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PROTEST ACTIVITY, SOCIAL INCENTIVES, AND REJECTION SENSITIVITY: RESULTS FROM A SURVEY EXPERIMENT ABOUT TUITION FEES

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Abstract

People may engage in protest activity either because of collective incentives or selective incentives, or a combination of them. In this study we focus on the selective incentives part of the calculus of political participation, particularly the impact of the social dimension. We hypothesize that people will participate in demonstrations or other forms of protest, to a higher extent if they are afraid of rejection, but only if they feel that they have high social support for their own position. This hypothesis was supported in an online survey experiment where social support was manipulated. Results also revealed that individuals who were highly rejection sensitive were among the most likely to participate even though they did not believe protest activity to be an efficient way to bring about social change. This supports the notion that some individuals tend to engage in protest activity for purely social reasons. However it is still unclear whether these individuals are driven by an approach motivation to establish new social bonds or an avoidance motivation to escape possible social rejection.

Keywords

political participation; protest activity; social incentives; rejection sensitivity

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Political protest in 2011 was such a widespread phenomenon around the globe that the magazine Time chose the ‘Protester’ as the ‘Person of the Year’. Movements such as the Spanish ‘Indignados’, the Greek ‘Aganaktismeni’, or the American ‘Occupy Wall Street’ mobilized several million people to take the streets and expanded to many other Western democracies. But, why do people leave their homes and participate in such demonstrations? In the scientific literature, protest activity has been framed as a collective action problem (Opp, 2009), and Olsen (1965) describes participation as a costly act. Since the probability of deciding the outcome is low, rational citizens should abstain from participating in political activities. Yet, many citizens become active. The aim of this paper is to contribute to explaining why individuals protest.

Several solutions to this ‘paradox’ have been presented. We focus on solutions centering on selective incentives, benefits that accrue to those who participate and are enjoyed independently of the political outcome (Bäck, Teorell, & Westholm, 2011). Specifically, we are interested in incentives relating to the social groups that individuals belong to. Several authors have stressed the role of social incentives, mainly focusing on the idea that integration into social networks encouraging protest is an important factor for engaging in protest behavior (Opp, 2009). For instance, one important explanation of participation is membership in the specific group being affected by some grievance (Klandermans, 2011).

Because people have a fundamental need to belong to groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), they are also sensitive to rejection cues (Williams, 2007). To some extent, engaging in protest activities may be driven by a fear of otherwise being rejected. Individuals vary in how sensitive they are to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Even though there is some research on the link between personality and political participation (Caprara, 2008), this particular personality characteristic has been surprisingly absent from research on collective action and protest activity. We believe that individuals who are sensitive to rejection will take part in protest activity to a larger extent than those who are less sensitive. However, this should only be true when the individual has high social support for their own preference, and thus will not risk being rejected from the own group.

Participation, Incentives, and Rejection Sensitivity

The ‘paradox’ of participation

Our theoretical starting point derives from the rational choice literature on political participation where participation is described as a costly act, an attempt to bring about a public good available to everybody (Olson, 1965). Individual’s impact on the probability of deciding the collective outcome is low, thus rational citizens should abstain from participating in political activity. Yet, many citizens become active, for example in demonstrations or other forms of protest. Two models have been proposed to explain this ‘paradox’. First, the collective incentives model, which suggests that some citizens believe they can influence political outcomes. Research here has focused on the fact that some individuals have a high sense of ‘efficacy’. Second, the selective incentives model focuses on the benefits that accrue to those who participate and are enjoyed independently of the political outcome (Bäck et al., 2011).

In this paper, we focus on the so-called selective incentives. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) suggest that the original calculus of voting is incomplete, because it ignores the

rewards of the act of voting that are independent of the outcome. These authors therefore stress the importance of psychic gratifications, such as the positive experience of having done one's duty when voting (cf. Bäck et al., 2011). Another type of selective incentive is known as expressive incentives. This is illustrated by supporters who root for their favorite sports team in front of the TV even though the team can neither hear nor see their efforts. Thus, the purpose of cheering is not to promote victory but to enjoy the satisfaction of expression *per se* (Brennan & Lomasky, 1985). Moreover, according to Whiteley (1995, p. 222), 'ideological radicalism should motivate party members to become more involved than voters or inactive members, if the reward for their involvement is to express deeply held beliefs in company with other like-minded individuals'. This type of incentive can be generalized to other forms of political action, such as protest activity, that gives citizens an opportunity to express intense political opinions. Further, political participation may have entertainment value (Tulloch, 1971). Citizens who vote, campaign, lobby or demonstrate may find the activity exciting *per se* or enjoy the company of other participants (Bäck et al., 2011).

In this article we focus on these forms of incentives. We contend that participants of protest events, such as demonstrations, derive some benefits from participation *per se* (Pattie et al, 2004, p. 142). More specifically, we are interested in incentives that relate to the social groups that individuals belong to or aspire to become part of, what can broadly be labeled as 'social incentives'. The role of social incentives in political participation is further discussed below.

The role of social incentives in participation

Several authors have stressed the role of social incentives in political participation. The main idea is that integration into social networks is an important reason for engaging in protest behavior and may encourage protest (Opp, 2009). Indeed, it has consistently been shown that one important reason why people participate is that they belong to the specific group being affected by some grievance (Klandermans, 2011).

In particular, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals have a strong motivation to seek out groups where they are accepted and respected. Such memberships fulfill several basic needs, such as the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), to feel unique (Brewer, 1991; 2007), to maintain or increase self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and to reduce uncertainty by validating others (Hogg, Hohman, & Rivera, 2008). Thus, humans are motivated to seek the support of others. Such social support has previously been presented as one explanation as to why individuals participate in collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2004). The idea is that if an individual receives information that others share their opinions, then he/she can define the situation as collective, which implies that others should also be willing to take action (van Zomeren et al., 2004; Klandermans, 1997). For instance, Mackie et al. (2000) showed that perceiving that one's beliefs are shared, explained both anger and intention to engage in action against an opposing out-group. Social support also indicate that participation is 'safe' in the sense that the individual will not be subjected to criticism or questioning, at least not from his/her own group, which should be more important than risk being questioned by other groups to which the individual does not belong (Otten, 2002).

The fundamental need to belong also implies sensitivity to rejection cues (Williams, 2007). To some extent engaging in protest activities on behalf of the group may be driven by a fear of otherwise being rejected or sanctioned. Moreover, individuals may differ in

how sensitive they are to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). We therefore believe that it is not only important to take into account whether individuals belong to or identify with certain social groups, but that certain personality characteristics should matter for protest activity.

When it comes to personality and political participation, the literature in general is relatively silent. However, researchers like Caprara and colleagues (Caprara, 2008; Caprara, Vecchione & Schwartz, 2012), have focused on such features, showing that personality characteristics and personal values affect political participation (focusing on turnout in elections). In a similar vein, Mondak (2010) showed that highly conscientious individuals (as defined by the Big Five) participate in politics to a higher extent when they perceive that the political system will be responsive to their actions. In keeping with this line of literature, we believe that another feature which might be linked to participation in collective action is *rejection sensitivity*.

Rejection sensitivity has been defined as a disposition to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to rejection (Downey, Khouri, & Feldman, 1997; Berenson et al., 2009). Variations along this trait explain why some individuals are more vulnerable to experiences of rejection than others (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Individuals who are sensitive to rejection have usually experienced rejection from close others previously and thus have learnt to expect rejection in different situations. These expectations motivate them to protect themselves against future rejection (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

Even though rejection sensitivity has mostly been studied in interpersonal settings, it should be relevant on a higher, group level as well. For instance, a highly rejection sensitive female should be more attentive to rejection cues and connect them to gender based discrimination, at least when gender is salient. Indeed, recent research indicates that such an application of rejection sensitivity is warranted. Romero-Canyas et al (2010) show that individuals who are high in rejection sensitivity conform more to their groups, when their identity is threatened.

This application of rejection sensitivity to group based attributes is quite novel. In this paper, we present the novel idea that highly rejection sensitive individuals may engage more in certain protest activities, as conforming to group standards is one way to protect oneself against rejection.

Rejection sensitivity

We suggest that if an individual perceives cues of rejection from the group, it is possible he/she may engage more in group serving behaviors. A situation where rejection is likely may be when the group to which an individual belong is about to take collective action. To not engage in the action and support one's fellow group members may be seen by the other members as an act of betrayal which could lead to possible rejection. Thus, in order to withstand such a threat, individual members may engage in participation, at least to some extent, due to their fear of rejection. In such a scenario, individual differences in sensitivity to rejection might play an important role and may affect tendencies to engage in collective action. To our knowledge, no research has so far investigated the link between rejection sensitivity and willingness to participate in protests.

As mentioned above, under some circumstances rejection sensitivity seems to moderate the effect of identity threat (Romero-Canyas et al., 2010). Specifically, highly rejection sensitivity individuals conform more to their group (Romero-Canyas et al., 2010). It is thus plausible that high sensitivity to rejection may elicit willingness to engage in group-serving behaviors in general, and also protest participation.

We contend that individuals who are sensitive to rejection are more likely to take part in protest activity than those who are less sensitive to rejection. This should particularly be true when participation is ‘safe’, that is, when there is no obvious risk of being questioned or criticized for participation, for example, when informed that most others agree with the individual. Thus, we suggest that there is a conditional impact of rejection sensitivity and social support on collective action, which has not been investigated before. Some selective incentives should matter more for certain individuals. Individuals who are sensitive to rejection are more likely to be influenced by whether their own opinion is also supported by others participating in collective action.

To clarify our theoretical argument, we refer to the calculus of participation, which suggests that selective incentives should matter and may induce participation even when collective benefits are low. Such selective incentives may for example include expressive incentives, suggesting that individuals derive an expressive value from protest activity since it gives them a chance to voice their opinions in the company of likeminded people. Selective incentives to protest activity also include social norms, which tell the individual that it is appropriate to take part in such activity.

We suggest that the calculus should also take other contextual features into account (here, social support), and certain personality features (here, rejection sensitivity). More specifically, we argue that selective incentives, such as expressive incentives and social norms, should only have a positive effect on protest activity under certain circumstances: (1) when social support for the own opinion is high (this is when the individual would expect to join ‘likeminded’ people in a protest, and when they believe that there is a social norm saying that they should take part in a particular cause), and (2) when we are dealing with individuals who are highly sensitive to rejection. We thus formulate the hypothesis:

H: Individuals are more likely to take part in protest activity when they are highly rejection sensitive and when social support for their own opinion is high.

Methods

Participants and Material

To perform a first evaluation of the hypothesis that we should see more protest activity among individuals who are highly rejection sensitive when social support for their own opinion is high, we have performed a survey experiment. The participants of this study were 40 university students (29 women; $M_{age} = 25.5$, $SD = 5.68$). Participants were recruited from a web site for people interested in participating in scientific studies. The web questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete. As compensation they were entered in a lottery where they had the possibility to win gift certificates worth 500 SEK, 250 SEK and 100 SEK (about £50, £25 and £10 respectively). All participants were notified by e-mail if they had won or not. The experimental manipulation consisted of whether the participant received high or low social support for his/her opinion.

The web questionnaire was introduced as a study on attitudes towards higher education in Sweden. On the first page, participants were informed about anonymity and that by starting the questionnaire they gave informed consent to participation. First, participants read a fake newspaper article discussing a new proposal to implement tuition fees at Swedish universities and colleges. To make the article credible, we used

the design of a well-known and respected Swedish newspaper.

The article was designed to manipulate social support for the participant's own preference. Pre-testing of the choice of issue revealed that most students, 95% of participants ($n = 59$) in the pre-study opposed tuition fees¹. Further, on this particular issue, university students have very strong opinions ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.39$), and the issue is considered important ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.35$) on 7-point scales from 1 = Not at all strong/Not at all important to 7 = Very strong/Very important. Thus, we could be confident that most students would oppose the proposal to implement tuition fees.

This made it possible to manipulate social support in the newspaper article by creating one article that was very positive towards tuition fees and one that was very negative. In the positive version, henceforth called the 'low social support' version, the general tone was that the proposal to implement tuition fees was positive, that most political parties, known University professors, and the National Student Union supported the proposal. In the negative version, henceforth called the 'high social support' version, the proposal was presented as the opposite. Half of the participants received the low social support version and half received the high social support version. Participants were assigned randomly to conditions.

Measures

Position on the issue. After reading the article, participants stated their own position on the issue (pro/con tuition fees). This item read 'Think about your opinion on this issue for a while. If you were to take a position on the proposal to implement tuition fees, what alternative would you choose?'. Answers were dichotomous, 'I am in favor of the implementation of tuition fees', and 'I am against the implementation of tuition fees'.

Normative endorsement. Participants also stated how important they considered the issue to be, how strong their opinion was, and how certain they were on their position. Answers were measured on 7-point scales from 1 = Not at all important/Not at all strong/not at all certain to 7 = Very important/Very strong/very certain.

Collective action tendencies. This was followed by measures of collective action tendencies (i.e., our dependent variable; cf. van Zomeren et al., 2008). The question read 'Sometimes people feel so strongly about something that they are prepared to take action to stop or enforce it. Considering the proposal to implement tuition fees, what would you consider doing to get your point across?'. Here, participants were given two items previously used by van Zomeren and colleagues (2008): 'I would participate in a demonstration', and 'I would sign a petition'. Answers ranged on 7 point-scales from 1 = Not at all likely to 7 = Very likely. Cronbach's alpha was 0.70, indicating good reliability. The items were collapsed into one index of collective action tendencies ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.62$).

Mode-specific efficacy. After this, we measured mode-specific efficacy, that is, how efficient the participant perceive different modes of participation to be in order to bring about change. On a 10-point scale from 1 = not at all efficient to 10 = highly efficient participants rated the efficiency on voting, working in a political party, personally contacting politicians that have influence, participating in public demonstrations and signing petitions. The items for demonstrating and signing petitions were collapsed into

1 This pre-test was part of a bachelor thesis on the topic of tuition fees. It was a paper-and-pencil questionnaire handed to students in basic level psychology courses at Södertörn University College in Stockholm.

one index of Efficacy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94; $M = 6.07$, $SD = 2.10$)

Rejection sensitivity. Rejection sensitivity was measured using the short version of the rejection sensitivity scale (8 items; cf. Downey & Feldman, 1996). Participants were asked to imagine themselves in different situations that describe things that people sometimes ask of others, for example 'You ask your parents or another family member for a loan to help you through a difficult financial time'. For each situation, participants rate a) how concerned or anxious they would be over the others' reactions, for example 'How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your family would want to help you' ($1 = \textit{very unconcerned}$ to $6 = \textit{very concerned}$), and b) to what extent they expect the others to help them in this situation, for example 'I would expect that they would agree to help as much as they can' ($1 = \textit{very unlikely}$ to $6 = \textit{very likely}$). A total of 8 similar scenarios were presented to the participants. To calculate a score of rejection sensitivity for each situation, the level of rejection concern (response to question a) is multiplied by the reverse of the level of acceptance expectancy (response to question b). An index of overall rejection sensitivity is then calculated by taking the mean of all scores for each situation (Berenson, et al., 2009). Mean rejection sensitivity score $M = 8.36$ with a $SD = 3.86$, which is fairly close to the population scores ($M = 9.69$, $SD = 3.07$, see Berenson et al., 2009).

Identification. Finally, we measured social identification with the student union (the social movement organization, see Klandermans, 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2008). We chose to measure identification with the student union rather than just social identification with the group 'students' because research shows that social movement organization identification is a better predictor of collective action participation (Klandermans, 2011). This identification measure was included as a control variable. Because this variable typically is a very good predictor of protest activity, we wanted to test whether rejection sensitivity predicts collective action tendencies over and beyond the effect of identification. Identification was measured with the following four items: 'I see myself as part of the student union', 'I identify with the student union', 'I feel connected to the student union', and 'I am happy to be a part of the student union'. All answers ranged on 7-point scales from $1 = \textit{Do not agree at all}$, to $7 = \textit{Completely agree}$. Cronbach's alpha was 0.97, again indicating very high internal consistency between items ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.91$).

Results and Discussion

Analyses confirmed that most participants (95%) opposed tuition fees. Two participants supported the proposal and were thus removed from further analyses, resulting in a total of 38 cases. The ratings for importance, opinion strength, and certainty were again high ($M_s = 6.00, 6.21, \text{ and } 6.21$, respectively and $SD_s = 1.54, 1.04, \text{ and } 0.96$, respectively for the three items). This confirmed that our choice of issue was appropriate given the previous results from the pre-study, and that our manipulation of social support was effective.

To test our hypothesis, a linear, hierarchical regression analysis was performed. In the first step (Model 1) social identity, rejection sensitivity and social support (dummy-coded using low support as reference category) were entered. The two-way interaction between support for own position (high/low) and rejection sensitivity was entered in the second model (step 2). The results showed that none of the predictors was significant in the first model, as can be seen in Table 1. In keeping with previous literature (e.g.,

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Social Support, Rejection Sensitivity, and Social Identity on Collective Action Tendencies.

		<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Model 1	Intercept	4.93		0.91	< 0.001	0.07
	Social support ^a	-0.36	-0.11	0.54	0.51	
	RS	0.00	-0.00	0.07	0.99	
	Social identity	0.20	.023	0.15	0.18	
Model 2	Social support ^a x RS	0.28	0.78	0.15	0.07	0.16

^aSocial support is a dummy variable coded as 0 if support for own position is low, and 1 otherwise. In model 2, only the coefficient of the added interaction variable is shown. Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented. RS = Rejection sensitivity.

Klandermans, 2011), there was a non-significant trend in the expected direction for identification, such that increased identification with the student union increased the motivation to participate in protest activity.

In the second model there was a significant interaction between social support and rejection sensitivity. Results showed that highly rejection sensitive individuals were more likely to participate than low rejection sensitive people if they had high social support, but not if they had low social support, giving clear support to our hypothesis. This is more clearly illustrated in Figure 1, where the conditional effect of rejection sensitivity and social support on collective action tendencies is described. Tests of the contrast of marginal effects confirmed the statistically significant differences in the slopes for each group at $p < 0.005$.

Thus, these results show that individuals who are afraid of rejection (high RS), but feel that most others share their own position, that is experience high social support, are more likely to participate than those who are either low in rejection sensitivity or do not feel social support for their own opinion. A possible interpretation of this result is that participation could be interpreted as a way to build social connections. These individuals scored highest on willingness to participate. Second, most likely to participate were individuals who scored low on the rejection sensitivity measure and low on social support. One interpretation of this specific result is that for those who are not afraid of rejection (low RS), collective incentives are more important in determining participation in protest activity; they participate when they feel that activity is needed, that is when support for their opinion is low, as opposed to high.

In order to investigate this idea we performed further analyses adding efficacy to the model. Indeed, another important aspect which might influence whether people will participate or not is the extent to which they believe that the particular form of political influence is effective (Bandura, 1995; 1997; van Zomeren, 2004). If people do not believe that protest activity is an effective way to bring about social change, then they will be less motivated to take part in such actions (i.e. collective incentives are expected to be low). The regression analysis used previously was modified adding efficacy as a single predictor in model 1, and the two-way interactions between efficacy and support, and efficacy and rejection sensitivity in model 2, as well as the three-way interaction between support, rejection sensitivity and efficacy in the third model while controlling for identification with the student union. The results are presented in Table 2.

The results show that there is a significant main effect of efficacy in model 1, indicating that efficacy is the best single predictor for protest activity. The more an individual believes that protest activity is an effective way to bring about social change, the more motivated they are to take part in such activities. The interaction in model 2 from the previous analysis between rejection sensitivity and social support remained virtually unchanged when controlling for efficacy, and no other two-way interactions were significant in model 2. In the third model we find a significant three-way interaction between social support, rejection sensitivity, and efficacy. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 2.

When efficacy was low, highly rejection sensitive individuals, compared to those with low RS, expressed more intention to participate when they experienced high social support. We checked whether individuals who had low social support and low sensitivity to rejection expressed high willingness to participate because they believe protest activity to be an efficient way of influencing political decisions. The three-way interaction reveals that there is a difference within this group (low support, low RS), and that those who score high on efficacy are more likely to participate, possibly due to the above argument that they feel that their participation is needed for social change, while those who score low on efficacy are less motivated to participate. The contrast of marginal effects confirms that willingness to participate is significantly higher for those that experience low support and low RS but believe protest activity to be an effective way to bring about change (see Figure 2).

Interestingly, individuals high in rejection sensitivity, who experience high social support, but score low on efficacy are more likely to express willingness to participate, while those low in rejection sensitivity, are those least inclined to participate. Thus, rejection sensitivity seems to be decisive in predicting who will participate. This suggests that highly rejection sensitive individuals participate in an effort to build relations, as

Figure 1. Two-way interaction between Rejection Sensitivity and Social Support on Collective Action Tendencies (predictive margins).

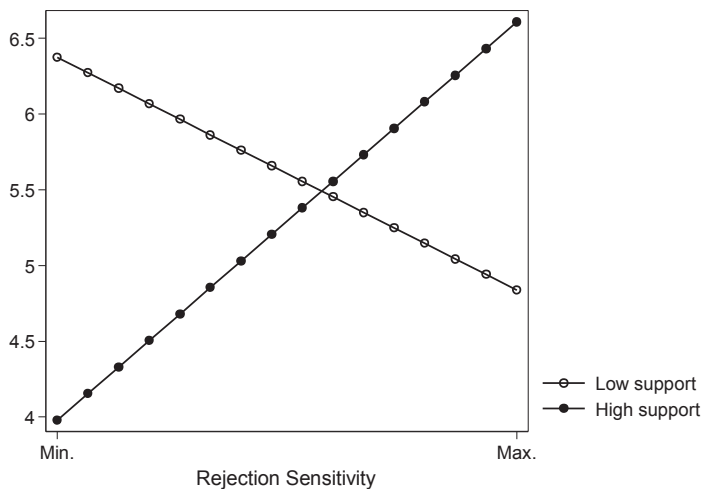


Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Social Support, Rejection Sensitivity, Social Identity, and Efficacy on Collective Action Tendencies.

		<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Model 1	Intercept	3.35		0.94	< 0.001	0.30
	Social support ^a	-0.19	-0.06	0.48	0.71	
	Rejection sensitivity	-0.05	-0.11	0.07	0.47	
	Social identity	0.08	0.10	0.13	0.54	
	Efficacy	0.38	0.51	0.12	0.00	
Model 2						0.38
	Support ^a x RS	0.27	0.72	0.14	0.07	
	Efficacy x Support ^a	0.02	0.09	0.24	0.94	
	Efficacy x RS	-0.01	-0.12	0.04	0.78	
Model 3						0.49
	Support ^a x RS x Efficacy	-0.21	-3.72	0.08	0.02	

^aSocial support is a dummy variable coded as 0 if support for own position is low, and 1 otherwise. RS = Rejection sensitivity. In models 2 and 3, only the coefficients of the added interaction variables are shown. Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented.

they do not believe the form is efficient for bringing change. When these individuals had low social support the trend was reversed; highly rejection sensitive individuals low in efficacy expressed less willingness to participate than those low in rejection sensitivity. Again, highly rejection sensitive individuals refrain from activity if they feel that this may come with a social cost.

General Discussion and Future Research

Each year, individuals take the streets to demonstrate against issues that may contradict their interests. Considering that sometimes the probability of affecting the outcome is low, the question that arises is ‘why do people protest’. Drawing on Olson (1965), some scholars have described participation essentially as a paradox. That is, many people participate in political behavior although the probability of affecting the outcome is low. The selective incentives model states that some individuals participate because of incentives that can be enjoyed by themselves regardless of the outcome (Bäck et al., 2011). Examples of such incentives may be the joy of expressing one’s opinion, the feeling of doing one’s duty etc (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Pattie et al., 2004; Bäck et al., 2011).

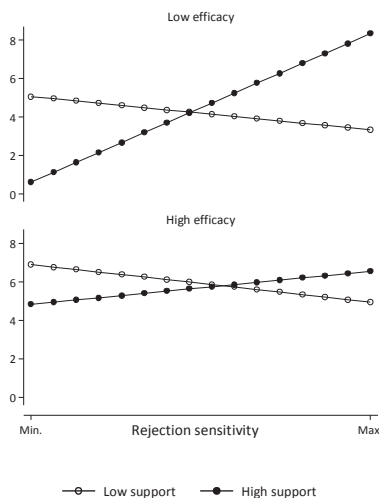
A sub-category to the selective incentive is what is known as social incentives. Social incentives refers mainly to the social groups to which an individual belong or aspire to belong. The social nature of humans may profoundly affect the way they become engaged in collective actions. For instance, research show that the extent to which an individual identifies with a group matters for how much that individual is willing to invest in that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Reicher, 1996, 2001; Simon et al., 1998). As belongingness is fundamental to human nature, humans tend to be highly sensitive to, and motivated to counter, rejection cues (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007).

However, individuals vary in how sensitive they are to rejection and thus also how they respond to possible rejections (Downey & Feldman, 1996). In the present research we tentatively hypothesized that highly rejection sensitive individuals are more motivated to seek out opportunities for social interactions such as social protest. In addition, we hypothesized that this should be particularly the case when social support for a cause is high. That is to say, when individuals expect relevant others to agree with their willingness to participate. Results seemed to confirm our hypotheses. Highly rejection sensitive individuals who perceive high social support are more likely to engage in protest activity than less rejection sensitive individuals, or individuals with low social support.

Interestingly, we also found that low rejection sensitive individuals who had low social support tended to be more willing to protest than those who scored high on rejection sensitivity (in the low support condition). What is particularly intriguing here is that rejection sensitivity seems to affect differently willingness to participate in collective actions depending on the level of social support. Thus, when support is high, there is a positive relation between rejection sensitivity and collective action tendencies, while when support is low, the opposite is true and the relationship between rejection sensitivity and collective action is negative. We contend that low rejection sensitive individuals, who had low social support may be motivated to participate because of collective incentives, feeling that their effort to stop the proposal to implement tuition fees is needed.

This implies that these individuals should also score high on efficacy and be more likely to believe that protesting is an effective way to bring about social change. The idea that efficacy matters in collective action has been stressed by many scholars (Lane, 1959; Bandura, 1995; 1997; van Zomeren, 2004) and it is further supported by our results. A significant three-way interaction revealed that individuals who score low on rejection sensitivity and who have low social support tend to participate more if they also score high on efficacy. This indicates that these individuals should be more motivated to participate in collective actions due to collective incentives - the desire to stop a negative social development that will ultimately not only affect themselves but the society as a

Figure 2. Three-way interaction between social support, rejection sensitivity, and efficacy on collective action tendencies (predictive margins)



whole.

Interestingly, when social support was high, the effect of rejection sensitivity on collective action tendencies was most pronounced among those who scored low on efficacy. This result clearly points to the importance of including rejection sensitivity as a variable in predicting who will participate to collective actions. Also, it indicates that those who participate in collective actions for purely social reasons are most likely to engage in participation.

Thus, the results support our hypothesis and also highlighted the role of efficacy, suggesting a complex interplay between various incentives. Some people, it seems, participate for collective reasons, for example when there is little support for their position, and they are not afraid of rejection. In such cases, the motivation to participate in protest activity seems to stem from a desire to bring about social change (or stop an unwanted change, like the introduction of tuition fees), and because social support for their own position is low, people may feel more obliged to give their contribution to this change (or non-change). It should be noted that these results are somewhat speculative, and further research is needed to clarify the underlying causal mechanisms.

Others, however, prefer to participate because of social reasons, such as when highly rejection sensitive people perceive high social support, leading to increased participation. Here, two possible reasons may be considered; first, that these individuals participate because they perceive an opportunity to build new social relations, or second, because they feel it is their duty and expected of them from other individuals (in their group, or the society as a whole). That is, the motivation may be an avoidance motivation stemming from a fear of exclusion if one refrains from participation, or it may be an approach motivation stemming from the desire to establish social relationships (Gray, 1991). This issue should be disentangled in future research.

Theoretical implications

The results from this study make an important contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms implied in people's engagement in protest activity. Even though it has been known for a long time that the social dimension is important (see for example Klandermans, 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2008), this study shows that personality dispositions relating to social connections must not be neglected. We show that individuals, who are highly sensitive to rejection, are more likely to participate in protest activity when social support for their own position is high, that is, when most others agree with the individual. This supports our argument that the so called calculus of participation (Olson, 1965) should be somewhat modified: social incentives, such as expressive incentives and social norms, should influence protest activity under specific circumstances, when social support for the individual's position is high, and when we are dealing with a specific type of individual, those who are sensitive to rejection. We also show that rejection sensitivity matters for individuals' participation due to collective incentives as well.

Conclusions

In light of recent waves of protests, understanding what drives people to the streets becomes more relevant than ever. Adding to former research on individuals' incentives to participate politically, this study was a first step towards integrating rejection sensitivity in explanations of participation in protest activities. Our results point to a complex

interaction between personal characteristics, perceived social support for a political cause, and beliefs of the potential success of a specific form of political participation. Favourable support for a cause increases the willingness to participate of people who are sensitive to rejection. However, those that are less concerned with social rejection are mainly influenced by the perception that a political protest activity has the potential to change a public policy outcome.

These results open the door to further inquiry regarding the mechanisms that drive individuals' decisions to participate. We speculated that citizens may feel more obliged to participate in a collective action when they perceive others will not defend their own position unless they are sensitive to personal rejection from their social context. On their part, those concerned with personal rejection may decide to participate to build new social relations or just due to social pressure. Since political protest is now one of the main actions in citizens' participatory repertoire in between elections, and as some parts of the population are more critical to the traditional channels to participate in representative democracy, only further investigation on individuals' incentives to participate will help us understand whose voices are heard in the streets.

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