European Sociological Review, 2022, Vol. 38, No. 2, 304–320
doi: 10.1093/esr/jcab051
Advance Access Publication Date: 21 October 2021
Original Article

Collective Action and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The Case of the Panama Papers Protest in Iceland

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Submitted March 2021; revised September 2021; accepted September 2021

Abstract

Social theory implies that a rise in the expectation that many will participate in collective action can make participation in the action widely rational, giving rise to a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. I address this classic, yet understudied, proposition by surveying participation in a demonstration that the 'Panama Papers Leak' triggered in Iceland in 2016. The demonstration was preceded by a sudden rise of large-turnout expectations, and attracted one-fifth of an urban population, allowing me to obtain event-specific, population-representative survey measures of the focal constructs ($N = 821$). The findings support hypotheses about the role of large-turnout expectations in collective action. They confirm that protest support (i.e. the value placed in the goal of the collective action) both raises large-turnout expectations and moderates their effects on protest participation. In fact, large-turnout expectations were associated with participation only if individuals supported the protest. Also, the findings imply that large-protest expectations trigger interpersonal relational dynamics that further motivate participation. The study thus supports and yet qualifies the role of the self-fulfilling prophecy in collective action.

Introduction

Social theorists, particularly those who acknowledge the role of rational choice in social behaviour, have referred to the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton, 1957) as a basic mechanism underlying major shifts in collective behaviour (Hedström and Swedberg, 1996; Biggs, 2018). The idea is that when individuals come to believe that many others will change their behaviour in a given way, they become more likely to expect the benefits of participating in the behaviour to outweigh the costs. Thus, a spreading expectation that many will change their behaviour in a given way may become 'real in its consequences' (Daya, 1971). This classic idea, in particular, has provided a distinct contribution to theory of collective action, particularly of collective protest. Scholars focused on that topic have implied that a rise in the expectation that many will participate in protest may render participation in the protest widely rational, giving rise to mass participation in protest (Granovetter, 1978; Klandermans, 1984; Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989; Oberschall, 1994; Opp, 2009: pp. 62–63).

However, research rarely examines the role of large-turnout expectations in protest participation. Aside from purely theoretical work (Granovetter, 1978; Chwe, 1999) and historical-qualitative research (Oberschall, 1994; Kurzman, 1996; Biggs, 2003; Bernburg, 2016),[1] only a few early studies have addressed if large-turnout expectations are associated with protest behaviour. Klandermans (1984) and Klandermans and Oegema (1987: p. 527)

found those who expected a large protest to be more *willing* to participate (but effects on actual participation were not tested). Finkel and Muller (1998) and Finkel and Opp (1991) found that those believing that many like-minded others *would* participate in protest were more likely to participate in non-specific protest later. But these studies thus do not test if expecting a large turnout at a *particular protest* is related to participation in *the protest in question*. This limitation is noteworthy. The self-fulfilling prophecy presumably arises as a situational-temporary mechanism, and thus should be addressed as such.

I examine the role of large-turnout expectations in a demonstration that attracted about one-fifth of the urban population of Iceland on 4 April 2016. The high participation rate allows me to use standard survey sampling to sample both the participants and the non-participants in the protest event. This advantage is noteworthy. Population-representative survey samples usually obtain very few participants in given protests (as usually small fractions of populations participate in any given protest event). Hence, representative surveys usually examine only participation in non-specific protest (but Bernburg, 2015, 2019; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Opp and Gern, 1993; van Laer, 2017; Kittel and Opp, 2019), making them unable to address beliefs that arise momentarily in relation to particular protest events (for a similar point, see Snow *et al.*, 1986; Norris, Walgrave and van Aelst, 2005). In contrast, I obtain *event-specific*, population-representative measures allowing me to test how expectations about turnout at a specific protest event are associated with participation in the event.

Also, historical detail suggests that the self-fulfilling prophecy may have played a role in the protest in question. Scholars have suggested (but not tested) that large-turnout expectations can arise and trigger mass protest when scandals re-evoke injustice themes that in the past have inspired major protest (Oberschall, 1994; see Biggs, 2003; Reed, 2004). On 3 April 2016, an international group of journalists made leaked data from a Panamian law firm globally public, revealing how banks and law firms assist the wealthy to hide assets in offshore tax havens (Obermayer and Obermaier, 2017). In Iceland, the 'Panama Papers Leak' (hereafter: *The Leak*) exposed many wealthy individuals as owners of offshore assets, including the Prime Minister (PM) and two cabinet members (Bergmann, 2016). The Leak thus re-evoked a corruption-privilege injustice theme (Bernburg, 2019) that a few years before (i.e. during the 2008–2009 financial crisis) had inspired major protest in Iceland (Bernburg, 2016). As my evidence will indicate, the scandal did trigger a widespread expectation that a demonstration that a small group of activists had planned and dated on the following day, that is, on April 4, would become large.

I use rational choice theory of collective action (Granovetter, 1978; Klandermans, 1984; Oberschall, 1994; Opp, 2009; also, Finkel and Muller, 1998; Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989) to posit hypotheses both about the formation of large-turnout expectations and about their role in protest participation. As to the first issue, the theory implies that if individuals support a protest due to an event shared by other citizens (e.g. due to a scandal), they tend to assume that many others will share their experience and thus will likely participate in the protest (Oberschall, 1994). By implication, values and beliefs resonating with the protest goal (Bernburg, 2015) and past participation in similar protest (Opp and Kittel, 2010) should raise large-turnout expectations by increasing protest support. As to the second issue, the theory implies that the effect of large-turnout expectations on protest participation should *interact* with protest support (Klandermans, 1984). Thus, while expecting a large turnout presumably creates a sense of 'efficacy' and/or of 'safety-in-numbers', such perceptions should motivate participation only if individuals value the goal of the protest. In addition, expecting a large turnout should trigger interpersonal relational dynamics (Klandermans, 1984; Opp and Gern, 1993; Oberschall, 1994) that further motivate participation.

Despite the ongoing popularity of rational choice theory in protest participation research (e.g. Opp and Brandstatter, 2010; van Laer, 2017), these hypotheses have not been tested. I do so with retrospective measures obtained in a population-representative survey ($N = 821$) conducted six through nine months after the protest event. I acknowledge that retrospective measurement entails a limitation. But obtaining real-time measures of event-specific beliefs that often emerge unexpectedly (Biggs, 2003) is difficult, such as in the present case where large-turnout expectations emerged just hours before a protest event planned only a few days before. But, as social movement scholars have argued (Opp and Gern, 1993; see Brewer, 1994), most individuals can be assumed to remember their own experiences of events that are unique, consequential, and emotion-evoking, especially if surveyed about them within a year after the event (Bernburg, 2015). I will explain how this assumption applies in the case of The Leak and the April 4 demonstration. Also, I present other evidence indicating that large-turnout expectations emerged before the protest event occurred.

The Theoretical Model

This section posits a theoretical model of both the formation of large-turnout expectations and their effects on protest participation. Figure 1 presents the model. While the figure presents hypotheses about both individual-level effects (the arrows labelled a-J) and contextual effects (the bolded, vertical arrows), this single-case study tests only the individual-level effects. A comparison of cases is needed to address the contextual hypotheses, and so they are included only for analytical clarity. Also, I acknowledge that my non-experimental, cross-sectional data cannot directly demonstrate the causal mechanisms posited. In work of this type a failure to confirm a given association can be seen as a failure to support the theoretical proposition implying it. But a confirmation of the same association can raise questions about explanations other than stated by the theory. In what follows, I am careful to address a few important alternative explanations of the expected associations.

The Formation of Large-Turnout Expectations

Aside from a few historical-qualitative case studies (Oberschall, 1994; Kurzman, 1996; Biggs, 2003; Bernburg, 2016), little research exists on the formation of large-turnout expectations. Yet rational choice scholars have suggested how events that re-evoke memories of past protest may trigger such expectations (Oberschall, 1994; Biggs, 2003; Reed, 2004; Opp, 2009).[2] In particular, Oberschall (1994) suggests that large-turnout expectations can arise when a scandal re-evokes an injustice theme that in the past has inspired major protest against a similar target. One reason is that if individuals have vicariously experienced major protest 'on the same issues against the same target' (p. 86), they likely expect major protest to re-occur under similar conditions. Another reason is that since scandals are shared they can evoke shared assumptions about the intentions of others. Thus, injustice scandals not only often make many individuals supportive of protest addressing the injustice revealed by a given scandal. But knowing that their fellow citizens are also exposed to the scandal, individuals who come to support the given protest may tend to assume that many will share their experience (including their outrage) and thus likely participate in the protest.

The top and left side of Figure 1 present this thesis. Consider first the contextual effects. In a context where activists have planned a protest on a scandal-evoked injustice theme, many will support the protest (contextual effect 1). Moreover, due to a widespread vicarious experience of major protest on the issue in the past, many will expect a large turnout (contextual effect 2). Again, I cannot test these contextual effects. But my evidence will confirm that in the current case (i.e. in Iceland, April 2016) a scandal of the said type was followed by both widespread protest support and widespread large-turnout expectations.

Now consider the individual-level hypotheses. First of all, knowing that many others are exposed to the scandal,

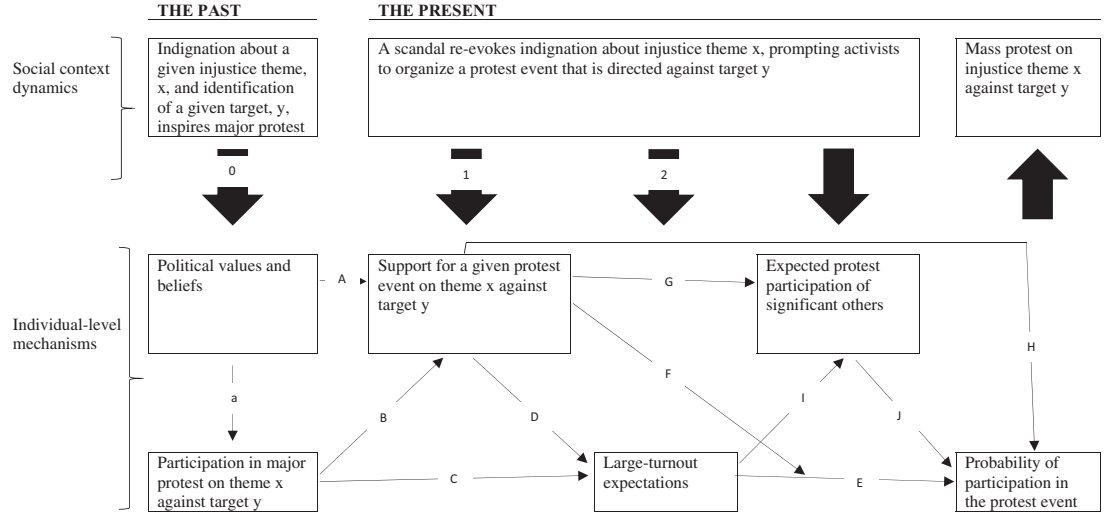


Figure 1. The theoretical model and the hypotheses

Note: The present study tests only the individual-level hypotheses.

those who support the protest will expect a larger turnout (Path D). By implication, given that the protest is aimed at a political target, political values and beliefs that resonate with the protest goal will raise turnout expectations by increasing protest support (Path AD; e.g. Bernburg, 2016, 2019). Although not the focus in this paper, the model assumes that the resonance of values and beliefs and protest support (Path A) is caused by contextual dynamics associated with the past protest (i.e. Contextual Effect 0 shapes Path a, and the sign for Path A and Path a is the same).

Furthermore, personal participation in past protest on a similar issue can create a 'feedback effect' (Opp and Kittel, 2010), whereby past participation raises long-term support for the protest issue, raising turnout expectations later (Path BD). Also, personal experience of major protest may directly raise expectations about large protest later (Path C; see Drury and Reicher, 2009). While many studies find prior activism to predict later activism (e.g. Gundelach and Toubøl, 2019; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993), few studies have tested an association of participation in distinct protest events of a similar type (but Fisher and McInerney, 2012; Opp and Kittel, 2010). But I must note an alternative explanation of the expected association of past and present protest behaviour, that is, the association may reflect an unmeasured tendency of some individuals to engage in protest. But statistically controlling past participation will at least rule out such behavioural continuity as an alternative explanation of the other effects tested in this study.

Large-Turnout Expectations and Protest Participation

Not all rational choice models imply that large-turnout expectations motivate protest participation. Olson (1965) originally implied that expected personal benefits were needed to motivate self-interested (i.e. most) individuals to participate in collective action. Unless expecting a personal benefit, most will avoid participation cost and ride free, especially if they expect many to participate and thus obtain the collective benefit regardless (Oliver, 1984; Opp, 2009). The free-rider model thus implies a negative effect of large-turnout expectation on participation (Klandermans, 1984).

But contemporary rational choice theory of collective action (Granovetter, 1978; Klandermans, 1984; Finkel and Muller, 1998; Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989; Oberschall, 1994; Opp, 2009) rejects this assumption of atomized, 'non-strategic' actors (Moore, 1995) and instead implies that large-turnout expectations tend to motivate individuals to participate in collective action. In what follows, I use this contemporary version of the theory to model the effects of large-turnout expectations on protest participation (but I will revisit the free-rider hypothesis in the Results section).

The Interaction of Large-Turnout Expectations and Protest Support

Rational choice theory provides a few major reasons why large-turnout expectations should motivate individuals to participate in protest. *Efficacy* is one major reason. As Opp (2009: p. 66) explains, large-turnout expectations may tend to create *collective efficacy*, that is, make individuals temporarily optimistic about the chance of protest success. Such optimism, in turn, tends to create *personal efficacy*, that is, the belief that one's participation will increase the chance of protest success (Klandermans, 1984; Oberschall, 1994; Opp, 2009). In particular, large-turnout expectations may prompt those who strongly support a given protest to 'realize' how, at the perceived critical moment of potential success, their own participation will motivate others (e.g. friends, family, co-workers) to participate, while their non-participation will have the opposite effect (Klandermans, 1984; Oberschall, 1994). In addition, large-turnout expectations activate a sense of obligation to participate in collective action that aims to achieve a goal that the individual values (Biggs, 2003; Opp, 2009: p. 62). As Finkel, Muller, and Opp (1989: p. 889) suggest, those who support a given protest goal may only see a benefit in 'doing their duty' when expecting others to act with them.

But optimism about the attainment of the protest goal should motivate individuals to participate in a protest only if they support (i.e. place value in) the goal of the given protest. As Klandermans (1984: p. 585) writes, 'values and expectations combine in a multiplicative way. Even if the value of an outcome is very high it will not motivate individuals as long as they do not believe that the outcome can be produced by their efforts'. The interaction of success expectations and the value placed in the collective goal is a core implication of the efficacy model of collective action (also, Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989: p. 900; Opp, 2009: p. 59).

Another reason why large-turnout expectations should motivate protest participation is that they create a sense of safety-in-numbers, reducing the expected personal costs of participation (Klandermans, 1984: p. 586; Oberschall, 1994; Opp, 2009: p. 62). This point is fundamental to threshold models (Granovetter, 1978; Chwe, 1999) that posit that the expected proportional participation of others is inversely related to the perceived risk of participating in collective action. Of

course, the expected costs of protest participation will broadly depend on the historical-political context, for example, whether a regime is likely to repress a protest with violence or arrests (Opp, 2009). But even in democracies large crowds may reduce other expected social costs of protest participation, such as potential stigma (Oberschall, 1994; e.g. Bernburg, 2016). But, again, reduced cost *per se* should tend to motivate only individuals who value the protest goal; individuals need to value the protest goal to be willing to endure even minimal costs of participation.

Accordingly, both the efficacy and the safety-in-numbers models imply an interaction effect: *large-turnout expectations should be positively associated with the probability of protest participation, but only insofar individuals support the protest goal*. Figure 1, Path F depicts this hypothesis (Note: Path H and Path E thus represent conditional effects defined by Path F). I am not aware of prior tests of this hypothesis. Studies generally support the effects of efficacy, particularly of personal efficacy, on protest behaviour (van Laer, 2017; Lee, 2000; Liu, Yau and Yuan, 2018; Opp and Brandstatter, 2010; Morgan and Chan, 2016; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and van Dijk, 2009; Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009). But the work rarely addresses large-turnout expectations. The same holds for studies addressing the role of expectation of repression in protest behaviour (Opp and Gern, 1993; Opp and Roehl, 1990; see Honari, 2018).

The Intermediate Role of Interpersonal Relational Dynamics

Rational choice theory implies yet another reason why large-turnout expectations should motivate protest participation. Based on experience and interpersonal communication, expecting a large protest may tend to create the expectation that significant others will participate in the protest. This expectation, in turn, creates relational dynamics that further motivate participation (Finkel and Opp, 1991; Dixon and Roscigno, 2003), namely, (i) *social motive* (Klandermans, 1984; Opp and Gern, 1993; Willer, 2009) and (ii) *assurance* (Oberschall, 1994). Social motive is when individuals expect approval for participation, but criticism otherwise. In this vein, expecting significant others to participate should activate 'participation norms' (Opp, 2009: p. 62; also, see Biggs, 2003), and thus motivate protest participation regardless of protest support (implying no interaction with support). Assurance of significant others' participation makes individuals expect even lower costs. Thus, if a large protest crowd reduces the risk of participation costs such as arrest or stigma, being able to go to a protest site with friends reduces other participation costs, such as the risk of being in an awkward social situation (i.e. it is usually 'easier' to go to a social event with significant others).

Accordingly, *the expected protest participation of significant others should mediate a part of the effect of large-turnout expectations on protest participation* (Figure 1, Path IJ). But here I acknowledge two study limitations. First, I do not measure the *expected* participation of significant others, but I use a proxy measure: the (actual) participation of significant others (as remembered by the respondent). Second, I cannot rule out an alternative explanation of the focal mediated effect (i.e. Path IJ), that is, that expecting significant others to participate may both make individuals expect a large turnout *and* directly motivate them to participate (due to social motive and assurance). But statistically controlling for the participation of significant others should at least rule out the possibility of this particular mechanism creating a spurious association between large-turnout expectations and protest participation.

Additionally, the previous discussion of the role of protest support in large-turnout expectations (see discussion on Path D) implies that *protest support may tend to make individuals think that significant others will support the protest and thus will likely participate in it* (Path G).

Many studies show that individuals are more likely to participate in protest if significant others participate in or support protest (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Muller, Dietz and Finkel, 1991; Opp and Gern, 1993; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994; Finkel and Muller, 1998; Dixon and Roscigno, 2003; Kittel and Opp, 2019; Lim, 2008; Opp and Brandstatter, 2010; van Laer, 2017; Dougherty and Schraeder, 2018). Ward (2016) recently argued that research should examine interpersonal ties as a conduit for the effects of beliefs and values (and other factors) on protest behaviour. The current study is the first to test if interpersonal ties to protest participants mediate the effects of protest size expectations on protest participation.

The Study Case: The 'Panama Papers Leak Protest' in Iceland

This section explains how the study case provides the type of context identified in Figure 1, that is, where large-turnout expectations arose after a scandal re-evoked an injustice theme that a few years had inspired major protest. Figure 2 shows the timeline (see Supplementary Material).[3] The 2008 global credit crisis triggered a financial and political crisis in Iceland, spurring a wave of popular protest in winter 2008–2009. At the protest, and in the public debate, a 'corruption-

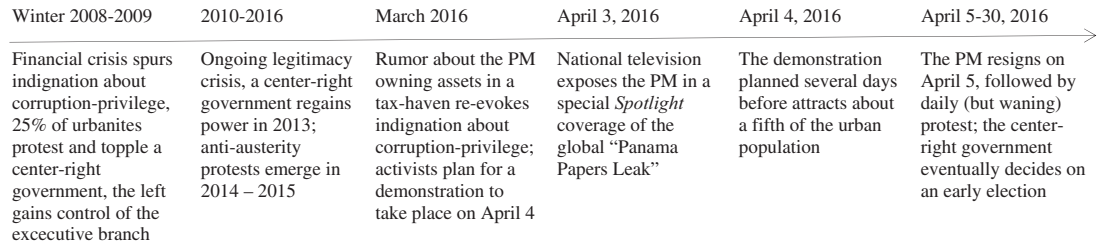


Figure 2. The historical context of the 4 April 2016 demonstration in Iceland

privilege' theme emerged, that is, indignant definitions about how globalized finance corrupted the politics and created privilege for the rich (Bernburg, 2016). This injustice theme resonated widely and eventually a quarter of urbanites participated in a wave of pots-and-pans protest that toppled a centre-right government. The protest was aligned with the political left (Bernburg, 2015), and in the early elections that followed the leftist parties won a majority. But the subsequent years witnessed ongoing legitimacy crisis (Hallgrímsdóttir and Brunet-Jailly, 2015) and even after the economy began to recover, in 2012, political distrust (Indridason *et al.*, 2017) and resentment of corruption remained widespread (Bernburg, 2019). In 2013, a centre-right coalition re-gained power. The new PM spoke against global finance, yet his neoliberal policies spurred anti-austerity protest in 2014 and 2015.

A few weeks prior to the official date of The Leak, April 3, rumour that the PM's wife owned assets in a 'tax-haven' began to circulate in the news and social media, spurring public debate about the PM's political-ethical standing, and re-evoking the corruption-privilege theme (as the content analysis of *Spotlight* tweets, reported in Table A1 in the Appendix, illustrates).[4] The re-surfacing of this injustice theme prompted a small group of anti-austerity activists to plan a demonstration against the centre-right government.[5] They created a Facebook 'event' entitled 'ELECTION NOW!' Located (like the 2009 Pots and Pans) at *Austurvöllur* square in Reykjavík, the demonstration was dated April 4, the date following the anticipated April 3 revelation. National television broke the story on April 3 in a widely *anticipated Spotlight* coverage. Watched life by more than half the population,[6] *Spotlight* provided new level of credibility for corruption-privilege, exposing wealthy Icelanders as owners of offshore assets, confirming what had been a rumour ever since the 2008–2009 crisis when in-debt households had suffered trouble, namely, that the wealthy were able to hide their wealth while receiving write-offs on their debt. Moreover, the coverage provided a 'salient target' (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995) for the outrage, broadcasting an interview recording of reporters presenting the PM with leaked documents about his wife's offshore assets. Caught off guard, the PM is seen to utter a vague untruth before storming out of the interview.[7]

By re-evoking indignation about corruption-privilege, thus activating a shared memory of the 2008–2009 pots- and pans protest,[8] The Leak gave rise to a shared expectation that the demonstration dated the following day would be large. Several observations support this statement. (i) National news at noon April 4 reported that many thousands of individuals intended to protest that afternoon (citing the fast-growing attendance count on Facebook),[9] and that foreign reporters were flying in to Iceland to witness the afternoon's protest.[10] (ii) The airing of *Spotlight* prompted the police to prepare for a large protest.[11] (iii) Information about a fast-growing protest interest spread via social media; before the demonstration began, the Facebook event had been shared 90,000 times (note: there are about 150,000 adult urbanites in Iceland). Finally, (iv) my survey data estimate that a large majority (i.e. 77 per cent) of the country's urbanites 'rather' or 'very much' expected a large protest (see Table A2 in the Appendix). The demonstration turned out to be the largest protest event in the country's history, attracting about a fifth of urbanites (see the Results, Table 1). The demonstration was followed by the PM's resignation and a wave of protest that lasted for about a month and eventually resulted in an early election (see Supplementary Figure S1).

Method

Data

The data come from the *Icelandic Election Study 2016*, which is a telephone survey conducted in October 2016 through January 2017. A random sample of 2,600 individuals came from a sampling frame of all individuals 18 years or older residing in Iceland (based on registered data). The analysis includes only respondents residing in a reasonable travelling distance from the protest site, that is, in Reykjavík city or one of its attached towns

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Control variables	Coding/scale	Mean	Standard deviation
Female	0, 1	0.51	0.50
Age	18–90	0.49	18.0
Neighbouring town	0, 1	0.41	0.49
Secondary school	0, 1	0.35	0.48
College degree	0, 1	0.44	0.50
Household financial stability	1–4	3.74	1.22
Managerial class	0, 1	0.09	0.29
Intermediate class	0, 1	0.32	0.46
Working class	0, 1	0.10	0.30
Not employed/working	0, 1	0.23	0.42
Focal variables			
Leftist ideology	0, 1	0.35	0.48
Centrist ideology	0, 1	0.25	0.43
Corruption beliefs (index)	−2.3 to 2.2	0.0	1.0
Participation in past protest (in winter 2008–2009)	0, 1	0.34	0.47
Large-turnout expectations (z-scored)[a]	−2.4 to 1.1	0.0	1.0
Protest participation of significant others	1–4	2.3	1.4
Protest support (z-scored)[a]	−2.2 to 0.89	0.0	1.0
Protest participation (on April 4)	0, 1	0.19	0.39

[a]The Table A2 in the appendix reports the descriptive statistics of the original scales.

(maximum travel distance about 20 kilometres). Deleting individuals residing outside of this radius produced a final sample of 821 (final response rate is 51 per cent). Since all the measures had acceptable missing values rates (<10 per cent), I use a listwise deletion of missing values. I report the final sample sizes for each model below. Stata 15 is used to estimate the statistical models.

Measurement Focused on the April 4 Demonstration

Asking retrospective questions about how individuals experienced events that occurred a few months before may entail measurement error. This concern applies in particular to retrospective measures of momentary mind-states, such as turnout expectations and protest support. But as Opp and Gern (1993) argue, based on psychological research (Brewer, 1994), individuals tend to remember events that are 'unique', 'consequential', and 'emotion-provoking'. The Leak (a scandal where the country's political leader was the main target of indignation) and the subsequent demonstration (the largest single protest event in the country's history) were unique and consequential events (that directly resulted in the PM's resignation; see Figure 2), being epicentres of widespread indignation and political drama that dominated the national media with live coverage for several days.[12] Studying another historic protest, Bernburg (2015) has found that obtaining retrospective measures of protest participation and protest support within a year after the protest event produces a much better construct validity than obtaining the measures later. In short, it seems reasonable to assume that the respondents could reliably recollect their experiences in this case.

To activate the respondents' memory, they were first reminded of the *Spotlight* coverage of The Leak and the Prime Minister's assets, and of the 'large demonstration' on April 4. Then they were asked: 'Did you expect a large protest to break out after *Spotlight*'. The original scale (Table A2 in the Appendix) for *large-turnout expectations* ranged from '1' (did not expect it at all) to '4' (expected it very much). But I transform the scale into a z-score to create a product term. The response rate for this item (92 per cent) is similar to other items, indicating no special recollection problems. Two additional points support the measure's validity. First, in support for construct validity, the measure significantly predicts participation only in the April 4 protest event (as hypothesized), but has no significant net-effect on participation in the post-April 4 protest (Supplementary Table S2).[13] Second, the evidence discussed earlier (i.e. national news on April 3, and my interview with the police, see Supplementary Footnote 12) support the aggregate result of the measure (again, reported in Table A2), namely, that the expectation that the April 4 protest

event would be large became widespread among the public just before the protest event occurred.

Respondents were then asked if at the time they had been in favour of the April 4 demonstration. The scale for *protest support* ranged from '1' (not at all in favour) to '4' (very much in favour). To create a product term in the statistical analysis, I transformed the scale into a z-score (Table A2 in the Appendix reports a frequency table for the original scale).[14]

The respondents were then asked whether they participated in the April 4 demonstration. A dummy variable for *protest participation* was coded '1' for participation and '0' otherwise.[15]

Finally, respondents were asked to think about the five persons with whom they interact the most, and then to say how many of these, to their knowledge, participated in the protest. I use the four-point scale as an interval-level measure of *protest participation of significant others*, ranging from one ('none') through four ('almost all').

Measures of Political Values and Beliefs and of past Protest Participation

Political values and beliefs

Dummy variables were constructed for *leftist ideology* (scoring below '5' on a 10-point left-to-right political orientation scale) and *centrist ideology* (a score of '5'), with right-wing ideology for reference (scoring above '5'). To measure *corruption beliefs*, the z-scores of two scales were combined: (i) 'Are you generally [1 = very happy to 4 = very unhappy] with the way in which democracy works in Iceland?' and (ii) 'How prevalent do you think corruption is among politicians in Iceland' [1 = it hardly exists to 4 = very prevalent].

Participation in the 2008–2009 pots-and-pans protest

The survey asked respondents if they had participated in any of the protest that broke out during the financial crisis in winter 2008–2009. Participation in at least one protest event from that time is coded '1', and '0' otherwise.

Control Variables

I control for demographic and socio-economic characteristics. *Age* is measured in years. *Gender* is coded 0 (male) and 1 (female). Residential location is included to control for travel distance to the protest in downtown Reykjavík, coded 0 (resides in Reykjavík) and 1 (resides in a neighbouring town). Dummy variables indicate *educational attainment* (secondary education and college degree, vs. compulsory education). Household *financial status* is measured on a scale ranging from 1 (worry very much about household finance) through 5 (worry very little). Occupational class is measured with dummy variables for *managers* ('directors' and 'top positions'), *intermediate occupations* (such as clerks, technicians, office workers), *working class* (skilled, unskilled), and *not-working*, with *non-managerial professionals* for reference.

Results

Table 1 (and Table A2 in the Appendix) shows the variables and the descriptive results. The results support my description of the study setting in key respects. They estimate a huge participation rate; 19 per cent of the urban population participated in the April 4 demonstration. Also, they indicate widespread large-turnout expectations and widespread protest support. Thus, 33 per cent of the respondents 'very much' expected a large protest, and an additional 44 per cent 'rather' expected a large protest. Moreover, 71 per cent were 'rather' or 'very much' in favour of the protest.

Effects on Large-Turnout Expectations

This section tests the hypotheses about effects on large-turnout expectations (as specified on the left side of Figure 1). To test the implied indirect effects, I use linear simultaneous equation models (SEM). Table 2 reports the full findings and Figure 3 summarizes the focal effects. The results support the key hypothesis about the association of protest support and large-turnout expectations (Path D). The association is significant, positive, and substantial (a standardized effect of 0.32). Moreover, protest support significantly mediates a part of the effects of political values/beliefs (Path AD), and of past protest participation (Path BD), on large-turnout expectations. Thus, leftist and centrist ideology, corruption beliefs, and past protest participation, are significantly, positively related to protest support that, in turn, significantly mediates the effects of these factors on large-turnout expectations. However, the results do not support a direct effect of past participation in protest on large-turnout expectations (Path C).

These findings support the individual-level implications of Oberschall's (1994) thesis about how large-turnout expectations form. Thus, they support the idea that, in a context where a scandal re-evokes an injustice theme that in the past inspired major protest, those who come to support a protest on the theme of the scandal tend to assume many to share their own experience,

Table 2. Direct and indirect regression effects on large-turnout expectations

	Direct effects on protest support	Direct effects on large-turnout expectations	Indirect effects on large-turnout expectations (via protest support)
Focal variables			
Leftist ideology	0.76** (Path A)	−0.03	0.25** (Path AD)
Centrist ideology	0.50** (Path A)	−0.04	0.16** (Path AD)
Corruption beliefs	0.13** (Path A)	0.03	0.04** (Path AD)
Participation in past protest	0.47** (Path B)	0.12 (Path C)	0.15** (Path BD)
Protest support	—	0.32** (Path D)	—
Control variables			
Female	−0.16*	0.03	−0.05*
Age	−0.01**	−0.01**	−0.00**
Neighbouring town	0.11	0.05	0.04
Secondary school	0.23*	0.17	0.07*
College degree	0.23*	0.07	0.07*
Household financial stability	0.01	−0.00	0.00
Managerial class	0.05	−0.13	0.01
Intermediate class	−0.10	−0.15	−0.03
Working class	−0.33*	−0.38	−0.11*
Not employed/working	−0.02	−0.15	−0.01
Intercept	−0.13	0.55*	—

Note: $^{*}P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.01$ (two-tailed tests). The table reports linear slope coefficients (maximum likelihood estimators) from simultaneous estimation models.

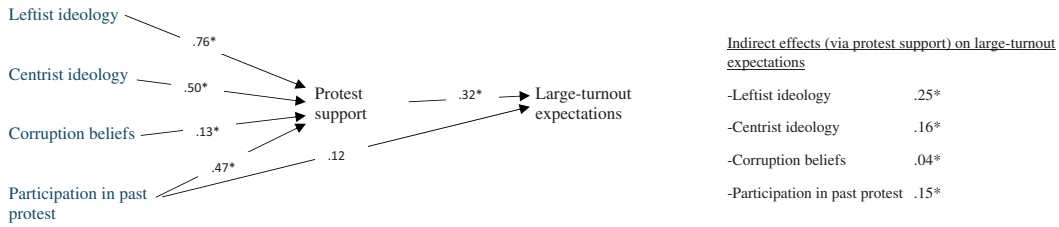


Figure 3. Summary of the hypothesized effects on large-turnout expectations

Note: $^{*}P < 0.01$ (two-tailed). The figure shows selected effect coefficients from the simultaneous equation models in Table 2.

raising their expectations about turnout. Furthermore, the findings indicate that values and beliefs that resonate with the theme, and past participation in protest on the theme, raise turnout expectations in part through increased protest support.

Although not the focus here, Table 2 also shows protest support to significantly mediate the effects of socio-demographic factors on large-turnout expectations. Thus, females (compared to males) and working-class individuals (compared to professionals) appear to expect a lower turnout because they support the protest less, while those with more education seem to expect a larger turnout because they support the protest more. Finally, those who are older expect a smaller turnout in part because they tend to support the protest less than those who are younger.

Effects on Protest Participation

This section tests the hypotheses about effects on protest participation (as specified on the right side of Figure 1). As before, SEM is used so that indirect effects can be tested. The full results are reported in Table 3. Note that since protest participation is a binary outcome, the estimated linear effects on participation are interpreted as effects in a linear probability model (note: I use robust standard errors to adjust for heteroscedasticity; Mood, 2009). I have estimated both ordinary least squares and logistic models to make sure that the results are not sensitive to modelling method.[16]

I first focus on the interaction effect implied by the efficacy and safety-in-numbers models, that is, the hypothesis that large-turnout expectations should be associated with protest participation insofar individuals

Table 3. Direct, interacting, and indirect regression effects on the probability of protest participation on April 4

	Direct effects on participation of significant others	Direct effects on protest participation	Indirect effects on protest participation (via participation of significant others)
Focal variables			
Leftist ideology	0.32*	0.10*	0.03*
Centrist ideology	0.01	0.03	0.00
Corruption beliefs	0.05	−0.00	0.00
Participation in past protest	0.52**	0.17**	0.04**
Large-turnout expectations	0.11* (Path I)	0.02 (Path E)	0.01* (Path IJ)
Protest support	0.42** (Path G)	0.05** (Path H)	0.03** (Path GJ)
Protest participation of significant others	—	0.08** (Path J)	—
Interaction term			
Large-turnout expectations * Protest support	—	0.03* (Path F)	—
Control variables			
Female	0.29**	−0.10**	0.02**
Age	0.11	−0.00*	0.00
Neighbouring town	−0.21*	−0.05	−0.02*
Secondary school	−0.17	−0.04	−0.01
College degree	−0.14	−0.03	−0.01
Household financial stability	−0.02	0.01	−0.00
Managerial class	−0.28	−0.05	−0.02
Intermediate class	0.03	−0.02	0.00
Working class	−0.24	−0.11*	−0.02
Not employed/working	−0.31*	0.06	−0.02*
Intercept	2.24**	0.05	—

Note: $^{*}P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.01$ (two-tailed tests, robust standard errors). The table reports unstandardized, linear coefficients (maximum likelihood estimators) from simultaneous estimation models.

support the protest (Path F, Figure 1). In support for the hypothesis, Table 3 confirms a significant interaction of large-turnout expectations and protest support, implying that large-turnout expectations have a significantly more pronounced effect on protest participation at higher levels of protest support. I further examine the interaction pattern in Figure 4. The left-side graph confirms that large-turnout expectations are significantly associated with a larger probability of participation, but *only* among protest supporters. The slope effect (0.05) implies a substantial effect; the participation probability is 0.15 higher among those who have maximum (+1 SD) relative to minimum (−2 SD) large-turnout expectations. Moreover, the right-side graph reveals that protest supporters are in fact significantly more likely to participate *only* if they expect a large protest.

These results negate the free-rider hypothesis (Olson, 1965) that implies that large-turnout expectations deter protest participation. Instead, the results support the current theoretical model, indicating that large-turnout expectations motivate protest supporters to participate in protest.

Furthermore, I have hypothesized that protest participation of significant others should mediate a part of the association of large-turnout expectations and protest participation (Path IJ). Table 3 shows all direct and indirect effects on protest participation, while Figure 5 summarizes the focal effects. The results support the mediation hypothesis; participation of significant others significantly mediates a part of the effect of large-turnout expectations on protest participation. This finding thus support the idea that large-turnout expectations motivate participation by triggering interpersonal relational dynamics. But this mediation is only 'partial', in the sense that, as I have already discussed, the expectations-support interaction effect (i.e. Path F) is statistically significant even when protest participation of significant others is controlled for.

Furthermore, as hypothesized (Path GJ), interpersonal relational dynamics mediate a part of the effect of

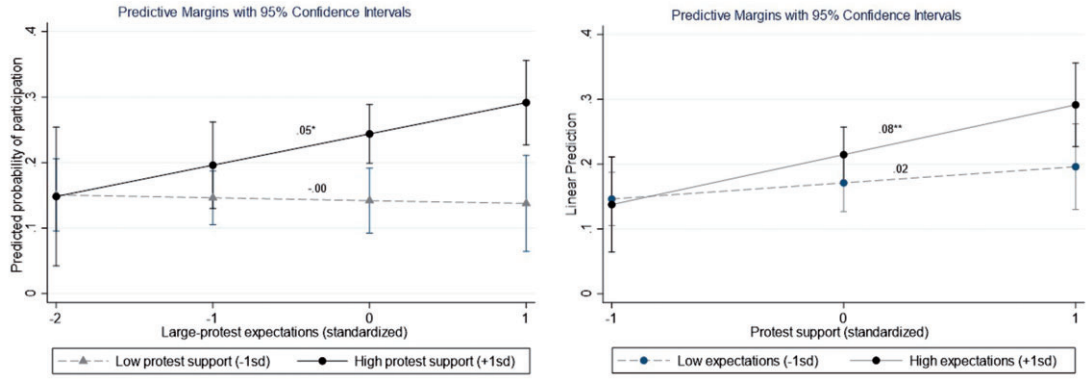
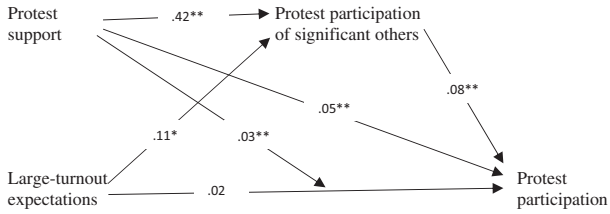


Figure 4. Illustrating the interaction of large-turnout expectations and protest support found in Table 3

Note: Linear probability regression with robust standard errors; the other variables in Table 3 are fixed at their mean values.



Indirect effects on protest participation via protest participation of significant others

-Protest support	.03**
-Large-turnout expectations	.01*

Figure 5. Summary of the hypothesized effects on protest participation

Note: *$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$ (two-tailed, robust standard errors). The figure shows selected effect coefficients from the simultaneous equation models in Table 3.

protest support on participation. This finding further supports the idea that a scandal-evoked protest support tends to raise expectations about the protest participation of others.

In addition, the results in Table 3 show that political values, past protest participation, and specific social-demographic characteristics significantly influence protest participation net of large-turnout expectations, protest support, and participation of significant others. Specifically, leftist ideology and past participation are significantly, positively related to protest participation. Also, net of all other effects, protest participation is significantly predicted by gender (females participate less), age (older individuals participate less), and class status (working-class individuals participate less than professionals). While addressing the effects of all of these factors on protest participation is not the focus of this paper, the Supplementary Table S4 reports a series of ordinary least squares models suggesting how the interaction of large-turnout expectations and protest support account for a part of the total effects of these factors on protest participation.

Discussion

Social theory implies that a rise in large-turnout expectations can motivate many individuals to participate in collective action (Granovetter, 1978; Klandermans, 1984; Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989; Oberschall, 1994; Kurzman, 1996; Biggs, 2003; Opp, 2009: pp. 62–63), giving rise to a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton, 1957; see Biggs, 2018; Daya, 1971; Hedström and Swedberg, 1996). But individual-level research on the topic is limited. This study has moved beyond a handful of early studies on the topic (Klandermans, 1984; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989; Finkel and Muller, 1998), by obtaining population-representative data allowing me to address both the formation of large-turnout expectations and their role in participation in a *particular protest event*.

Comparative research is needed to confirm whether the historical situation that gave rise to large-turnout expectations in Iceland, in April 2016, belongs to a category of similar cases (Walton, 1992), that is, if scandals that re-evoke injustice themes associated with past

protest tend to trigger large-turnout expectations (Oberschall, 1994). But while studying a single historical case prevents me from addressing broad hypotheses about contextual effects, the study is the first to address the individual-level mechanisms underlying a particular rise of large-turnout expectations. The results confirm that individuals who come to support a protest planned in response to an injustice scandal tend to expect a large turnout, presumably because of their awareness that others are also exposed to the scandal (Oberschall, 1994). Moreover, due to this reason, values and beliefs that resonate with the theme of the scandal (Bernburg, 2015), and past participation in protest on the theme (Opp and Kittel, 2010), tend to raise turnout expectations. In this respect, I have acknowledged that the effect of past participation on protest behaviour may reflect an unmeasured tendency to participate in collective action (rather than a 'feedback effect'). But at least the study controls for this tendency when estimating other effects. More research is needed to replicate the results in other settings.

The key finding is the interaction of large-turnout expectations and protest support, which indicates that expecting a large protest motivates protest participation *only* if individuals value the protest goal. While negating the free-rider model (Olson, 1965), this finding supports (yet does not distinguish) rational choice models of efficacy and safety-in-numbers, that both imply that it is the *combination* of situational-temporary optimism and of the value placed in the collective goal that motivates individuals to participate in collective action (Klandermans, 1984; Finkel and Opp, 1991: p. 900). The findings thus support (and are supported by) the early studies of the role of large-turnout expectations in participation in non-specific protest (Finkel, Muller, and Opp, 1989; Finkel and Muller, 1998) and in participation willingness (Klandermans, 1984; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). But the findings not just indicate that large-turnout expectations motivate only supporters to participate. They also indicate that protest support motivates protest participation only if individuals expect a large turnout. This finding has broad implications for research on collective protest. Prior studies have found that only a fraction of those who support a given protest end up participating in it (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; van Laer, 2017). But in the present study case widespread large-turnout expectations appeared to motivate many supporters to participate (again, see Figure 4). By implication, building on the words of revolution theorist Goldstone (2001: p. 164), a rise in large-turnout expectations may be the type of 'perception shift' that can 'convince' many of those who have 'long harbored concerns about [an] injustice' that 'action can make a difference', giving rise to those critical moments where widespread, long-standing discontent finds expression in mass action. In this vein, studying historical shifts in turnout expectations may help research to explain the timing of 'protest cycles' (Koopmans, 2004) and, as the current case suggests, why mass protest tends to occur where it has occurred before (Braithwaite, Braithwaite, and Kucik, 2015). Finally, given that only a small group of activists planned the April 4 demonstration, the study suggests that large-turnout expectations may be an important force in mobilizing 'sympathizers' who have little ties to movement organization (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Klandermans *et al.*, 2014).

Given the extensive research supporting the role of interpersonal ties in protest participation (Opp and Gern, 1993; Passy and Giugni, 2001; Dougherty and Schraeder, 2018), and of the prominence of relational dynamics in rational choice theory (Klandermans, 1984; Goldstone, 1994; Oberschall, 1994), including participation of significant others in the analysis is a major advantage, although the measurement was limited in important respects. Thus, showing that participation of significant others mediated a part of the expectation-participation link provides unique support for the intervening role of relational dynamics (i.e. social motive and/or assurance) in the self-fulfilling prophecy (Klandermans, 1984; Oberschall, 1994). But, since I used a measure of the participation of significant others as a proxy for the *expected* participation of significant others, future research must validate the mediation thesis. Moreover, I cannot not rule out the possibility that expecting significant others to participate in protest actually tends to both increase large-turnout expectations and directly motivate individuals to participate in the protest. But at least we can be fairly confident in that the study's key finding, namely, the interactive effects of large-turnout expectations and protest support on protest participation, is not spurious for this reason.

But while the findings support (and yet qualify) the role of the self-fulfilling prophecy in collective action, the study limitations call for more research on this mechanism. First of all, Iceland represents a 'non-dangerous' setting, where the police rarely repress popular protest with violence or even arrests (Bernburg, 2016). The study should be replicated in more dangerous (i.e. authoritarian) settings. Also, research needs to include measures that directly address the proposed intermediate processes (i.e. sense of efficacy, obligation, and of safety-in-numbers, and social motive and assurance). Finally, relying on retrospective measures has been a major limitation. Although The Leak and the April 4

demonstration were unique, consequential, and emotion-provoking events (Opp and Gern, 1993), and while historical evidence confirms that large-turnout expectations arose in between these events, I cannot rule out that measurement error (due to memory loss or recollection bias) may have impacted the findings. Future research should find ways to measure turnout expectations and other focal constructs in *real time*. Web-based surveys seem particularly promising. Such surveys can be implemented in a matter of hours to obtain real-time measures of expectations and of support for and participation in a given collective action. In the case of ongoing collective action, daily surveys can be employed and, in the case of dated events, pre- and post-event measures can be obtained (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). But to obtain a representative sample of both the participants and the non-participants, samples surveys still require a setting where a substantial portion of the population participates in the collective action. Moreover, given that large-turnout expectations usually arise in relation to particular events and thus usually exist only momentarily, and given how their formation and role in collective action participation depends on the value that individuals place in the goal of the action at a given moment, research should address the self-fulfilling prophecy as embedded in a given historical context.

Notes

1 For example, Kurzman (1996) study of personal accounts of the Iranian Revolution found that many were willing to participate in protest against an authoritarian regime because they expected that mass participation would overwhelm the regime's repressive powers. But Kurzman had no data to test if this expectation was associated with protest participation.

2 Biggs (2003) refers to such a mechanism as 'positive feedback'. Reed (2004) discusses how moral outrage can evoke 'success models' from past protest, raising 'hope' of success.

3 The Supplementary Material discusses my supplementary research on the study case (see footnotes cited in this section).

4 This statement relies on a discourse analysis of more than 200 stories appearing in the news media in March and April 2016 (Supplementary Material).

5 This statement relies on interviews with the activists who planned the protest (Supplementary Material). Thus, one of them told me how during the latter part of March 2016 he/she sensed that 'the public might be ready to protest'.

6 A representative survey ($N = 1001$) conducted shortly after *Spotlight* estimates that 57 per cent of urbanites watched the broadcast on the evening of April 3, and an additional quarter watched it later (Supplementary Material).

7 The interview can be seen on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTdBGdFH8zc.

8 My field observation (Supplementary Material) found a corruption-privilege theme to dominate the symbolism used in the protest. Also, see Supplementary Table S1, for open-response survey data illustrating how participants experienced corruption-privilege as the main protest issue.

9 'Á þrettán þúsund melduð á mótmælin' (About thirteen thousand intend to protest) (news, 4 April 2016). *Stundin*. Available online at /https://stundin.is/frett/threttanda-thusund-bodad-komu-sinu/?fb_comment_id=1007536389332028_1007555305996803.

10 'Erlendir fjölmiðlar komnir hingað til að vera viðstaddir mótmælin' (Foreign media have arrived here to attend the protest) (news article, 4 April 2016). *Vísir*. Available online at https://www.visir.is/g/2016160409520/erlendir-fjolmidlar-komnir-hingad-til-ad-vera-vidstaddir-motmaelin.

11 A quote from my interview with the director of protest operations at Reykjavík Metro Police, dated in May 2016: 'We did not expect much until we saw *Spotlight*... then we immediately started to prepare for a large protest' (Supplementary Material).

12 'Mannfjöldi samankominn á Austurvelli' (many people at Austurvöllur) (news article, 4 April 2016). *RÚV*. Retrieved from https://www.ruv.is/frett/mannfjoldi-samankominn-a-austurvelli; 'Sigmundur Davíð hættur' (Sigmundur has quit). (news article, 5 April 2016). *Vísir*. Retrieved from https://www.visir.is/g/2016160409294/sigmundur-david-haettur.

13 See Supplementary Table S2 and Figure S1, for the development of the April 2016 protest wave.

14 A separate survey conducted within a month after the protest confirms a similar protest support rate (Supplementary Material).

15 A separate survey conducted within a month after the protest confirms a similar participation rate as the present survey (Supplementary Material).

16 Although protest participation is a binary outcome, this analysis tests indirect and interaction effects and thus I follow Mood (2009) and avoid using logistic regression and instead estimate linear effects

and rely on robust standard errors to adjust for heteroscedasticity. Supplementary Material demonstrates the robustness of the SEM results. First, ordinary least squares linear probability models (Supplementary Tables S3 and S4) almost perfectly replicate all the effects found in Tables 2 and 3. Second, in Supplementary Table S5, a comparison of linear probability models effects and logistic regression average marginal effects reveals almost identical effects on protest participation (i.e. when estimating direct-effects-only models).

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

Acknowledgements

I thank Eva Heiða Önnudóttir for inviting me to contribute to the Icelandic Election Study with questions focused on the 4 April 2016 demonstration. Moreover, I thank Sigrún Ólafsdóttir and Jonas Toubol for critical remarks on earlier drafts of this paper. I thank my paid assistant Sonja Sif Þórólfsdóttir, for retreiving the tweets and performing the content analysis reported in Table A1 in the Appendix.

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Appendix

Table A1. A content analysis of a large sample of tweets on the *Spotlight* coverage

	Per cent
Corruption of, or lack of ethics, in the politics	44
Pride in the protests, encouraging others	16
Concern about Iceland's reputation	11
Wealth privilege	11
Praise for journalism	7
General disappointment	6
Satisfaction with the opposition in parliament	4
The winter 2008–2009 financial crisis protests	1

Note: The hashtag studied was '#cashljos', which is a wordplay of the Icelandic word *Kastljós* (the direct translation of the meaning would be 'cash-light' i.e. Spotlight). All tweets ($N = 11{,}342$) under the banner '#cashljos' in the period 3 April through 9 April were retrieved from Twitter. To perform a manageable content analysis, a random sample of 1,649 tweets was drawn, of which 634 tweets conveyed no particular meaning or where otherwise non-interpretable (e.g. contained merely jokes or curses). The table reports a content analysis of the remaining 1,015 tweets.[a]

Table A2. The original survey scales for large-turnout expectations and protest support

	Did you expect a large protest to break out after the *Spotlight* revelation about the PM's shell company?
Did not expect it at all	6.1 per cent
Rather not expected it	16.3 per cent
Rather expected it	44.2 per cent
Expected it very much	33.4 per cent
	On the day after the *Spotlight* interview, on April 4th, there was a huge protest on *Austurvöllur*. Were you in favour or opposed to this protest?
Very much opposed	9.0 per cent
Rather opposed	8.4 per cent
Neither in favour or opposed	11.4 per cent
Rather in favour	30.2 per cent
Very much in favour	41.0 per cent