters are more likely, *ceteris paribus*, to be members of civil society organizations, it is reasonable to assume that contact with fellow members was the mobilizing factor:

H7: People who are members of civil society organizations are more likely to protest than people who are not.

Although civil society is “not necessarily embodied in a single, identifiable structure” (Bayart, 1989, 112), the literature on civil society in Africa generally defined it as “a sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifest in norms of community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication” (Bratton, 1994, 2). Civil society organizations include labor unions, rural associations, student groups, and informal organizations. Although Niger’s leaders have often banned civil society organizations, Masquelier (1999, 224) posits that Nigerien citizens “have become increasingly aware that they belong to specific groups and that they need to organize in order to address and defend their own interests.” By including group membership as an independent variable, I can assess the extent to which civil society really does mobilize people to defend their interests by protesting.

Unorganized social networks might also be important for mobilizing protesters. Scacco (2008), McAdam (1986), and others emphasize “prior contact” and casual interactions with friends, family, and distant acquaintances, which is important for mobilizing protesters in recruitment contexts where political activism is not the norm. Their research suggests the following more general hypothesis, which applies to people who are members of organizations, as well as to those who are not:

H8: People who are asked to protest are more likely to protest.

This hypothesis recognizes the possibility that civil society leaders will reach out to people who are not members of their organizations. It also reflects experimental evidence from the voter turnout literature that face-to-face political mobilization is more effective than indirect outreach.

## 7.2 Measuring Protest, Explaining Activism

I test the above hypotheses with original survey data collected in the capital of Niger during the summer of 2011. Questions focused on citizens' attitudes toward tazartché and economic conditions. To facilitate comparisons with earlier research, some questions resembled questions from the popular Afrobarometer surveys, which cover 20 African countries from 1999 to 2008. Because the Afrobarometer sample does not include Niger, the present study provides an opportunity to supplement existing data and to test the validity of analyses that show a correlation between protest participation and low prospects of upward mobility.

The sample is restricted to the capital city, because the protests of 2009-2010 were concentrated there and hence citizens likely faced the decision of whether or not to participate. The urban milieu is representative of mobilization contexts in most developing countries, where urban populations are less likely than their rural counterparts to protest. Rural dwellers often face coordination problems associated with being geographically dispersed and are excluded from technological or employment-based information networks.<sup>1</sup> Bates

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to coordination effects, Rule (1988, 94) proposes that physical proximity may

(1981) famously highlighted this phenomenon in his explanation of why African leaders exhibit political bias toward urbanites in order to appease their would-be opponents. Looking beyond Africa, Bohstedt (1983) likewise observed that riots in 18th-century England and Wales were most likely to occur in towns.

In Niger as in many developing countries, it is difficult to achieve a representative sample of the population given the lack of reliable demographic data and neighborhood maps. I therefore constructed an informal sampling frame by consulting social scientists at Niameys LASDEL research institute.<sup>2</sup> My colleagues' research experience and knowledge of local variations in ethnicity, religion, education, and other demographic variables made it possible to select neighborhoods in such a way as to approximate a representative sample (see Table 7.1).

Local enumerators used this sampling frame to administer questionnaires to over 300 men and women in 40 of Niamey's 99 neighborhoods. Neighbourhoods were dispersed throughout Niamey, covering both sides of the river that divides the city. On each day of the ten-day survey period, enumerators began at local meeting points (usually a taxi stop) and walked in opposite directions. They selected houses at intervals determined by randomly drawing a number from one to five (for example, drawing a "3" would mean knocking on the door of every third house). Although enumerators generally surveyed the first person to answer the door, they were instructed to sample approximately the

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affect protest propensity through emotional or grievance-based mechanisms: "The shared experience of reacting to a single source of stimulation, or sharing a strong emotion, almost irresistibly draws the exposed individual into the crowd state."

<sup>2</sup>LASDEL stands for Laboratoire études et de recherches sur les dynamiques sociales et le développement local.

same number of men as women each day, which sometimes required asking members of a household whether a woman was available for an interview.<sup>3</sup> Although exact employment statistics are unavailable, Niamey's generally high unemployment rate reduced the bias that might result from collecting surveys at residences during the day: since many Niamey residents are unemployed or work near their homes in the informal sector (Brilleau, Roubaud and Torelli, 2005), the sample probably over represents unemployed individuals, but not by as much as would be the case in other countries. It is worth noting that unemployment in Niamey is so pervasive that this over-representation is unlikely to be very significant. Surveys were conducted in the respondent's language of choice—usually Hausa, Zarma, or French.

While asking politically sensitive questions creates the potential for enumerator bias and respondent dishonesty, several precautions were taken to avoid these pitfalls. First, I conducted focus groups prior to administering the survey in order to gauge the political openness of Niamey society. It was common for focus group participants to respond to questions such as “What does tazartché mean to you?” with animated and prolonged debates. The candor with which local citizens volunteered their political opinions both for and against the outgoing regime suggested that survey respondents would likewise be sincere. Second, enumerators were all Niamey residents whose fluency in

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<sup>3</sup>In a similar study that I conducted in Malawi a month earlier, enumerators found that women were the most likely to be at home during the day, resulting in the under-sampling of men. In Niamey, my research team encountered the opposite problem: women did not usually answer the door and were sometimes discouraged by their male relatives from participating in the survey. According to focus group participants, this tendency stems from religious customs (most Nigeriens are observant Muslims). Enumerators gently inquired about the availability of women to answer questions, resulting in a sample that was about 30 percent female.

local languages and sensitivity to subtle cultural cues helped reduce bias in both recruiting subjects and eliciting responses to survey questions. Using local enumerators was doubly important given some people’s suspicions that international plots were behind the anti-Tandja movement ( “*Les pro-Tandja dénoncent ‘un complot de la communauté internationale’*”, 2009). Third, a rigorous enumerator training, including repeated role-plays, prepared enumerators to maximize respondents’ comfort and honesty during interviews. For instance, the training encouraged enumerators to appear politically neutral and to interview respondents in settings where they could not be overheard.

### 7.2.1 Variables

The dichotomous dependent variable is Protest Participation, derived from a question asking respondents whether they participated in a protest during the previous year. Independent variables include the following:

- Opposition to Tazartché: whether a respondent opposes Tandja’s attempt to change the constitution and seek a third term in office. This variable was coded from responses to the open-ended question, “What is your opinion on tazartché?”<sup>4</sup>
- Absolute Deprivation: whether a respondent considers her or his present living conditions to be either “bad” or “very bad.”
- Relative Deprivation (Egoistic): whether a respondent considers her or his living conditions to be worse than those of other Nigeriens.

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix C for the complete survey instrument.



- Relative Deprivation (Fraternal): whether a respondent considers the living conditions of her or his ethnic group to be worse than those of other ethnic groups in the country. A respondent's specific ethnicity (mainly Hausa, Djerma, or Tuareg) is not expected to be related to the likelihood of participating in a protest because he is a Tuareg and so does not hail not from one of Niger's major politically salient ethnic groups (he was the first Nigerien president who was not Hausa or Djerma). Tuaregs are a minority in Niamey, and numbered very few among protesters and survey respondents. The vast majority of protesters and respondents were therefore undifferentiated, in that they all were from a different ethnic group than the president. As ethnicity was not found to be a significant factor in respondent's answers, it is not included in the regression models.
- Relative Deprivation (Temporal): whether a respondent considers her or his living conditions to be worse now than they were a year ago.
- Low Prospects of Upward Mobility (POUM): whether a respondent expects her or his living conditions to be no better in the next five years.
- Organization Member: whether a respondent is a member of an organization such as a student group, a labor union, or a neighborhood association.

Regressions also include the following control variables that often correlate with protest participation:

- Female: a variable that takes a value of “1” if the respondent is female and “0” if the respondent is male. In Niger men are considerably more visible than women in political life than women and are thus expected to be more likely to protest.
- Age: Younger people can be expected to protest more, because they are more likely to be students and free from familial or vocational obligations that raise the opportunity costs of protesting. Scholars have attributed historical events such as the American civil rights movement and the decomposition of the Soviet Union to demographic shifts and “life-course processes” that produce large populations of frustrated young people: “Political generations emerge when particular birth cohorts are exposed to highly distinctive life experiences during adolescence or young adulthood” (Goldstone and McAdam, 2002, 195). Similar processes may explain recent uprisings in Niger and the Arab world, where teenagers and young adults comprise a sizeable portion of the population. It is also possible that African societies follow different patterns, as a recent study by Resnick and Casale (2011) suggests. I follow standard practice by breaking age into brackets (18-29, 30-39, and 40 and over), recognizing that one additional year of age is unlikely to affect the value of the dependent variable.
- Education: a categorical variable indicating the respondents highest level of education: primary school or less, Koranic (religious) school, secondary school, or post-secondary school. Kirwin and Cho (2009) find

a significant and positive effect of education on protest participation in Africa, proposing that better educated people are more politically aware than less educated people.

- Religiosity: a variable indicating whether a respondent is “very religious,” “religious,” “somewhat religious,” or “not religious.” In focus groups and open-ended survey questions, many Nigeriens attributed their economic conditions to God’s will, suggesting that people who are more religious may be less likely to protest.

Some scholars have argued that social movements are “ecology-dependent,” meaning that physical spaces organize people into networks that facilitate or impede protest mobilization (Fantasia, 1988; Zhao, 1996). In addition to exposing people to grievances and affecting their ability to coordinate, location might simply make it more or less convenient to protest. All of these considerations are salient in Niamey, which is divided into two sections by the Niger River, with businesses and government buildings concentrated on one side and residences concentrated on the other. Examining the data revealed that protesters indeed lived mainly on one side of the river and in downtown neighborhoods. Some of the 40 neighborhoods surveyed had protest participation rates as low as seven percent, whereas others had rates as high as 60 percent. To account for this spatial variation, the models include neighborhood fixed effects.

Table 7.1: Summary Statistics

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Protest participation            | 30% |
| Opposition to tazartché          | 42% |
| Absolute deprivation             | 19% |
| Relative deprivation (egoistic)  | 10% |
| Relative deprivation (fraternal) | 7%  |
| Relative deprivation (temporal)  | 18% |
| Low prospects of upward mobility | 47% |
| Organization member              | 18% |
| Female                           | 30% |
| Age 18-29                        | 37% |
| Age 30-39                        | 32% |
| Age 40 and over                  | 31% |
| Primary education or less        | 22% |
| Koranic school                   | 21% |
| Secondary education              | 23% |
| Post-secondary education         | 34% |
| Very religious                   | 31% |
| Religious                        | 37% |
| Somewhat religious               | 13% |
| Not religious                    | 19% |

### 7.3 Results

Table 7.1 displays summary statistics for all variables. Considering Niger's objective levels of poverty and hunger, strikingly few respondents expressed grievances of any kind. The most common economic grievance was absolute deprivation, although less than one fifth of respondents said that their current economic situations were bad or very bad. Nigeriens were also very hopeful for the future: most expected their economic situations to improve in the next year.

At first glance, Nigeriens appear more politically than economically ag-grieved. Forty-two percent of respondents opposed Tandja's attempt to stay

in power, although international observers might be surprised that opposition to tazartché was not higher. While some respondents opined that tazartché led to famine and anarchy, many stated that it was good for the country. 12 percent of respondents even associated tazartché with democracy, echoing Tandja's claim that changing the constitution was in line with popular wishes.

However, grievances do not necessarily drive people to protest. To systematically investigate the effects of grievances on protest behavior, I estimate the binary logistic regression model summarized in Table 7.2. Having low prospects of upward mobility is the only economic grievance with a statistically and substantively significant effect: controlling for other variables, expecting that one's economic situation will not improve over the next five years increases one's odds of protesting by a factor of two. In keeping with earlier research and theoretical predictions, being a member of an organization also makes one more likely to protest.

Social networks, too, seem to influence the likelihood that a respondent protested in the past year. Hypothesis 8 states that people will be more likely to protest if someone asks them to do so. A preliminary analysis of the data confirmed that virtually all protest participants had been asked to participate, whereas virtually all respondents who did not protest had not been asked. Hypothesis 8 is supported by the finding that being asked to protest almost perfectly determines protest participation.<sup>5</sup> The fact that respondents have been asked to protest by student groups and labor unions (Figure 7.1) points to a mobilization mechanism and not simply a self-selection mechanism (whereby

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<sup>5</sup>To avoid estimation problems related to collinearity, I include only one of these covariates in the regression model.

Table 7.2: Logit Model of Protest Participation

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| Opposition to tazartché                                  | 0.198<br>(0.363)     |
| Absolute deprivation                                     | -0.081<br>(0.567)    |
| Relative deprivation (egoistic)                          | -0.090<br>(0.664)    |
| Relative deprivation (fraternal)                         | -0.485<br>(0.795)    |
| Relative deprivation (temporal)                          | 0.713<br>(0.512)     |
| Low prospects of upward mobility                         | 0.801**<br>(0.415)   |
| Organization member                                      | 1.442***<br>(0.408)  |
| Female   | -0.467<br>(0.406)    |
| Age  | -0.011<br>(0.017)    |
| Koranic school (vs. primary education or less)           | -2.400***<br>(0.722) |
| Secondary education (vs. primary education or less)      | -0.427<br>(0.514)    |
| Post-secondary education (vs. primary education or less) | 0.570<br>(0.475)     |
| Religious (vs. very religious)                           | -0.355<br>(0.431)    |
| Somewhat religious (vs. very religious)                  | -0.433<br>(0.674)    |
| Not religious (vs. very religious)                       | -0.257<br>(0.687)    |
| R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.249                |
| N  | 311                  |

Logit estimates using neighborhood fixed effects, with standard errors in parentheses. \*\* denotes confidence at the at the 95% level; \*\*\* denotes confidence at the at the 99% level.

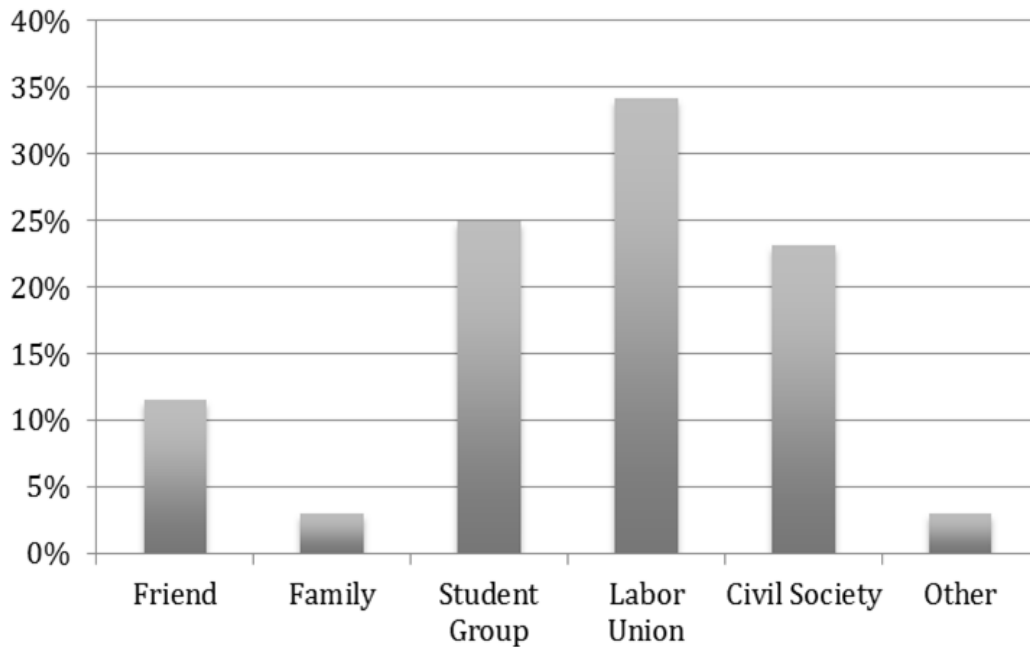


Figure 7.1: “Who Asked You to Protest?”

people who join civic organizations are already more likely to protest).<sup>6</sup> It also suggests that the political entrepreneurs who lead civil society groups mobilize protesters beyond their own ranks. Interviews that I conducted with labor union leaders in Guinea, Mali, and Malawi confirm that this is not just a Nigerien phenomenon. As one Malian labor organizer remarked, “We, as unions, cannot limit ourselves to the interests of workers.”<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, attending Koranic school has a negative effect on protest participation, although religiosity in general does not. This suggests that membership in a religious network, and not faith per se, deters protest par-

<sup>6</sup>This is based on the open-ended question, “Did anyone ask you to protest? If so, who?”

<sup>7</sup>For a complete interview transcript, see Appendix D.

ticipation. This finding also squares with previous research showing that “social ties may constrain as well as encourage activism” (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993) and that “being engaged in religious organizations is not significant in Western and Southern African countries and has a negative and significant effect in Eastern African countries” (Pilati, 2011). Although the Niger Islamic Council publicly denounced Tandja’s constitutional referendum, it advocated dialogue over direct confrontation. Thus, even if Tandja failed to co-opt religious organizations, religious leaders’ relatively limited support for the protests may have deterred the participation of the Koranic school community.

In sum, attitudes toward tazartché have no apparent effect on protest participation. The primacy of economic (vs. regime-related) grievances is also evident in responses to the open-ended question, “What were you protesting against?” Figure 7.2 shows that a minority of protesters had concerns about the regime, whereas most said they were protesting “la vie chère” (the high cost of living). The most politically salient economic grievance is low prospects of upward mobility—a finding that supports aforementioned theories about why present economic conditions tend not to correlate with demands for redistribution.

In addition to asking whether respondents expect their economic situations to be worse in the next five years, enumerators asked about respondents’ expectations for the next year alone. To check the robustness my results, I re-estimated the model using this alternative measure of prospects of upward mobility. Shorter-term prospects of upward mobility do not have a significant effect on protest propensity, suggesting that people who joined the 2010



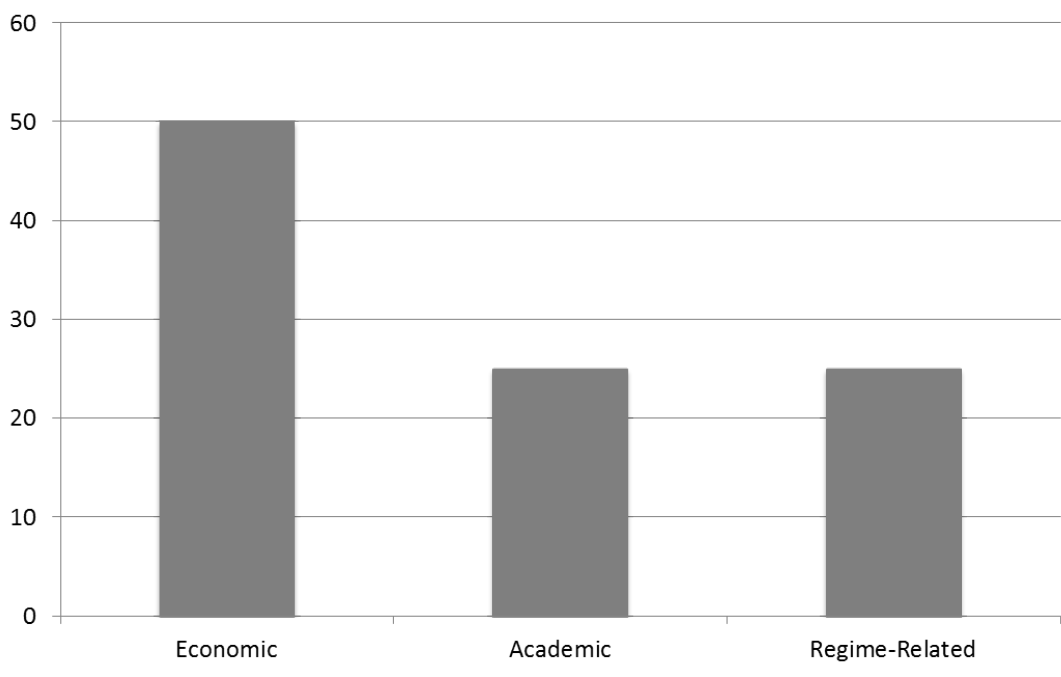


Figure 7.2: Protesters' Grievances

protests had long time horizons and were targeting a president that they expected to remain in power for a third term.

Since it is plausible that older people are not as anxious about future economic conditions as younger people, I also re-estimated the model while including an interaction term between age and prospects of upward mobility. This term was negative and statistically significant, suggesting that, indeed, the older one is, the lower the effect of POUM on one's likelihood of protesting. Including the interaction term did not, however, change the significance of the main effect: people with low POUM were still more likely to protest, all else equal.

The fact that low prospects of upward mobility was the most salient grievance in Niger's recent protests raises the question of why this is so. Did civil society groups rhetorically frame events to make people believe that the economic future was bleak and warranted protesting? Did Tandja manage to paint tazartché as democratic, thereby allaying concerns about his attempt to stay in power? Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explain individuals' psychological responses to political and economic shocks, existing data permit a general analysis of the sources of grievances in the uprisings.

Numerous studies have underlined the role of social contacts in conditioning grievances (Christopoulos, 2006; Morris and Staggenborg, 2005; Popkin, 1988; Robnett, 1996). Political entrepreneurs such as labor union leaders can strategically frame current events and convince people a) that they have low prospects of upward mobility; and b) that they should therefore protest. Hence, being a member of an organization might encourage protest participa-

tion not only through coordination effects (i.e. by facilitating communication about protest logistics) and cooperation effects (i.e. by facilitating social sanctioning and the transfer of selective incentives), but also through framing effects. However, simple cross-tabulation suggests that group membership is not the reason why people have low prospects of upward mobility. In fact, group members are relatively optimistic: 35 percent of them have low POUM, versus half of non-members. To test whether group membership encourages people with low POUM to protest, I re-estimated the main model while including an interaction term between low POUM and group membership. This term was statistically significant and negative, implying that group membership reduces the effect of POUM on protest participation (possibly because civic organizations provide a forum outside of the streets for voicing grievances). In short, framing effects do not seem to explain the relative salience of POUM in the 2010 protests. To the extent that group membership is correlated with protest participation, it is more likely through mobilization (i.e. coordination and cooperation) effects. Scholars have observed this mechanism at work in a variety of contexts, citing that organizations like church and student groups coordinate protests and incentivize collective action through social pressure (Robinson and White, 1997; Posner, 1995).

Despite the coup that eventually removed him from power, there are signs that Tandja was rather successful at managing popular dissatisfaction. Having helped to overthrow President Hamani Diori in 1974, Tandja likely foresaw the risks of appearing to defy citizens' will. He accordingly launched an aggressive pro-tazartché public relations campaign, benefiting from a strong democratic

mandate acquired by winning two bids for office in elections that were widely considered to be free and fair. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that these efforts convinced a sizeable portion of the population that revising the constitution was both democratic and necessary for completing development projects such as a uranium mine and a dam on the Niger River. For example, 38 percent of survey respondents who protested also supported tazartch; some respondents lauded the president's projects when answering the open-ended question "What do you think about tazartché?" Despite the international media's focus on opposition demonstrations, some Nigeriens marched in support of Tandja, carrying portraits of the leader and shouting, "Long live tazartché!" (*Thousands Demonstrate to Back Niger President*, 2009). According to news reports and original interviews conducted in Niamey during the summer of 2011, Tandja supplemented his populist rhetoric by distributing patronage and censoring the media (*Profile: Mamadou Tandja*, 2010; FIDH, 2012). His more extreme tactics, such as detaining journalists and shutting down the constitutional court, were a last resort after public relations failed. Although the anti-tazartché movement ultimately succeeded, the president's strategic use of soft and hard power helps explain the relatively low level of political grievances during the protests of 2009-2010.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Comparing the salience of political and economic grievances in the Nigerien protests of 2009-2010, this case study supports the theory that harboring

grievances does not necessarily lead to political action; instead, only specific grievances brought people to the streets. Although the Niamey protests appeared to international audiences as expressions of discontent with President Tandja's antidemocratic tendencies, opposition to tazartché had no measurable influence on the likelihood of protest participation. It seems that the international press misreported events on the ground, especially compared to Nigerien newspapers that tended to cover the constitutional debate in the broader context of an economic crisis. Indeed, the majority of those surveyed actually supported revising the constitution to allow Tandja to remain in power, and some even considered tazartché to be democratic. Taken together, these observations shed doubt on whether supposed pro-democracy movements like those in the Arab world necessarily reflect popular preferences for Western-style democracy. Instead, people's expectations for their future economic conditions might be a more important influence on whether they are willing to bear the considerable costs and risks of challenging entrenched autocratic regimes.

The study also highlights the importance of mobilization mechanisms, specifically membership in civil society organizations and being asked to protest. Grievances alone may not be enough to bring people to the streets; people must have both the will and the way to overcome coordination and cooperation problems. Ethnographic research involving the direct observation of political entrepreneurs' mobilization efforts could complement this study by revealing the causal mechanisms that drive the correlation between protest participation and being asked to protest. Political entrepreneurs can frame

some grievances as more important than others and mobilize protesters by offering selective incentives or by using social sanctioning to deter free riding. Hence, new scholarship on protest participation would benefit from a multidisciplinary approach incorporating anthropological, sociological, and psychological methods.

## Part IV

# Conclusion

“For me, all these attempts to stifle protests may have temporary success, but in the long run they will fail. Protest movements have been here and will persist. It takes a while to organize protests, but once that current starts, history has shown it cannot be stifled.”

—Mwiza Njhata, lecturers’ union leader, Chancellor College, Zomba, Malawi<sup>8</sup>

As the Malawian union organizer notes in the above quote, African protests unfold in a current that never fully stops, though the strength of that current fluctuates over time and space. I have shown that temporal and spatial variation in the frequency and intensity of African protests does not stem fundamentally from ethnic antipathies or preferences for democracy, but rather from grievances about forms of relative deprivation—including income inequality (Chapter 4), declines in living standards (Chapter 5), and low prospects of upward mobility (Chapters 5 and 7). By most measures, Africa as a whole is more prosperous than it ever has been. However, economic inequality within countries is rising, with important political consequences. Many African countries have seen historic economic growth in recent years, but that growth has not made all Africans equally well off or equally optimistic about the future. Some who view their opportunities as constricting instead of expanding have deemed the electoral process insufficient to air their grievances, and have taken to the streets. This final part of the dissertation addresses why African protests matter for scholars, policy makers, and, especially, Africans themselves.

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<sup>8</sup>This quote is from an interview that I conducted on August 18, 2011 in Zomba, Malawi during a lecturers’ strike.



## Chapter 8

# Protest Cycles and Their Implications

Having identified the economic roots of African protests, I address in this final chapter the implications of my findings. In the first two sections, I discuss the prospects of continued protests in Africa's near and long-term future. I highlight two contrasting scenarios: "virtuous" protest-and-democracy cycles; and anti-democratic, economically destructive protest traps. Next, I propose ways for scholars and policy makers to adapt my findings to their research and foreign policy agendas. I recommend that future studies of African protests focus on the political and economic effects of protest events, as well as the determinants of grievances that motivate protest participation. Finally, I conclude by placing my study in political-theoretic perspective.

## 8.1 Protest and Democracy

“We have played a very important role in the transition to democracy. Democracy is our child.”

—Labor organizer with the National Workers’ Union of Mali <sup>1</sup>

It is important to continue studying African protests, because protest can play a pivotal role in African countries’ democratic transition and consolidation—even if protests do not arise from ideological commitments to democracy. Although democratization sometimes occurs through elite bargaining (Higley and Gunther, 1992; North and Weingast, 1989; O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), many scholars argue that democratization is fundamentally a bottom-up process involving popular demands for majoritarian policies and institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Collier, 1999*b*; Wood, 2000; Geddes, 1999; Wood, 2001; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997).

These scholars argue that citizens in an autocracy will eventually pressure leaders for democracy, because a) democracy empowers the poor majority to demand redistribution; and b) the elite (the rich and the very powerful, who are often the same people) can revoke democratic institutions less easily than they can revoke redistributive policy changes. Democracy, in other words, is a credible commitment by members of the elite to uphold pro-poor policies. However, because the rich and powerful prefer not to relinquish wealth and power, democratization “only occurs because the disenfranchised citizens can threaten the elite and force it to make concessions. These threats can take

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<sup>1</sup>This quote is from an interview that I conducted on December 17, 2009 in Bamako. See Appendix D for a complete transcript.

the form of strikes, demonstrations, riots, and—in the limit—a revolution” (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006, xii). After a society transitions to democracy, the continued threat of protest deters members of the elite from renegeing on majoritarian concessions. This helps democracy to consolidate, or to become “the only game in town” (Linz and Stepan, 1996, 5).

Diverse examples support this theory. Collier (1999*b*) notes that the spread of democracy in Western Europe and Latin America coincided with industrialization and the rise of the proletariat. Analyzing 21 democratic transitions, she finds that labor protests and strikes were instrumental in pressuring members of the elite to accept elections and constitutional rule. Wood (2000) likewise highlights the “insurgent path to democracy” in South Africa and El Salvador, where worker and peasant uprisings subverted the elite by undermining property rights, disrupting the supply of disciplined labor, and prompting international sanctions. Persistent pressure from below eventually convinced the elite that it was less costly to grant democracy than it was to remain defiant. During the Arab Spring of 2010 and 2011, protesters overthrew autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, spreading “democratic fervor” and democratic reforms across North Africa and the Middle East (Sly, 2011; Beinin and Vairel, 2011). Focusing on nineteenth-century Europe, Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) show that democratic transitions are more likely after periods of economic crisis, which they interpret to mean that economic grievances cause social unrest that forces autocrats to concede power.

The graph in Figure 8.1 separates 78 democratic transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa according to whether or not they followed at least one significant protest

event in the preceding five years. “Significant protest events” include riots, revolutions, and anti-government demonstrations, as coded by the Cross-National Time Series Data Archive (Banks and Wilson, 2013). I adopt the common definition of “democratic transition” as an increase of at least three points in a country’s Polity score, which is a composite index ranging from -10 to 10 that measures freedom of elections, executive turnover, and other aspects of democracy (Marshall and Jaggers, 2011). The overwhelming majority of transitions between 1964 and 2011 followed significant protest events. This does not rule out the possibility that other factors cause democratic transitions, but it is consistent with the idea that protest facilitates democratization beyond Europe, Latin America, and the Arab world.

In short, there appears to be a close link between protest and democratic regime change in Africa. This relationship is reciprocal: Protests aid democratic transitions, and democracy introduces political freedoms that facilitate even more protests (Scarrit, McMillan and Mozaffar, 2001).

## 8.2 The Protest Trap

The virtuous cycle described above is one possible outcome of African protests. However, protests sometimes escalate in ways that destabilize nascent democratic regimes and disrupt developing economies.<sup>2</sup> Forty-six countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have transitioned to democracy over the past 50 years (Kapstein and Converse, 2008). Citizens in those countries might rationally fear that incumbents will revert to despotism and try to outstay

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<sup>2</sup>Greskovits (1998) documents this phenomenon in Eastern Europe.

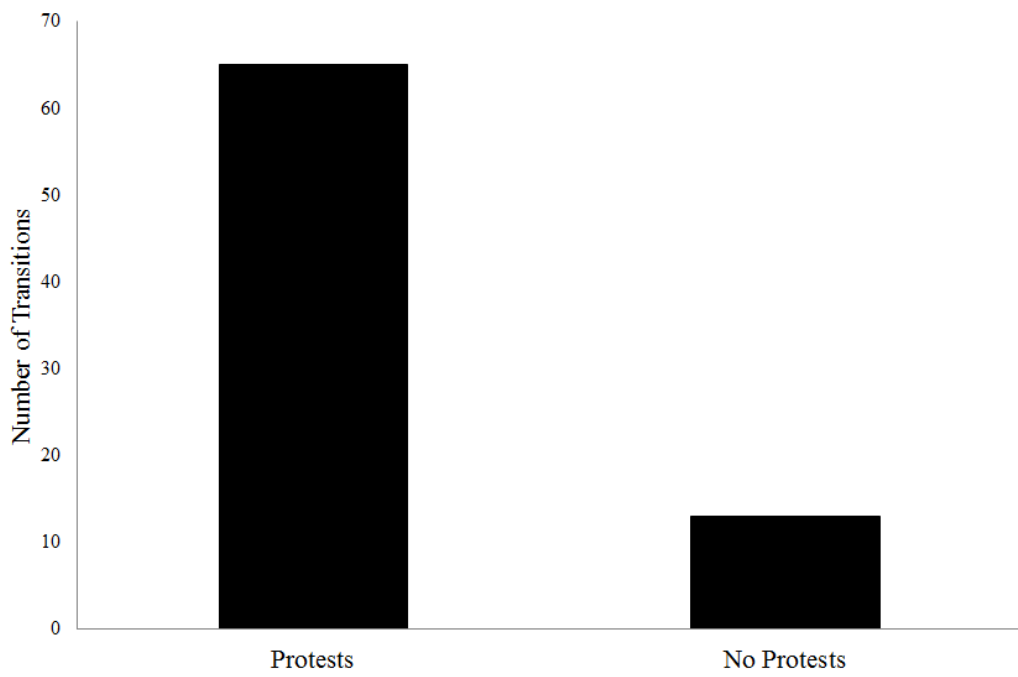


Figure 8.1: Protests and Democratic Transitions in Africa, 1964-2011

their mandates, as Mamadou Tandja did in Niger. Empirical research confirms this fear: Surveys from four African regimes that are “advancing toward democracy” (Ghana, Uganda, Botswana, and Cape Verde) showed that “people were unsure about the virtues and vices of a democratic dispensation and therefore ... offered tentative support to democracy but at the same time retained residual loyalties to older authoritarian alternatives” (Bratton and Mattes, 2009, 18). Elected incumbents, on their part, might worry that citizens will revert to extra-electoral forms of political participation, such as coups and protests. Uncertainty leads citizens and incumbents alike to hedge their bets with pre-emptive aggression (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). Nervous incumbents repress freedoms of expression and association (Diamond, 1999). They also try to forestall coups by distributing targeted goods, reducing food prices, and over-valuing domestic currency to mollify citizens living near the seat of government (Bates, 1981). Such favoritism reinforces inequalities that earlier chapters of this dissertation have shown to motivate protests.

Whereas sporadic protests can complement the electoral process by prodding incumbents to enact democratic reforms (Beaulieu, 2014), continual and unruly protests can threaten not just democratic consolidation, but also economic development. For example, nation-wide demonstrations in Guinea against the repressive and ineffective Conté government halted nearly all economic activity for over two months in 2007. This was devastating in a country where nearly half of the population lives below the poverty line of \$196 per year (Engeler, 2008). The 2007 protests precipitated a coup in 2008 and more demonstrations in 2009 in which dozens of pro-democracy protesters died

at the hands of government troops (Camara, 2008; Arieff and Cook, 2009; “*Dozens Killed’ at Guinea Protest*”, 2009; “*Scores Killed in Guinea Ethnic Violence*”, 2013).

This cycle, in which protests against poverty, inequality, and autocracy inadvertently reproduce those same problems, is akin to what Paul Collier terms “the conflict trap” (Collier, 2007). The conflict trap occurs when civil war produces conditions—like political uncertainty and poverty—that increase the risk of more civil war (Collier, 2007; Håvard et al., 2011). In this dissertation, I have distinguished civil war from protest by showing that inequality correlates with the latter but not the former. However, civil war and protest may have an important feature in common: Both can recur chronically, as part of an equilibrium. In the protest trap, anti-government demonstrations provoke incumbents to repress opponents or to placate would-be protesters with targeted benefits; resultant political and economic grievances give rise to further protests. The possibility of protest cycles in Africa—both vicious and virtuous—deserves attention from scholars and policy makers.

### **8.3 Lessons for Scholars and Policy Makers**

The Guinean uprisings and their aftermath contrast with the 2009-2010 uprisings and coup in Niger, which most observers saw as advancing Niger toward democracy (Barnett, 2010; Baudais and Chauzal, 2011). Why do protests sometimes help and sometimes hurt democracy and development in African countries? This can be a fruitful area for study, because most of the existing

literature on the consequences of African protests focuses on democratic transitions of the 1990s (e.g. Bratton (1994); Bratton and van de Walle (1997); Wood (2001); Posner (1995)). The African politics literature lacks comprehensive, systematic descriptions and explanations of variation in the effects of African protests on democracy and development.

One exception is a new book by Beaulieu (2014), in which the author uses an original data set on electoral protests in developing countries from 1975 to 2006 to investigate the effects of protests on democratic consolidation. Beaulieu concludes that mass demonstrations can help democratic consolidation when they attract attention from international actors who demand that incumbents implement democratic reforms. Additional research of this kind could complement studies like the ones in this dissertation, which focus on the determinants—rather than the effects—of African protests.

There are also opportunities to explore the effects of protests beyond regime change. I have presented evidence that African protests are motivated primarily by material grievances and less by concerns about democracy. If inequality continues to rise in African countries, then material grievances could become even more politically salient. Therefore, scholars might explore the economic consequences of public demands for redistribution and for policies, such as education spending, that improve citizens' chances of upward mobility. Do incumbents eventually acquiesce to such demands, making protest an effective way for citizens in weak democracies to bend policies in their favor? Or do the economic costs of social unrest outweigh any economic benefits of policy change?



Answering those questions is important for policy makers as well as for scholars. The spread of democracy in developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa has long been a top policy priority for western governments and international organizations. United States foreign policy, in particular, has centered on the idea that a more democratic world is a more orderly, peaceful, and prosperous place (Wollack, 2008). This notion was prominent in fights against fascism and communism during World War II and the Cold War, and American policy makers continue to use democracy as a weapon against terrorism in the twenty-first century. During revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, even budget-conscious Republicans criticized the Obama administration for proposing to cut the State Department's \$140 million democracy promotion fund by 21 percent and to reduce subsidies for the National Endowment for Democracy by 12 percent to \$104 million (Foley, 2011).

Policy makers who are interested in promoting democracy or economic development abroad could advance their agendas by aiding protesters in autocratic and transitional regimes. They could facilitate democratic transition by ensuring that aggrieved citizens—whatever their grievances might be—have the resources to challenge incumbents. Levitsky and Way (2010, 67) refer to this strategy “levelling the playing field” between incumbents and opponents: “In poor countries, where a few 4x4 vehicles or rural radio stations can make a big difference, external efforts to level the playing field do not require large sums of money. By simply enabling opposition groups to reach voters across the country, even modest assistance can put those groups in a position to win.” Foreign involvement can reinforce protesters' efforts not only

by providing logistical resources, but also by applying additional pressure on incumbents (Butcher, 2012; Beaulieu, 2014). For example, the United States helped Nicaraguan opposition members run a successful campaign against the Sandinistas in 1990. Civil society groups and independent media organizations in Serbia, Cambodia, and Ukraine have also used American and European support to sustain pro-democracy movements (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Policy makers could extend support to protesters who demand progressive economic policies, and not just democratic reforms. Lending external assistance to protesters in foreign countries is usually controversial and can have unforeseen negative effects (Sharp and Blanchard, 2013), but it can ensure that citizens with the will to change the status quo also have a way to do so. Collier (2007) advises that foreign intervention might even be necessary to break the conflict trap, because traps are by nature self-reinforcing. His prescription may also apply to the protest trap.

Where protesters are not already pressuring incumbents for political and economic reform, scholars and policy makers might be interested to ascertain the determinants of political and economic grievances. In this dissertation, I have shown that people are more likely to protest, all else equal, if they do not expect their economic conditions to improve. To the extent that citizens in Africa and elsewhere remain politically quiescent, it is not simply because they lack the freedom or resources to rise up; it is because they are too optimistic. What explains subjective well-being amid objective poverty, inequality, and oppression? Why do some people expect their economic conditions to be no better in the next year or five years, whereas others foresee improvements in

their lives (and therefore do not protest)? Answering these questions can help scholars who are trying to understand political behavior and policy makers who are trying to empower citizens in the developing world.

Psychologists have begun to investigate the causes of political and economic grievances (or the lack thereof). In observational and experimental studies of people in the United States, they observe that Americans tend to overestimate the odds of positive outcomes. For instance, most subjects give themselves a much higher chance of surviving natural disasters or illness than those around them in identical circumstances (de Meza and Southey, 1996, 375). Psychologists believe this to be a natural mental coping mechanism, albeit one with sub-optimal behavioral implications. In contrast to their “sadder but wiser” peers, people who remain hopeful in the face of unfavorable odds are less likely to engage in behaviors, including protesting, that re-stack the odds in their favor (Alloy and Abramson, 1979; Taylor, 1989). Protest scholars could explore the determinants of grievances in regions that the psychology literature tends to overlook, such as Sub-Saharan Africa. They could also study how incumbents and opposition leaders use the media and propaganda to strategically shape popular attitudes about policies and politicians.

## 8.4 Conclusion

The relationship between inequality and protest has been a subject of interest since long before modern African countries even existed. In *Politics*, Aristotle wrote that “what differentiates oligarchy and democracy is wealth or

the lack of it” (Aristotle / Trevor J. Saunders and T. A. Sinclair, trans., 1962, 117). In *Wage, Labour, and Capital*, Marx emphasized the individual-level mechanisms that make relative deprivation politically significant and distinct from absolute deprivation:

“A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirement 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, or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighboring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls” (Marx, 1847/1935).

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated the contemporary relevance of classic theories about inequality and social unrest. Conflict is by no means new to Africa, but African conflicts have a new face in this age when poverty is generally on the decline, but inequality is on the rise. The modal African conflict is not a large-scale civil or interstate war, nor a bloody riot between rival ethnic or religious groups; it is a peaceful protest of a few hundred to a few thousand people, lasting a few hours to a few days. This fact is gaining recognition among scholars. A growing chorus of them, including Firebaugh (2003) and Piketty (2014), echoes the central argument in this dissertation: A rise in protests with a rise in economic inequality is probably no coincidence.

# Appendices

# Appendix A

## Models of Protest Frequency with Alternative Issue Categories

Table A.1: Regression Analysis of Protest Frequency (Protests about Ethnic Discrimination or Ethnic Issues)

|                      | (1)           | (2)               | (3)              | (4)              | (5)              | (6)              | (7)              |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Inequality           | -.02<br>(.05) | -.02<br>(.09)     | .01<br>(.10)     | -.02<br>(.09)    | .03<br>(.10)     | .03<br>(.09)     | .00<br>(.09)     |
| Income (log)         | .41<br>(.38)  | .68***<br>(.33)   | .80*<br>(.46)    | 1.09*<br>(.57)   | 1.29**<br>(.61)  | 1.47**<br>(.70)  | .94*<br>(.57)    |
| GDP Growth           |               | .02*<br>(.01)     | .01<br>(.01)     | .02<br>(.04)     | .05<br>(.39)     | .03<br>(.05)     | .02<br>(.04)     |
| Export Concentration |               | 2.57***<br>(1.04) | 2.26**<br>(1.13) | 2.39**<br>(1.14) | 2.37*<br>(1.15)  | .06<br>(1.25)    | 2.41**<br>(1.20) |
| Population (log)     | .04*<br>(.27) | .39*<br>(.26)     | .41*<br>(.26)    | .13*<br>(.34)    | .27<br>(.23)     | .18<br>(.36)     | .26<br>(.35)     |
| Regime Type          |               | .04<br>(.05)      | .06<br>(.04)     | .07*<br>(.04)    | .07*<br>(.04)    | .06<br>(.04)     | .08*<br>(.05)    |
| Labor Participation  |               | .00<br>(.03)      | .01<br>(.02)     | -.01*<br>(.03)   | .04**<br>(.02)   | -.02<br>(.03)    | -.01<br>(.03)    |
| Urban                |               |                   | .02<br>(.02)     | .00<br>(.02)     | .02<br>(.03)     | -.02<br>(.03)    | .00<br>(0.02)    |
| Phones               |               |                   | -.04***<br>(.01) | -.05***<br>(.01) | -.05***<br>(.01) | -.05***<br>(.02) | -.05***<br>(.01) |
| Inflation            |               |                   |                  | .01<br>(.02)     |                  | .01<br>(.02)     | .02<br>(.02)     |
| CFA Member           |               |                   |                  | -.96<br>(.76)    |                  | -1.29<br>(.96)   | -.90<br>(.75)    |
| Food Prices          |               |                   |                  |                  | .00<br>(.00)     |                  |                  |
| Military Personnel   |               |                   |                  |                  |                  | -.38*<br>(.24)   |                  |
| Military Expenditure |               |                   |                  |                  |                  |                  | .05<br>(.13)     |
| Observations         | 531           | 338               | 322              | 296              | 217              | 282              | 226              |
| Countries            | 28            | 26                | 26               | 24               | 17               | 24               | 24               |

Negative binomial regression estimates with standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses. The dependent variable is the frequency of protests about ethnic discrimination or ethnic issues in a given country-year. \*Significant at .10; \*\*significant at .05; \*\*\*significant at .01.

Table A.2: Regression Analysis of Protest Frequency (Protests about Elections)

|                      | (1)              | (2)            | (3)            | (4)              | (5)              | (6)              | (7)              |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Inequality           | -.18***<br>(.05) | -.10*<br>(.07) | -.10<br>(.07)  | -.14***<br>(.05) | -.13*<br>(.08)   | -.15*<br>(.06)   | -.26***<br>(.07) |
| Income (log)         | .17<br>(.16)     | -.02<br>(.22)  | .22<br>(.37)   | .05<br>(.41)     | .00<br>(.47)     | .24<br>(.42)     | .17<br>(.43)     |
| GDP Growth           |                  | .01*<br>(.01)  | .01<br>(.01)   | .00<br>(.03)     | -.02<br>(.04)    | -.01<br>(.04)    | -.02<br>(.04)    |
| Export Concentration |                  | -1.00<br>(.83) | -1.00<br>(.84) | -.69<br>(.84)    | 1.48<br>(1.10)   | .06<br>(.67)     | .40<br>(.64)     |
| Population (log)     | .23*<br>(.14)    | .23*<br>(.16)  | .29*<br>(.16)  | .31*<br>(.21)    | .38**<br>(.17)   | .53***<br>(.16)  | .63***<br>(.15)  |
| Regime Type          |                  | .04<br>(.03)   | .05*<br>(.03)  | .06**<br>(.29)   | .07**<br>(.03)   | .00<br>(.03)     | .02<br>(.02)     |
| Labor Participation  |                  | -.02<br>(.02)  | -.02<br>(.02)  | -.02<br>(.02)    | -.03<br>(.02)    | -.01<br>(.02)    | .01<br>(.01)     |
| Urban                |                  |                | .00<br>(.02)   | .02<br>(.02)     | .02<br>(.02)     | .01<br>(.02)     | .01<br>(0.02)    |
| Phones               |                  |                | -.02<br>(.01)  | -.02**<br>(.01)  | -.03***<br>(.01) | -.02<br>(.01)    | -.01<br>(.01)    |
| Inflation            |                  |                |                | .01<br>(.01)     |                  | -.01<br>(.01)    | -.01<br>(.01)    |
| CFA Member           |                  |                |                | -.13<br>(.50)    |                  | -.32<br>(.42)    | -.18<br>(.39)    |
| Food Prices          |                  |                |                |                  | .00<br>(.00)     |                  |                  |
| Military Personnel   |                  |                |                |                  |                  | -.54***<br>(.19) |                  |
| Military Expenditure |                  |                |                |                  |                  |                  | -.27***<br>(.09) |
| Observations         | 759              | 494            | 473            | 431              | 317              | 412              | 387              |
| Countries            | 40               | 38             | 38             | 35               | 25               | 35               | 35               |

Negative binomial regression estimates with standard errors clustered at the country level in parentheses. The dependent variable is the frequency of protests about elections in a given country-year. \*Significant at .10; \*\*significant at .05; \*\*\*significant at .01.



# Appendix B

## Wording of Afrobarometer Questions

**Round 1 (1999-2001):** Here are a series of things people might say about how they see their group in relation to other [South Africans]. There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your opinions. Please tell me whether you disagree, neither disagree nor agree, or agree with these statements: You feel much stronger ties to [members of your identity group] than to other [South Africans]?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

- Don't know

**Round 2 (2002-2004):** Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [national identity] and being a \_\_\_\_\_ [respondent's identity group]. Which of these two groups do you feel most strongly attached to?

- National identity
- Group identity
- Don't know

**Round 3 (2005-2006):** Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] and being a \_\_\_\_\_ [respondent's identity group]. Which of these two groups do you feel most strongly attached to?

- I feel only (R's group)
- I feel more (R's group) than [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.]
- I feel equally [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] and (R's groups)
- I feel more [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] than (R's groups)
- I feel only [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.]
- Don't know

# Appendix C

## Survey Instrument

The following questions are translated from original surveys in French, Hausa, and Zarma.

Table C.1: Survey Questions and Coding

| Variable                         | Question   | Scale   | Coding   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Protest participation            | Over the last 12 months, have you participated in a protest or a strike?   | Binary response (Yes/No).   | Participation=1, no participation=0.   |
| Asked to protest                 | Did anyone ask you to protest?<br>If so, who?  | Open-ended question.  | Coded into<br>Friend/Family/Student<br>Group/Labour Union/Civil<br>Society/Other/None.                             |
| Opposition to tazartché          | What do you think about tazartché?   | Open-ended question   | Collapsed into a binary variable where “support tazartché”=1, “opposed to tazartché” =0.                           |
| Absolute deprivation             | In general, how do you consider your economic situation?   | Very bad/Quite bad/Neither good nor bad/Quite good/Very good/Dont know. | Collapsed into a binary variable where “very bad and rather bad”=1, and other responses (excluding “dont know”)=0. |
| Relative deprivation (egoistic)  | In general, how do you consider your economic situation relative to the economic situation of other Nigeriens?   | Better/The same/Worse/Don’t know.                                       | Collapsed into a binary variable where “worse”=1, and other responses (besides “dont know”)=0.                     |
| Relative deprivation (fraternal) | In general, how do you consider the economic situation of [respondent’s identity group] relative to the economic situation of other [identity groups]? | Better/The same/Worse/Don’t know.                                       | Collapsed into a binary variable where “worse”=1, and other responses (besides “dont know”)=0.                     |

Table C.2: Survey Questions and Coding (Cont.)

| Variable                         | Question   | Scale   | Coding  |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Relative deprivation (temporal)  | Thinking about the past, how do you consider your economic situation relative to your economic situation 12 months ago?          | Better/The same/Worse/Don't know.                                     | Collapsed into a binary variable where "worse"=1, and other responses (besides "dont know")=0.  |
| Low prospects of upward mobility | In the next 12 months (five years), do you expect your economic situation to be better, the same, or worse than it is right now? | Better/The same/Worse/Don't know.                                     | Collapsed into a binary variable where "worse"=1, and other responses (besides "dont know")=0.  |
| Organization member              | Are you a member of a union, rural association, student association, or some other organization?                                 | Union/Rural association/Student association/Other organization/None.  | Collapsed into a binary variable where "member of an organization"=1 and "not a member of any organization"=0.  |
| Education                        | What is the highest level of education that you have completed?  | None/Koranic school/Primary school/Secondary school/Lycée/University. | Used to create a series of binary variables, where "Koranic school"/"Secondary education"/"Post-secondary education"=1 and "primary education or less"=0. |
| Religiosity                      | Do you consider yourself ...?  | Very religious/Religious/Somewhat religious/Not very religious.       | Used to create a series of binary variables, where "religious"/"religious"/"not religious"=1 and "very religious"=0.                                      |

# Appendix D

## Interview with a Malian Union Leader

The following transcript, translated from French, is of an interview that I conducted in Bamako on December 17, 2009 with an organizer of the National Workers' Union of Mali (UNTM). I withhold the organizer's name for confidentiality.

**What are your objectives as union members?**

We, as unions, cannot limit ourselves to the interests of workers. ... Since independence, there is no democracy without unions. The two go together. And thus, unions must have a vision even beyond salaried workers. Because defending democracy requires the participation of all actors, salaried or not. ... Unions today have an important role to play, because they have a hand

in all aspects of economic development. That means that we must play counter-point to power-holders. Our goal is not to seize power, but to defend socioeconomic justice and equality—so that citizens are equal under the law and so that the government respects the conventions of the International Labor Organization. We have played a very important role in the transition to democracy. Democracy is our child. Labor has become the center of the democracy movement—a movement in which I've participated.

**Is that to say that you are active in politics?**

You know, we aren't political actors, per se. But we must have political influence. We don't want to seize power, but without political influence, one has neither social nor economic influence. Still, we are not true political actors. We are independent of political leaders, and this independence allows us to intervene when conditions are bad and to apply pressure.

**Ho many members are there in the UNTM?**

Today we have about 50,000 members.

**Is that number growing?**

We're trying to expand, because in the 90s our numbers fell as a result

of privatization. But today, with globalization, the state as we know it is disappearing. The economy is fixed by multinational corporations. Today's politicians don't have much power. That's also the problem. Democracy itself is in peril. Because in a country where leaders can't respond to the population's needs, there can be no democracy. Only anarchy.

### **What is the best way to defend democracy?**

That's debatable. Today you must have a global vision, because the decisions that affect Africa come from outside of Africa. There must be global action, beginning with workers' organizations. In November 2006, we formed the CSI [a central union]. It was necessary to create a single organization, because today in the world there is a single enemy. Capital is in the process of determining the global order, power, and wealth. And today the virtual economy is on the verge of supplanting the real economy—the real economy that creates jobs and wealth. Unfortunately, people are only interested in the virtual economy—the stock market. Don't you see? Making millions in a few hours ... domestic companies are under attack. The government is not working in the national interest. The national spirit is fading, which is very dangerous, because that generates cruel inequalities between people. It starts revolts, civil wars, etc. I'm not saying it will be easy to defend democracy.

### **How is the UNTM organized?**



We have 13 national unions, which we call syndicats de branche. And we have eight regional unions, one for each region of Mali.

**But there were formerly 12 unions, yes?**

Yes, there were 12. But ever since 1996 or 1997, there have been 13. We added a union for the food industry. There are 49 local unions. And then there's what we call the conseil central, which is the executive bureau of the UNTM. There's also a congress that convenes every five years.

**To hold elections?**

Yes, there are elections and committees.

**Who can vote in the elections?**

According to UNTM statutes, there are congressional delegates, chosen at the level of the national union. Each national union is allocated a number of delegates according to its number of members. Each national union sends seven delegates to the congress, from which the executive bureau is chosen.

**What is the best way to represent the interests of Malian workers?  
Dialogue? Strikes?**

We have prioritized social dialogue. This allows parties to meet and exchange their concerns. Because you see, negotiation has its limits: negotiation is for resolving conflict, whereas dialogue is for preventing conflict in the first place. And yet, dialogue has its own limits. In other words, we don't count out the option of fighting on behalf of workers. We don't count out the option of making demands, even if we prioritize dialogue. But dialogue is a way to initially find a solution to the problems at hand, provided good faith and will. If parties respect each other, it is possible to find solutions through dialogue.

**In general, do the parties respect each other?**

In general, yes. Because everyone prefers to avoid a strike. Often the state pushes us toward a strike, and once the strike paralyzes the country, we resume dialogue. Therein lies the power of unions—in independence, in our capacity to analyze. The UNTM is the premier democratic organization in Mali. All the leaders of this country had their start in the UNTM. Even the original secretary-general of the UNTM is still around. Abdoulaye Diallo, a Guinean. He was the head minister of labor in French Sudan.

**Really! How old is he?**

Haha! He must be very old! You know, it was the unions that once organized Africans against colonial powers. And Mali is one of the rare countries that never stood on the sidelines. Many Frenchmen fell. And even after

occupation, there were revolts all the way up until independence. Maliens don't know how to submit. There were revolts even in the smallest villages. As a result, the conquest and occupation of Mali were extremely difficult. All of the first presidents were unionists. That shows you that the workers' struggle led African countries to independence.

### **How has the movement changed since those days?**

The movement has changed with successive regimes. The first regime was socialist, which at first had a very bad rapport with the colonial French union. Because of our ties with the Soviet Union and China, France cut off our aid. And then there was the coup d'état and the subsequent arrest of union leaders in violation of the conventions of the International Labor Organization. After these events, the UNTM played a large role in elaborating the texts of the National Conference of 1992. This transition lasted 14 months. We told ourselves that preserving democracy was labor's top priority, because democracy allows unions to promote their interests and to develop. Therefore, we decided that we would make certain accommodations in the name of democracy. For example, the new president Alpha Oumar Konaré was installed at a moment when students and the opposition were in the streets, people were burning tires, using tear gas ... We realized that it's impossible to meet in just two years all the demands that had accumulated over 20 years. We accepted this. We told ourselves that we must be mature. By tradition, Mali had only one labor union. But, we adopted a pluralist model to allow workers to create orga-

nizations as they chose. These plural unions were the precursors to democracy.

### **What happened to those organizations?**

Some still operate, but some have disappeared.

### **Do you view the UNTM at the head of civil society?**

We believe that we must form a strategic alliance among unions and other civil society groups to mount a common struggle.

### **What is the common struggle?**

The common struggle is the reinforcement of democracy. It's the fight against poverty. It's equal economic opportunity. It's economic partnerships. Because for a while now, the concept of civil society has become very broad, very open, very confusing. Everyone considers themselves civil society: the marabouts, associations, organizations, NGOs. There is no universal definition of civil society. But we must have a strong civil society. Now, in Mali there are many people who exploit civil society to access privileges. This is a serious problem. It's important to pay close attention and avoid falling into that trap. We agree to work with the organizations with which we share the same concerns: the NDH [Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme], which works on human rights, and other similar organizations. We are with them in a civil society. When you

talk about human rights in general, you must include workers rights, because those are human rights. Political rights are also human rights. Economic rights, too. In other words, we participate in civil society, but we are not tied to every civil society organization, because some of them have political motives. Political parties create organizations to intervene in civil society.

### **Does the UNTM avoid politicization?**

It's true that the majority of us are with the opposition. The opposition is important, because without it, there is no democracy; because the opposition contributes to the development of the country. We are a responsible opposition, with imagination, that analyzes, that acts ... that's an opposition. We are not against all that. But an opposition that has an empty political strategy ... we are not OK with that. We told ourselves that we would be prepared to back any proposition from a political party, whether a pro-government party or an opposition party, so long as that proposition helped workers. Our political independence gives us the freedom to denounce what doesn't work and to support what does. Article 13 in the UNTM by-laws states that when a union member engages in politics, he must leave the union. But when you're a citizen, you have the freedom to have a political opinion and to work on behalf of a political party. That's a democratic process, and one that requires reinforcing individuals' capacity to understand current events and to really master political concepts. We have not had the same political experience that Americans have had. We are not in the same

milieu. We've studied labor history of the United States, and think that we might evolve toward your kind of democracy. But for the time being, our democracy remains young and fragile.

### **What makes democracy fragile?**

Democracy is fragile, because we live in a country where the population is comprised of only about 20 percent intellectuals. I'm speaking carefully here, because I don't want to use the word "illiterate." Many Malians don't speak French, English, or any other second language. And yet, these are people with the capacity to understand. You must always think in terms of "we" and not "I."

### **Given the fragility of democracy in Mali, how can the UNTM aid in democratic consolidation?**

Democracy has elements of education, training, sensitization, and also dialogue. We must open a conversation with the people. We must develop a say to inform the population.

### **What is the best way to inform people?**

It's to engage people in the elaboration of development plans in their home regions. We support decentralization. It's necessary to involve the population

in the articulation of its needs. That is democracy.

**What is the relationship between the UNTM and the CSTM [Workers' Trade Union Confederation of Mali]?**

The CSTM was founded by people who had left the UNTM. For the most part, these were people who had lost elections and left to create a new organization that they called the CSTM. At the time, I had just lost my father and was in mourning, staying at home. So as the secretary of transportation, I was not informed by the union congress. And so I was not given any say in the matter. I ended up writing all the founding texts of the CSTM and was elected Secretary General of Transportation. But I had a different vision than the CSTM had.

**What was that vision?**

You see, the members of the CSTM are always grabbing at resources to do what they want. I'm not OK with that. And the union is very personalized. Without Hammadou Amion Guindo, there is no CSTM. That is not syndicalism. But I didn't leave just like that. I attended the congress to explain that I could not work on those terms. I hid nothing. I invited all members of the press. Several CSTM projects have been suspended by international partners. The management is horrible. All the computers go to the sons and daughters of CSTM organizers. That's no right. And this

carte blanche that ATT [the president] gave them ... ATT helped them out because he was from Mopti. That's why he helped them. He even forged contracts.



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