




Relative deprivation, protests and voting in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

While protests and voting are forms of political participation, their theoretical and empirical literature has largely developed independently and remains unintegrated, despite a possible common causal mechanism. This paper explores the possibility that perceptions of relative deprivation could be a common causal mechanism. It identifies three forms of relative deprivation – intra-personal, inter-personal, and fraternalistic. Using the Afrobarometer survey data for Kenya, the paper tests the influence of each of the three forms of relative deprivation on the likelihood of voting or participating in protests. The results show that intra-personal relative deprivation influences the likelihood of protesting and voting, by raising the former while reducing the latter. However, inter-personal and fraternalistic relative deprivations are not significant predictors of the likelihood of either protesting or voting.

KEYWORDS Relative deprivation; protests; voting; political participation; Kenya

1. Introduction

It has long been recognised and accepted that ‘citizen participation is at the heart of democracy [and hence] democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process’ (Verba, Kay, & Brady, 1995, p. 1). Moreover, ‘political participation provides the mechanisms by which citizens can communicate information about their interests, preferences, and needs and generate pressure to respond’ (Verba et al., 1995, p. 1). Relatedly, most scholars agree that voting is the most common form of participation (Downs, 1957; Maisel & Brewer, 2008), with some even equating political participation with voting (Edelman, 1984; Leighley, 1995). For instance, Vanhanen index is one of the most commonly used measures of democracy (Berg-Schlosser, 2007). It incorporates the two basic dimensions of democracy highlighted by Robert Dahl, namely, *political participation* and *competitiveness*. However, the index uses voter turnout as the indicator of political participation. Yet, ‘political participation does not take place only at election time, nor is participation at election time necessarily the most effective

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means of citizen influence' (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978, p. 47). In fact, political participation refers to 'activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and or the actions they take' (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2). Thus, political participation is a broad concept that refers to a diverse range of activities such as voting, campaigns, lobbying government officials, seeking political office, joining political groups, and participating in protests and demonstrations (Dalton, 2008).

Although voting and protests are the two most-researched forms of political participation, the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning them has largely developed independently. Little effort has been made to integrate them, even though some of their theoretical explanations seem to dovetail into each other suggesting the possibilities of a common causal mechanism. In this regard, relative deprivation theory of protest seems to have close affinity with the economic theories of voting. Technically, both sets of theories explain political participation in terms of frustrations that the prospective participants encounter, which arise from unfulfilled expectations. Such frustrations may emanate from unpalatable government policies, decisions, and actions. The negative energy generated by these frustrations is directed to those in charge of state apparatus with the aim of altering the *status quo*. In the case of economic voting theories, the frustrated voters seek to alter the *status quo* by changing the government itself through elections.

Egotropic voting theory, which is one of the strands of economic voting theory, holds that voting decisions are primarily motivated by perceptions about a voter's personal economic situation. If voters perceive their personal economic conditions as unsatisfactory, they blame and vote against the incumbent party (Kramer, 1971; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). In contrast, the *sociotropic voting theory*, which is the second version of economic voting theory, suggests that voting decisions are determined by perceptions of national economic conditions so that if voters perceive the national economic situation as unsatisfactory, they direct their frustrations to the government and hence vote against the incumbent party (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981). Relatively deprived protestors almost always seek to attain more or less the same goal of exerting pressure on the incumbent government to 'think and act differently'.

Quintessentially, *relative deprivation theory* offers both economic and psychological explanations of protests, where deprivation refers to 'wanting what one does not have, and feeling that one deserves whatever it is one wants but does not have' (Walker & Smith, 2002, p. 2). It has also been defined as

a perception discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities [or] a psychological condition that obtains when individuals perceive that those 'goods and conditions of life to which they are rightfully entitled' fall short of those they are actually capable of achieving, given the social means available to them. (Gurr, 1970, p. 13)

Relative deprivation has been formally specified, thus,

A is relatively deprived of X when (i) he does not have X, (ii) he sees some other person or persons, which may include himself at some previous or expected time, as having X (whether or not this is or will be in fact the case), (iii) he wants X, and (iv) he sees it as feasible that he should have X. (Runciman, 1966, p. 10)

There are two broad forms of relative deprivation, based on the levels of analysis. At the aggregate level, there is *fraternalistic* or group relative deprivation, which involves comparisons between groups (Taylor, 2002). For instance, one can compare his or her region, religion, or ethnic group, with others to see if it is unfairly treated or deprived of what it is entitled to. At the individual level, there is *egoistic relative deprivation*, where individuals compare their current personal situation with their previous personal situation, or with the situation of others (Taylor, 2002; Walker & Smith, 2002). In fact, we can also identify two forms of *egoistic relative deprivation*. The first one we refer to as *intra-personal relative deprivation* where individuals compare their current personal situation with their own previous personal situation. The second one is the *inter-personal relative deprivation* where an individual compares their current personal situation with the current personal situations of others around him or her. In fact, the latter refers to 'discontent that people may feel when they compare their achievements with those of similarly situated persons and find that they have less than they think they deserve' (Kendall, 2010, p. 555). Generally, deprivation plants seeds of discontent, which germinates into anti-establishment grievances and matures into anti-incumbent street protests and anti-incumbent protest votes. Either way, deprivation is expected to increase the odds of political participation (Gurr, 1970).

The challenge noted in the literature is whether it is possible to link a purely intra-personal cognitive process that occurs in an individual's mind such as developing perceptions of relative deprivation, with collective actions like voting and protests. The other line of criticism has been that if egoistic relative deprivation is valid, then the frustrations that result from such perceptions of deprivation would target both the in-group and out-groups in equal measure (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). What is even unclear is why one would blame the government for his or her own poor individual living condition, when other people within their neighbourhood have relatively better living conditions under the same government. Others have suggested that perceptions of intra-personal relative deprivation generate in-ward bound emotions like stress and anxiety which are more likely to lead to self-destructive tendencies such as suicide as opposed to being externally manifested. In contrast, the inter-personal relative deprivation tend to generate out-ward bound negative emotions. Thus, it is interpersonal rather than intra-personal relative

deprivation which is likely to lead to collective actions like protests (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Walker & Smith, 2002).

It is noteworthy that studies on relative deprivation typically concentrate on deprivation relative to others (Olson & Roese, 2002). Yet, there are also arguments in the literature which suggest that relative deprivation is purely an intra-personal cognitive process that does not depend on some comparisons of individual life situations with the situation of others (Folger, Rosenfield, Rheaume, & Martin, 1983). Others have argued that perceptions of relative deprivation develops when individuals compare their real living condition with some abstract, imaginable or desirable state that may even be unattainable (Folger et al., 1983).

Relative deprivation theory has, however, been criticised and even dismissed, largely out of being misunderstood. Although the theory is about *relative* rather than *absolute* deprivation, most studies that claim to have disproved it tend to use absolute instead of relative deprivation indicators (Dube & Guimond, 1986; Martin & Murray, 1984). The theory is also about people's perceptions rather than actual deprivations, yet critics tend to focus on the actual instead of the perceived deprivations. These misconceptions have led to the view that deprivation occurs in all societies, and hence cannot explain periodic events like protests (McCarthy & Zald, 2001; Skocpol, 1979). It is hardly startling that studies testing deprivation-protest links often conclude that, 'the findings are contradictory or at best inconclusive' (Dube & Guimond, 1986, p. 201).

Others argue that the theory operates at the wrong level of analysis by using individual emotions to account for group behaviour. For instance, in the original relative deprivation study, Ted Gurr measured political dissent at the systemic rather than the individual level. He used the indicators like magnitude of civil strife, that comprise of demonstrations, political strikes, riots, rebellions, assassinations, mutinies, coups, plots, and widespread revolts that occurred between 1961 and 1965 (Gurr, 1970). Moreover, in their study of protests in Canada, Dube and Guimond (1986) used the degree of student dissatisfaction with the actual distribution of salaries among Francophones and Anglophones in Quebec as the indicator of group relative deprivation. Of all their numerous studies on contentions politics, it is the study of the Montreal students that provided better measurement of group relative deprivation. In the Montreal study, they measured group relative deprivation by asking the students to situate their discontent in a collective action matrix, by stating whether the grievance that led them to participate in the protests that plagued Montreal was driven by personal or collective problems.

Despite criticisms against the theory, it is still acknowledged even by some critics as the main rival of the rational actor theories (Lichbach, 1996). Indeed,

'relative deprivation theory has been widely used to explain and predict domestic rebellion and dissent' (Carey, 2009, p. 6). Besides, a fairly recent survey of several authors on protest politics reported that the theory was the most useful (Schmid & Jongman, 2005). Critics of the theory often fail to appreciate that few current comparative politics theories offer watertight explanation of events. Thus, social science theories and paradigms tend to fall as quickly as they emerge due to 'our inability to build on, develop, and extend old theories instead of periodically discarding them' (Geddes, 2003, p. 4).

Taken together, the egotropic voting theory and the relative deprivation theory suggest that the *perceptions* about personal economic status determine both voting and protest decisions, so that those who are relatively deprived are more likely to vote and protest against the incumbent. Since both the egotropic voters and deprived protestors derive their inspiration from more or less the same source – frustration due to some real, perceived, or desired but unfulfilled expectations – it is reasonable to expect that those who vote against the incumbent party are likely to participate in protests as well. If people fail to force the incumbent to act as they wish through protests, they can plan to register their displeasure at the polls by voting against the incumbents. Indeed, it has been noted that 'citizens who are most engaged in conventional political activities may also be active in unconventional political activities' (Frode, Kleven, & Ringdal, 2008, p. 114).

However, the implications drawn from the two theories contradict the arguments by some scholars that voting and protests are dissimilar forms of political participation, motivated by very different sets of factors. Indeed, Verba et al. (1978) identify five political participation modes: voting, campaign, direct contacting, communal activity, and protest. Each of these modes requires a different set of skills, different degree of cooperation with others; create different types of conflicts; attracts different actors; and affects political processes differently (Dalton, 2008). Others argue that correlations between conventional and contentious forms of politics are modest at individual level, but strong at the aggregate national level (Frode et al., 2008).

It should be noted at this point that contentious politics refer to 'collective activity on the part of claimants – or those who claim to represent them – relying at least in part on non-institutionalized forms of interactions with the elites, opponents or the state' (Tarrow, 1996, p. 874). It has also been defined as the

episodic, public, collective, interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claim or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants. (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001, p. 5)

They later modified this definition to

public, collective making of consequential claims by connected clusters of persons on other clusters of persons or on major political actors when at least one government is a claimant, an objects of claims or a third party to the claims. (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2009, p. 261)

So far, relative deprivation predicts that deprived individuals are likely to vote or protest against the incumbent. However, it is unclear if deprived individuals are generally more likely to turn out and vote than those who are not deprived. Moreover, we have identified three different forms of deprivation and it is unclear if they equally influence voting or protests. Thus, this paper poses the following questions: Do the perceptions of relative deprivation influence the likelihood of voting and protesting? If so, do the three different forms of relative deprivation (*fraternalistic*; *intra-personal* and *inter-personal*) influence the chances of voting and protesting equally? Better still, can one theory explain political participation, and could it be relative deprivation?

2. Rational choice theory and political participation

Before testing the veracity of relative deprivation, it is imperative to examine the rational choice theory because of its special position in the collective action literature. Indeed, it has been noted that, 'the only theory in comparative politics today that is sufficiently powerful and general to be a serious contender for the unified theory is rational choice theory' (Wallerstein, 2001, p. 1). In fact, Coleman (1990) argues that rational choice theory can explain everything in social sciences.

The rational choice theory articulated by Mancur Olson in *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) has three major postulates. First, individuals behave the same way in both political and economic spheres. In both cases, individual actors are rational, self-interest-driven, and utility maximisers, whose decision to participate or abstain from politics are motivated by cost-benefit calculations. Secondly, when people mobilise around common interests, they do so in order to secure a collective good either for group members or for the wider society beyond the group membership. Thirdly, collective good offer necessary but not sufficient incentives for individuals to join groups since 'rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests' (Olson, 1965, p. 2). This is due to the fact that rational individuals driven by self-interest may be unwilling to incur the cost of joining a group whose benefits they can still enjoy without being members, particularly if the collective good extend beyond the group membership. This creates the first problem known as the free-rider problem for collective actions.

Since the participation costs exceed benefits, rational people are expected to abstain from participation (Downs, 1957; Olson, 1965). Yet, many people

usually vote, and at least 5 per cent of the people participate in protests (Francisco, 2010)! This poses yet another problem known as the participation paradox, identified by Olson: why would a rational person vote or protest, when the participation cost exceeds benefits? Besides, the potential voter or protester is faced with many disincentives. First, the probability that an individual's participation in voting or protest would make a difference is close to zero (Blaise, 2000). Secondly, information cost and human cognitive limits render many citizens ill-informed and unable to accurately calculate the utility of participation (Downs, 1957). Finally, most benefits accruing from participation are public goods, shared equally by participants and non-participants, hence the room for free-riding (Geys, 2006; Lichbach, 2009). How, does one surmount these barriers to vote or protest? According to Olson (1965), free-rider problem can be solved by using selective incentives, defined as benefits that are exclusively available for those who participate, or costs which must be incurred by those who do not participate to qualify to enjoy the fruits of participation. Thus, selective incentives can be Positive (rewards for participation) or Negative (punishment for non-participation). Thus, to secure support, groups must use one or both incentives (Landman, 2008).

Others substitute the instrumentalist view of rational choice, based on *expected utility*, with expressive version, based on immediate utility derived from the very act of voting or protesting (Toka, 2009). Expressive motives include support for democracy (Downs, 1957); civic duty (Riker & Ordershook, 1968); partisan altruism (Fowler, 2006); and minimising regrets (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974). However, due to information deficit, most citizens cannot maximise either the expected or expressive utility. They largely operate on the basis of 'satisfying' decisions (Geys, 2006). Consequently, it is likely that the cost-benefit calculations that are said to guide the collective action decisions are based on perceptions rather than objective facts. Yet, perceptions may be flawed, since they are mostly formed on the basis of partisan information and cues. It is also possible that participation may be informed by a false perception that the benefits exceed costs (Riker & Ordershook, 1968). In any case, it is not necessarily true that free-riding is always less costly than participation in collective action. There are instances where free-riding may be more costly to a free rider than participation. For instance, free riders may be socially ostracised or even economically sanctioned by their participating colleagues, beaten up or even killed.

Zald and McCarthy's resource mobilisation theory begins from Olson's exposition of the free-rider problem, and the need for incentives as a mechanism for overcoming the problem. They consider resources as critical incentives for organising protests. How the resources are aggregated is critical for participation in collective action. Yet, effective aggregation of resources requires some form of organisation, even if minimal. Consequently, protest

movements need to be professionalised to improve their vitality especially given that their success depends on the external support they can tap, while the costs and rewards associated with participation in the protests are determined by the structure of the society (Zald & McCarthy, 1987).

One of the contrasts that Zald and McCarthy (1987) draw between resource mobilisation theory and Gurr's relative deprivation theory is that while the latter is based on grievances that emanate from perceptions of being relatively deprived, the former is not necessarily rooted in grievances. Sometimes those who help social movements in resource mobilisation may not share in its grievances. This raises the question as to why someone who does not share the aspirations and values of a protest movement would aid its resource mobilisation. It is possible that one can do so in the hope of sharing in the political capital likely to accrue from the success of a protest. Moreover, there are people who may engage in protests for the sake of it even when they do not have any grievances. Some people may derive psychological satisfaction in participating in riotous situations. Others may not even be at the core of the mobilising zealots, but expect to gain in the attendant chaotic situations and hence would go to any length to support protests.

However, Zald and McCarthy's resource mobilisation theory has been subjected to three major criticisms. First, they have been accused of seeking to explain protest in economic terms such as 'movement entrepreneurs', 'movement industry', and 'movement sectors'. Secondly, the theory also stands accused of ignoring the role of ideology, commitment, and values, thus failing to distinguish protest movements from interest groups. Finally, Zald and McCarthy's call for the professionalisation of protest movement organisations is considered unrealistic particularly, in light of American and European grassroots movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Tarrow, 1998).

Charles Tilly on his part argues that social movements require a wide array of resources, the most important being money and ideas. However, even if a social movement has sufficient resources, it cannot induce change unless the opportunity structures within the state open for the action. He rejects the core arguments of collective action theories, particularly the idea of the individual rationality according to which, an individual participates in collective action when their anticipated personal benefits from participation exceed costs. For him, participation in the social movements involve collective as opposed to individual rationality. That is, participation depends on whether the benefits accruing to one's group are greater than the cost (Selbin, 1999). He, therefore, shifts the focus from individual to group rationality and in the relative deprivation dialect, from the egoistic relative deprivation to fraternalistic or group relative deprivation.

Sidney Tarrow (1998) also supports the idea that the free-rider problem can be overcome through the use of selective incentives. These incentives could be material or ideological, and could be long-term or episodic. In this case, the 'changing political opportunities and constraints' that give rise to contentious

politics create incentives for those who lack their own resources to participate in protests. He views 'political opportunities' as the political dimensions of society which makes it possible for protest movements to arise, while 'political constraints' are the factors that discourage engagement in contentious politics (Tarrow, 1998).

Tarrow developed the concept of *protest cycle*, arguing that when the political opportunity structure opens, it leads to a protest cycle, defined as the increase in numbers and magnitude of protests, which then spread across movements and eventually decline. Therefore, protests are likely to occur when citizens capitalise on the incentives created by those political opportunities that lower the cost of participating in collective action, reveal potential allies, expose weakness of both the elite and those in authority, and facilitate social networking and the formation of collective identities. Increased political opportunities and the spread of perceptions of the vulnerability of the authority provide incentives for citizens and activists to test the elasticity of social control. Initial gains by contenders are interpreted simultaneously as a sign of strength as well as weakness of the authority, and this encourages even greater mobilisation (Tarrow, 1998).

Lichbach (2009) on the other hand developed what others have described as a 'logically complete theory of collective action' (Francisco, 2010). He offered four solutions to the free-rider problem – market, community, contracts, and hierarchy. These solutions are not his original expositions but derivations from the seminal works of past scholars. Indeed, he admits that, 'each of the four categories of solutions to the rebel's dilemma has its classic proponents. Market was championed by Adam Smith, community by Emile Durkheim, contract by John Locke, and hierarchy by Thomas Hobbes' (Lichbach, 2009, p. 279). His main credit in this regard is that he integrated these diverse theories into a potential solution for the free-rider problem.

He identifies two important dimensions on which the solutions to the free-riding problem can be located. The first one is the *deliberative dimension*, which depends on whether or not the solution is deliberated upon and a resolution reached. Solutions derived from deliberations yield *Planned Order*, while those that are not based on deliberations result into *Unplanned Order*. Secondly, there is the *ontological dimension*, which also takes two forms. When the collective action problem involves individuals then the result is *Spontaneous Order*, but if it involves institutions or structures then it creates *contingent order*. Taken together, these two dimensions yields the four solutions to the rebel's dilemma (market, contract, community, and hierarchy) shown in Table 1.

The *Market* solutions focus on individual's decision-making situations, and try to reduce participation costs, raise benefits, enhance risk-taking, and restrict exit. Thus, market solutions raise resources, improve production of tactics, increase prospects of winning, and reduce supply of public goods. *Community* solutions seek to supplant pecuniary self-interests with common values,

Table 1. Mark Lichbach's solutions to the rebel's dilemma.

Ontological dimension	Deliberative dimension	
	<i>Unplanned order</i>	<i>Planned order</i>
<i>Spontaneous order</i>	Market	Contract
<i>Contingent order</i>	Community	Hierarchy

Source: Adopted and modified for precision and clarity from Lichbach (2009, p. 21).

knowledge, and belief systems. *Contract* solutions involve developing institutions that manage the group. *Hierarchy* solutions imply that dissident organisations require pre-existence of capable leadership. Effective mobilisation requires a combination of at least two of these solutions. That is, none of the four solutions can account for collective dissent by itself, and none of the solutions must necessarily be present for collective dissent to occur (Lichbach, 2009).

Given these numerous solutions to the rebels' dilemma, one would expect the rebels to easily overcome the free-rider problem so that many people would participate in the protests. However, Lichbach points out that while the rebel entrepreneurs attempt to apply the solutions in order to promote collective dissent, the state attempts to limit, if not destroy, the rebels ability to use the solutions. Moreover, the four suggested collective action solutions have the potential to undercut collective dissent. Indeed, 'collective action solution might be effective at mobilising supporters and achieving public good but counterproductive in other ways' (Lichbach, 2009, p. 29). Lichbach has also been criticised that none of his solutions provide a complete account of how to resolve the problem. Moreover, his exposition ends with a disappointing conclusion that, 'a general theory of why people rebel will fail for one simple reason: aggregate levels and particular outbreaks of collective dissent are largely unpredictable' (Lichbach, 2009, p. 281).

3. Data source

This paper used Round III of Afrobarometer survey dataset on Kenya, collected in September 2005, through face-to-face interviews in the language understood by respondents. Population of study comprised of all male and female adults aged at least 18 years, which is the lower voting age limit in Kenya. Thus, respondents were potential voters and protestors. Stratified multistage area probability sampling method was used, yielding a 60 per cent response rate and a nationally representative sample of 1278 respondents (see Afrobarometer Survey Round III, Kenya).

4. Key findings and discussions

4.1. Relative deprivation and protests in Kenya

The paper tests the influence of the three forms of relative deprivation on protests in Kenya. The first one is *intra-personal relative deprivation* which refers to

deprivation relative to one's past living conditions. The second one is *inter-personal relative deprivation*, or deprivation relative to the living conditions of other individuals. The last one is *fraternalistic relative deprivation*, or perception that one's ethnic group is more deprived relative to other ethnic groups. Although the latter form of relative deprivation refers to any type of group deprivation, I chose ethnic group deprivation because ethnicity offers one of the strongest group identities in Kenya and indeed in most of Africa. The variable measurements and indicators are presented in Appendix 1.

Table 2 shows three logistic regression models of the impact of each of the three forms of relative deprivations on the likelihood of participating in protests. In all the models, I controlled for some demographic and political variables that provide rival explanations in the literature. For instance, *civic voluntarism*, often referred to as the standard model of political participation, suggest that participation is a function of three factors – personal resources like 'time, money, and civic skills' (p. 271); political attitudes and a sense of efficacy; and connections to political recruitment networks. People participate in politics only if they have the capacity, are willing, and have been mobilised. Thus, participation depends on factors like age, gender, and interest in public affairs (Dalton, 2008). I also controlled for patriotism and employment, which are often used to predict political participation (Schoussseman & Soule, 2005; Verba et al., 1995).

Table 2 shows that when we control for several demographic and political variables, intra-personal relative deprivation is a significant predictor of the

Table 2. Models of relative deprivation and participation in protests.

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intra-personal relative deprivation	0.118* (0.060)		
Inter-personal relative deprivation		0.037 (0.062)	
Fraternalistic relative deprivation			-0.069 (0.057)
Interest in public affairs	0.358*** (0.059)	0.352*** (0.060)	0.347*** (0.059)
Age	-0.025*** (0.004)	-0.023*** (0.005)	-0.024*** (0.005)
Gender: Female	-0.414** (0.123)	-0.389** (0.125)	-0.408** (0.124)
Employment: Unemployed	0.194 (0.122)	0.205 (0.125)	-0.196 (0.123)
Patriotism	-0.008 (0.052)	-0.013 (0.054)	-0.003 (0.053)
Intercept	1.074** (0.384)	0.983* (0.397)	1.093** (0.375)
Model χ^2	91.4	78.48	84.44
Pseudo R^2	0.096	0.087	0.091
Observations	1220	1159	1195

Entries are Logit Regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.

probability of participating in protests. More specifically, those who feel that they are under significant intra-personal relative deprivation are more likely to participate in protests than those who do not feel equally deprived. However, both inter-personal relative deprivation and fraternalistic relative deprivation have no significant effect on the odds of participating in protests. That is, how people assess their current living conditions relative to their past conditions is a much better predictor of whether they will participate in protests than how they view their situation in relation to other people's situations.

Table 2 also shows that those who have interest in public affairs, and who perhaps engage in regular political discussions are more likely to take part in protests than those who lack interest in politics. Like Schousselman and Soule (2005), the paper shows that younger people are more likely than older people to participate in protests, while employment status and patriotism have no significant effect on the likelihood of participating in protests. Moreover, while gender is one of the control variables, the literature presents mixed results on its impact on participation in protests. Some studies in advanced democracies found that women are more likely than men to engage in protests (Frode et al., 2008). Others found that women are less likely to protest than men (Verba et al., 1995). Yet others found that gender has no effect on the odds of protesting (Dalton, 2008). The results in Table 1 support the view that men are more likely to protest than women, consistent with what one expects in male-dominated societies like Kenya.

4.2. Relative deprivation and voting in Kenya

In testing the influence of relative deprivation on voting in Kenya, I replicated the three protest models in Table 2, only changing the dependent variable from protests to voting intentions. The results of the logistic regression analysis are shown in Table 3.

As was the case with the protest model, it is notable that *intra-personal relative deprivation* is an important predictor of the probability of voting while *inter-personal relative deprivation* and *fraternalistic relative deprivation* are not. An individual's increased sense of *intra-personal relative deprivation* reduces the likelihood of voting so that relatively deprived citizens are less likely to vote than those not deprived. But, why would potential voters who feel relatively very deprived abstain from voting rather than use the vote to 'throw out the rascals'? It is possible that lack of credible opposition parties may put deprived voters between a rock and a hard place, by presenting them with a choice between the same incumbents whom they blame for their relative deprivation and a hopeless opposition which may aggravate their relative deprivation. In fact, further analysis reveals that only 10.2 per cent of those who exhibit *intra-personal relative deprivation* trust the opposition parties a lot, as compared to 41.9 per cent who do not trust them at all.

Table 3. Models of relative deprivation and voting in Kenya.

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intra-personal relative deprivation	-0.262* (0.134)		
Inter-personal relative deprivation		-0.069 (0.141)	
Fraternalistic relative deprivation			0.127 (0.128)
Interest in public affairs	0.660*** (0.126)	0.628*** (0.131)	0.695*** (0.131)
Age	-0.009 (0.010)	-0.003 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.010)
Gender: Female	-0.227 (0.282)	-0.190 (0.295)	-0.199 (0.290)
Employment: Employed	-0.200 (0.275)	0.091 (0.288)	0.242 (0.278)
Patriotism	-0.042 (0.111)	-0.013 (0.118)	-0.041 (0.113)
Intercept	2.935*** (0.783)	2.166** (0.792)	1.551* (0.701)
Model χ^2	38.81	28.10	37.18
Pseudo R^2	0.100	0.079	0.099
Observations	1017	976	1001

Entries are Logit regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.

The 31.7 per cent difference between these two proportions is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 113.55$; $\alpha = 0.00$).

On the theoretical front, these findings suggest that grievances against the incumbent are likely to encourage participation in protests while discouraging voting. While relatively deprived citizens who turn out to vote may vote to 'throw out the rascals' in line with the economic voting theories, their overall turnout rate, is likely to be relatively lower than those who do not feel deprived. Unlike the incumbents' supporters, who already know benefits of incumbency, those who intend to oppose the incumbents on account of feeling deprived, merely hope that regime change can improve their lot. Thus, *pro-status quo* may have a stronger incentive to vote than the *anti-status quo* voters. This line of argument provides what can be termed as the psychological explanation of 'the advantage of incumbency', which has not been fully explored.

4.3. Intra-personal relative deprivation, protest and voting in Kenya

To explore these results further, I calculated the predicted probabilities for protesting and voting for those with a sense of intra-personal relative deprivation, while holding all the other variables constant. The predicted probabilities are plotted as shown in [Figure 1](#).

The results show that, the probability of voting is generally much higher than that for protesting regardless of levels of intra-personal relative deprivation. This may be because most people find it easier to express the willingness

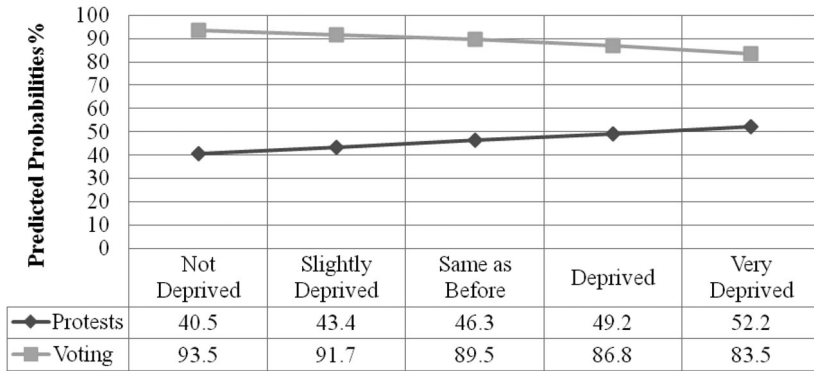


Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of voting and protesting.

to participate in conventional political activities like voting than the more contentious political activities such as protesting. Moreover, the cost of participating in conventional politics is generally lower than the cost of engaging in contentious politics. It is also noteworthy that intra-personal relative deprivation has nearly the same effect on the likelihood of voting and protesting, though in different directions. Specifically, if someone develops the perception of being very deprived, then the probability that the person will vote if elections are held at that time reduces by 10 per cent, while the probability of that person participating in a protest if there is a chance to do so would increase by 11.3 per cent.

Furthermore, the gap between the probabilities of voting and protesting is 53 per cent for those who are not deprived and 31.3 per cent for those who are very deprived. That is, someone who is not deprived at all is 53 per cent more likely to vote than to protest, while someone who is very deprived is 31.3 per cent more likely to vote than to protest. In essence, intra-personal relative deprivation reduces the gap between the likelihood of voting and protesting by 22.7 per cent. Given the possibility that people over-report prospects of voting while under-reporting the prospects of protesting, this gap might be a little smaller among those who are very deprived.

5. Conclusion

The paper makes important contributions to the debate on the utility of the relative deprivation theory in the face of sustained attacks from critics who consider it obsolete. This paper shows that individual's perceptions of relative deprivation influence the likelihood that they can engage in the two most common forms of political participation, namely, voting and protests. In essence, political participation is influenced more by perceptions of individual deprivation rather than group deprivation. However, it is not an individual's perceptions of deprivation

relative to others that influence participation, but perceptions of deprivation relative to one's own past. Besides, intra-personal relative deprivation raises the chances of protesting, while reducing that for voting.

The study results suggest that the reason why scholars fail to find evidence supporting the relative deprivation theory may be because they focus on the least helpful aspects of relative deprivation, namely deprivation relative to others. It seems that by merely looking at other individuals and realising that they are doing better than ourselves, does not inspire us to be inclined to vote or protest. For instance, a peasant farmer may not feel frustrated just because a neighbour has bought a new farm tractor, but would feel unhappy if the government withdraws farm subsidies he or she has been receiving in the past. Our own situations in the past and not the situation of others, which we may not even understand well, becomes a useful reference point when forming perceptions of deprivation. What is more likely is that the 'personal experiences of discrimination are important in the development of feelings of group relative deprivation which in turn leads to the adoption of pro-group attitudes and behaviors' (Tougas & Beaton, 2002, p. 121). It is plausible to conclude that 'previous reviewers were too quick to dismiss RD [relative deprivation] as an explanation of collective behavior and attitudes' (Smith & Ortiz, 2002, p. 98).

In the final analysis, the study shows that intra-personal relative deprivation could serve as a common causal mechanism accounting for both protests and voting behaviours. In this regard, it seems that intra-personal relative deprivation tends to generate three distinct patterns of civic responses with respect to political participation, corresponding to Hirschman's *Exit*, *Voice*, and *Loyalty* (Hirschman, 1970). Extremely deprived citizens may adopt the *Exit* option, resort to political quiescence and hence abstain from voting. This is more likely when such voters face an unenviable choice between a depriving incumbent regime and a hopeless opposition. In such circumstances, one's goose is cooked in advance regardless of which side he or she votes for, and hence the default recourse is to abstain. The second possible response to intra-personal relative deprivation is what Hirschman calls *Voice*, which in this context refers to participation in protest. Rather than abstaining from political participation, extremely deprived citizens can express discontent through contentious political activities such as protests directed at those who can address their grievances.

Finally, relatively deprived citizens can adopt the *Loyalty* option which would avert the possibility of adopting either *Exit* or *Voice* as a means of expressing grievances. *Loyalty* involves participation in the more conventional forms of political activities such as voting. However, this option is likely to yield considerable anti-incumbent protest votes. Indeed, 52.4 per cent of those with intra-personal relative deprivation expressed the intention to vote out the incumbent if elections were held then as compared to 44.8 per cent of their un-deprived counterparts. Nonetheless, this means that a non-trivial section of the deprived (47.6 per cent) still remain loyal to the incumbent despite

their quandary. Such voters may have supplanted the instrumentalist view of rational choice based on *expected utility* with an *expressive utility* based on support for democracy, sense of civic duty, partisan altruism or the quest to minimise regrets. Alternatively, partisan ties like ethnicity may have glued them so tightly to incumbents that their own deprived status became inconsequential.

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Appendix 1. Variable measurement.

Variables	Indicators and measurements
Age	How old are you?
Gender	1 = Male, 2 = Female
Employment status	Do you have a job that pays cash income? <i>Recoded: 0 = Unemployed; 1 = Employed</i>
Patriotism	Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Kenyan and being a member of your ethnic group, which group do you feel most strongly attached to? <i>Recoded: 1 = Very Unpatriotic; 2 = Unpatriotic; 3 = Somehow patriotic; 4 = Patriotic; 5 = Very Patriotic</i>
Interest in public affairs	How interested would you say you are in public affairs? 0 = Not at all interested, 1 = Somewhat interested, 2 = interested, 3 = Very interested
Inter-personal relative deprivation	In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other Kenyans? <i>Recoded: 1 = Not at all Deprived; 2 = Somehow not Deprived; 3 = Same as before; 4 = Deprived; 5 = Very Deprived</i>
Intra-personal relative deprivation	Looking back, how do you rate your living conditions compared to twelve months ago? <i>Recoded: 1 = Not at all Deprived; 2 = Somehow not Deprived; 3 = Same as before; 4 = Deprived; 5 = Very Deprived</i>
Fraternalistic relative deprivation	How are the economic conditions of your ethnic group compared to that of the other ethnic groups in Kenya? <i>Recoded: 1 = Not at all Deprived; 2 = Somehow not Deprived; 3 = Same as before; 4 = Deprived; 5 = Very Deprived</i>
Voting intentions	If presidential elections were held tomorrow, which party's candidate you would vote for? <i>Recoded: 0 = Would not Vote (Non-Voter); 1 = Would Vote (Voter)</i>
Protest intentions	Please tell me whether you, have attended a demonstration or protest march during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance? <i>Recoded: 0 = Has never or Would never Protest (Non-Protester); 1 = Has or Would Protest if he/she had the chance (Protester)</i>

Source: Afrobarometer survey data for Kenya, 2005. Some questions have been shortened or paraphrased for clarity. For actual question wording and coding refer to the Afrobarometer website at: <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>.