

# Efficacy, Blame Attribution, and Protest Scope: Findings from a survey experiment in South Africa

Miquel Pellicer\*, Eva Wegner†, and Alexander De Juan‡

*Draft Version. All comments very welcome*

June 17, 2017

## Abstract

Similar grievances can motivate different types of protests with some demanding small scale improvements such as better quality sanitation in a neighbourhood and others calling for a change of the system itself. We investigate the role of perceptions of efficacy in shaping support for narrow/precise as compared to broader/systemic protest issue scopes. Our core mechanism, based on findings in the social psychology literature, posits that higher efficacy enables individuals to reappraise the origin of their grievances and attribute blame to broader scope targets, which, in turn, increases preference for broad protest issue scope. To investigate this mechanism, we conduct a survey experiment in two South African townships. We find that individuals asked to recall a successful protest (vs. an unsuccessful one and vs. a control group), are not only more likely to feel powerful and have higher levels of efficacy. They are also more likely to attribute common social grievances to the system rather than lower level culprits and to support protests calling for system change (social inequality) rather than specific policies (service provision). These results can help understanding the stability of social and political systems in the face of high grievances *and* protests.

## 1 Introduction

Given the high level of grievances in developing countries – stemming from poverty and socio-economic inequality, lack of economic opportunities, low quality public services, corruption etc. – the stability levels of social and political systems are surprisingly high around the world. The answer the collective action literature has traditionally given to this puzzle is that a high level of grievances is insufficient to

---

\*University College Dublin (Corresponding Author: miquel.pellicer@ucd.ie)

†University College Dublin (eva.wegner@ucd.ie)

‡University of Konstanz (alexander.de-juan@uni-konstanz.de)

bring about collective action. Collective action requires more than grievances, for example political opportunities for mobilization, such as political entrepreneurs or organizations solving collective action problems of the poor. As a result, literature on driver on the decision to engage in protest has flourished (see Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) for a review).

More overlooked is that a lot of people in developing countries do protest; the cost of collective action may be less prohibitive than assumed. In South Africa, about a dozen protests take place every day, in China a study found that in 2010 alone, there were 180,000 protests (Fisher 2012). More generally, over the past decade or so, protests around the world have increased in frequency, intensity, and size (see survey in Carothers and Youngs 2015). These include major and widely known protests such as those toppling Arab autocrats in 2010/2011 as well as many localized protests or marches. An important characteristic of those latter protests is that they frequently target narrow goals, such as food subsidies, property right for shacks in a particular slum, or connections to the sewer system and that these problems are often blamed on specific local officials or service providers rather than on the underlying socio-political structures.<sup>1</sup>

If many people articulate their grievances in protests demanding small scale improvements rather a situation of high stability in the face of high grievances *and* high levels of protest may result. The Arab uprisings where people came to rally around and protest about systemic targets (top level politicians or the political regime as such) did indeed show that unity around a systemic articulation of grievances can have massive consequences. So why do protesters sometimes have “narrow” and precise targets while at other times they target systemic change? What determines *individual preferences* for protest scope? This is the question we address in this paper.

Our starting point is the observation that similar grievances can translate into different types of protest. People that are frustrated over limited employment opportunities, basic services provision or high food prices may mobilize to demand specific improvements that address their particular grievances, for example, jobs for people in their neighbourhood, better sanitation in their township, or the increase of food subsidies. However, the same people may also articulate their grievances in a much more fundamental and systemic way, demanding, for example comprehensive socio-economic reform, the resignation of the incumbent government or regime change. The Arab Uprisings mostly started with specific economic or administrative demands (more jobs, subsidies, removal of individual corrupt politicians), but later turned into radical demands of system change. It seems implausible that a dramatic change in the nature of grievances could have occurred in such a short time to explain this change in scope.<sup>2</sup>

It is surprising that there is to date little research into what drives preferences

---

<sup>1</sup>To some extent this echoes the point made by Van Dyke, Soule and Taylor (2004) who found that many social movements in the West do not focus on formal state institutions but rather on public opinion and cultural change.

<sup>2</sup>Explaining this shift in protest goals is not the objective of this paper; this will have a variety of drivers including the reaction of the regimes to the initial protests or spill-over effects from other countries. Our argument is that it is not a change in objective grievances that caused this shift.

for the breadth of protest demands and objectives - which we will term *protest issue scope*. There is a large literature on related aspects of collective action such as for example the determinants of protest occurrence (Eisinger 1973; Meyer 2004), the strategic design of protest narratives (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow, Rochford Jr, Worden and Benford 1986), individual-level conditions of protest participation (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Finkel, Muller and Opp 1989; Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2005), or engagement in peaceful vs. violent protests (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Shaykhtudinov 2010). Little work, however, deals with the *preferences for protest issue scope* on the individual level.

Our paper contributes to filling this gap. We conducted a survey with 1500 individuals in April and May 2016 in South African townships. Our survey asks respondents about social problems commonly discussed in South Africa, such as service provision, crime, inequality, or corruption. For crime and electricity problems, we ask questions to capture who respondents think is to blame for these problems, with possible responses differing in *attribution scope*, ranging from blaming citizens themselves, specific government agencies, politicians in general, or the unequal social system in South Africa. We also probe into their preferences regarding *protest scope*. Hypothetical protest marches about health care provision in the community are presented to respondents, with the exact theme of the march differing in scope: ranging from requesting more doctors and nurses, to addressing corruption in health care spending, to asking for redistribution to increase equality in access to high quality healthcare. We propose respondents to sign a petition supporting each of these claims in order to move beyond stated preferences.

We begin by exploring the nature of protests in South Africa in a first section, showing that according to data from a crowd control “event” database of the South African police force, a vast majority of events in that country focus on localized targets (e.g. Ward councillors, municipal managers, managers at local industries or shops). We further show suggestive evidence from these data as well as from our survey that preferences for protest issue scope are not simply a direct function of the scope of grievance where broad issues translate in broad protest scope and vice-versa. According to the crowd control data, any given theme (e.g. services, corruption) may translate both in locally or nationally targeted protest. In our survey, there is wide variation in preferences for attending protests of different scope to address the *same problem*, with substantial proportions favouring specific as well as systemic targets.

We argue that variation in protest issue scope is related to the complexity of social problems and the related difficulties of attributing responsibility for one’s grievances; for each grievances, multiple culprits are possible/plausible and individuals will vary in how they judge who (or what) is the main responsible for a problem. Descriptive statistics from our survey show that individuals differ greatly in the way they attribute responsibility to common social problems, with substantial shares attributing responsibility to system wide factors such as government and inequality, as well as to more precise factors, such as specific agencies or citizens themselves (e.g. “people steal electricity”).

We investigate what drives these differences in the scope of blame attribution and protest with an experimental component in our survey. The mechanism we

consider originates in people’s beliefs about efficacy, i.e. the degree to which one believes one is able to affect the world one lives in in general, and political outcomes in particular. We argue that it is a low sense of “efficacy” of individuals that makes them engage in narrow protests. Importantly, we argue that it is not efficacy as part of a cost-benefit evaluation that makes them choose narrow topics and targets - as would be suggested by the standard view on efficacy and protest (Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg 2013) - but that low efficacy affects the cognitive process of blame attribution. In other words, individuals protest about narrow targets because a low sense of efficacy (possibly initially indeed driven by rational evaluations such as observing the absence of collective action around systemic topics or the entrenchment of the social system) makes them attribute the blame for the grievance at a narrow level.

The core mechanism we investigate in this paper is therefore that beliefs about efficacy affect blame attribution and, thereby, affect protest issue scope. Possibly, this mechanism operates via “system justification”, a concept advanced in the social psychology literature (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004).

To test the effect of efficacy perceptions on blame attribution and protest scope, an experimental component in our survey seeks to manipulate these perceptions. The high (low) political efficacy treatment consists of asking respondents to remember a successful (unsuccessful) protest.<sup>3</sup> Manipulation checks show that the political efficacy treatment worked as intended: individuals asked to recall a successful protest tend to display higher levels of efficacy, both regarding protests, politicians’ accountability and social mobilization. They also score higher in perceptions of personal power.

Our results are broadly consistent with our core mechanism. We find that individuals requested to recall a successful protest are more likely to attribute blame for their grievances to more systemic causes, and to prefer joining more systemic protests. Moreover, we verify that these results do not seem to be driven by the specific type of protest recalled. Whereas those asked to recall successful protests are more likely to remember larger and Apartheid era protests, we show that our results also hold even the subsets of respondents recalling similar types of protests. In contrast, there is no effect of the low efficacy treatment - relative to the control group - suggesting that perceptions of efficacy are generally low in that part of the South African population.

We believe that these results that link perceptions of efficacy to blame attribution and protest scope can contribute to understanding systemic stability at the face of high grievances. It has been well established that, in highly unequal countries, poor people make less demands for redistribution than standard theories would predict (Alesina and Giuliano 2011; McCall 2013). This is not necessarily because poor individuals do not engage in individual or collective protest. To the contrary,

---

<sup>3</sup>The survey also included a separate power treatment adapted from Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke, Feinberg, Jost, Kay, Tyler, Willer and Wilmuth (2015). Manipulation checks showed that the power treatment did not work as expected: there is no difference in reported perceptions of personal power between those in the high and low power condition. The paper thus focuses on the results of the political efficacy treatment only and provides results for the power treatment in the appendix

protests are quite common in a highly unequal country like South Africa (De Juan and Wegner 2017). However, most protests are about specific topics, not about egalitarian change. If poor individuals articulate their poverty-related grievances as demands for very specific improvements (such as cheaper electricity, or better sanitation in a particular township) instead of collective action around systemic issues, a social stability equilibrium can be established where the general sense of efficacy is low, which in turn leads to a narrow articulation of grievances which feeds back into sustaining and stabilizing the status quo. Understanding why disadvantaged individuals go for small scale rather than radical change that could end their disadvantage can thus contribute to understanding why even highly unequal systems can be much more stable than one would expect given the extent of grievances.

In addition, our findings contribute to extant research on protest. First, we add to research on individual-level determinants of protest behavior. Previous studies have highlighted the role of efficacy for protest participation (Gamson 1992; Klaundermans and Van Stekelenburg 2013; Van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears 2008; van Zomeren, Leach and Spears 2012). In particular, it has been highlighted that people are more likely to participate in protests when they believe collective action to represent an effective means of redressing their grievances at acceptable costs. Our results extend this research in two ways: we show that individual assessments of efficacy do not only matter in terms of increasing people's general willingness to participate in protests but also in terms of increasing their preference for broad protest issues. Moreover, our findings also suggest that efficacy may not primarily affect protest behaviour by influencing people's cost-benefit calculations but through cognitive processes of blame attribution.

Second, going beyond research on the drivers of protest, we contribute to understanding protest dynamics. Our results suggest that efficacy perceptions may help explain why protests that start focusing on narrow targets sometimes become broader and systemic and sometimes do not. For example, the way protests are handled by authorities in terms of concessions versus outright repression do not only affect opportunity structures but also increase or decrease the sense of efficacy of protesters, thus leading to changing protest dynamics in terms of protest issue scopes. Similarly, from the perspective of cascade models of protest participation (Sunstein 2005), our findings suggest that "early movers" may not only be important in terms of making people re-evaluate the costs and benefits of protests but also by influencing bystanders' cognitive empowerment. As a consequence, people would not only be more willing to protest but also more willing to protest for broad and system-wide change. This may explain simultaneous process of increasing size and increasing issue scope of protests as seen in the 2011 Arab uprisings.

## **2 Protest issue scope: more than big vs. small grievances**

What is the nature of protests in developing countries? In the past decade, protests have been increasing worldwide. South Africa is a case in point: since the mid-2000s protests have increased dramatically by all counts (De Juan and Wegner 2017). A

lot of media/ research attention is usually given to violent or large scale protests that demand big changes and target national governments. However, a casual observer of political behaviour in developing countries would note that many of the everyday protests are small in scale and focus on narrow and very precise issues, such as better housing or electricity in a particular neighbourhood or property rights for shacks in an informal settlement. Blame in such protests is often laid on local politicians, a badly performing ward councillor or public employees (such as teachers or nurses) that don't show up for work rather than on underlying structural causes.

Before this background, this section sees to address two questions: First, what is the share of protests with a narrow vs. protests with a broad scope in South Africa? Second, how do grievances translate in preferences for protest scope? The section is based on two types of evidence. First, data from the South African police's crowd control database the Incident Registration Information System (IRIS) that record events with more than five participants.<sup>4</sup> We coded a random subset of protest events in 2011 and 2013 from the database. The data include descriptions of the events and, although the descriptions focus on the crowd control aspect of the event, they mostly allow for a coding of the protest target (i.e. whether it is the local, province, or national level).

The second data come from an individual level opinion survey with 1,500 respondents that we conducted in two South African townships, Gugulethu and Mitchells Plain between March and May 2016.<sup>5</sup> While not the poorest South African citizens, these townships have high levels of unemployment (around 40 per cent in Gugulethu), and suffer from crime and service delivery problems. Gugulethu is an African black township, Mitchells Plain has a "Coloured" population.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1 shows a crosstabulation of protest motive by target level. The vast majority of the events is targeted at the local level. A typical example of such a localized event with a narrow scope would be the following:

“ +/- 70 people are marching to the councillors office. The community of Ward 6 is not happy with the councillor, Mr [...] They want to

---

<sup>4</sup>We obtained these data from the SA police forces under the Access to Information Act. These data record events with more than five participants by location and data and give a short description of the event.

<sup>5</sup>A total of 135 Enumerator Areas (EA) were randomly selected from a complete list of residential EAs as defined by StatsSA. Within each EA a random GPS coordinate was chosen as the starting point for a "random walk"; a dice was used to determine the direction at junctions. The data was collected on mobile devices. We contracted a South African survey company, ikapadata for the survey. Pretests and training were provided by the researchers. A total of 17 fieldworkers conducted the interviews with fieldworker population group matching those of respondents. The master questionnaire was in English and was translated with feedback from the fieldworkers into Xhosa and Afrikaans. Language could be switched for each question.

<sup>6</sup>South Africa's Apartheid regime divided the South African population in four "races": African, Coloured, Indian/Asian, and White. Only the White population had voting rights and full citizenship. Under Apartheid, there was full residential segregation with Whites living in the cities and the other groups being forcefully removed to dedicated townships. Large parts of the African population were moreover deported to so-called homelands supposedly matching their ethnic group. Residential segregation laws were revoked in the 1990s but the vastly different housing prices in these areas have left residential segregation intact in many townships, so that Gugulethu is 99 per cent African and Mitchells Plain 96 per cent Coloured, according to the 2011 population census.

address the issue of service delivery and they want to change the leadership of the ward. They will march to the councillor’s office to hand over the memorandum.” (12th of March 2011).

This event is a smallish protest of people who are dissatisfied with the performance of their ward councillor who they seem to blame for problems with service delivery. They go to the councillor’s office, deliver a document stating their grievances and disperse.

Table 1: Protest Topics and Scope Level

motive	Level			Total
	local	provincial	national	
crime	23	0	5	28
employment/salaries	228	10	22	260
governance/corruption	19	1	4	24
human rights	5	1	10	16
service delivery	89	5	7	101
other	64	2	5	71
Total	428	19	53	500

A related finding, shown in table 2 is that a vast majority of protest events are small. More than half have less than 100 participants, and another 35% have between 100 and 500 participants, suggesting that a lot of protest behaviour is essentially just a number of people from a neighborhood getting together and articulating their joint grievances.

Table 2: Number of Protesters

Participants	Freq.	Percent
1-100	251	56.53
101-500	156	35.14
501-1000	17	3.83
1001-6000	20	4.5

Although we lack comparable data for other developing countries, it is a sensible assumption that the picture in other countries is not that different. This has two important implications. First, an exclusive focus on protest with broad issue scope, i.e. demanding regime change or the resignation of top government officials is likely to miss an important part of political participation/ behaviour in developing countries. Second, it calls further into question the quality of media based event datasets as this type of unspectacular protest is improbable to make it into the news.

Why do many individuals seem to have a preference for a narrow protest scope? A straightforward explanation could argue that preferences for protest scope are

simply the expression of different grievances where individuals with “bigger”, systemic, grievances engage in system-related protest, and individuals with narrow grievances engage in protest directed at lower-level targets. However, the Tunisia protests of 2010 suggest that this is unlikely. In these protests, a sudden and dramatic change in scope from narrow demands about jobs and subsidies to broad ones about regime change took place but grievances can assumed to have stayed constant.

Our data also suggest that there is no neat mapping from a grievance about a particular topic such as services or corruption to preferences for a particular protest scope. As table 1 shows, the same protest topic, e.g. services, employment, or governance/corruption can lead to protest targeted at different levels, local, provincial, or national.

Findings from our survey provide additional evidence for the fact that the same grievance can translate into preferences for protests with different scope levels. As a measure of preferences for different levels of protest scope the survey presented a scenario to respondents in which citizens get together to organize a march about the bad quality of health care but disagree on what the march should target. One group wants to call for more doctors and nurses, a second group attributes bad health quality to corrupt policies, and a third group argues that only redistribution of wealth can solve the health care problem. Respondents are asked to chose going to one of the marches. In this way, the question seeks to emulate a situation where there is a defined, given grievances, "bad quality of health care", but different protest scope options to choose from.

Table 3 shows the result for the control group in the panel “Protest Choice”. Although there is a preference to join the march asking for more doctors and nurses, especially in the African Black township, there is a wide variation in the preferences for protest scope with about 25 per cent of respondents favoring the broad scope march asking for redistribution to address grievances about healthcare. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the grievance itself does not determine the scope of protest. The large amount of narrow scope protests in the SA data thus does not suggest that South Africans have narrow problems that lend themselves to narrow scope protests only.

This “missing link” between the type/ theme of grievance and the scope of protest is likely to originate in the complexity of social problems. Social problems and grievances often have a variety of causes and the same problem can be attributed to both proximate and systemic causes, depending on individual beliefs. This complexity implies that for any given problem there is a multitude of actors that could be held responsible. Different individuals with similar grievances may therefore appraise such grievances in different ways depending on their own characteristics or the characteristics of the environment they operate in. As Javeline (2009, p. 32) states in her study of protest on wage arrears in Russia, "Targets for blame are [...] conceived by individuals in their minds and through conversations with others about the particular issue in question. At any time, possibilities include managers, local executives, local legislatures, national executives, national legislatures, and a variety of others. Given the diversity of perspectives in the public, the

Table 3: Distribution of responses to attribution and protest scope questions

Means	All	Gugulethu	Mitchells Plain
<b>Protest Choice</b>			
more doctors	0.46	0.53	0.38
corruption	0.30	0.26	0.35
redistribution	0.24	0.21	0.27
<b>Attribution Services</b>			
people	0.29	0.35	0.23
serv. provider	0.11	0.11	0.10
government	0.30	0.24	0.36
poverty/ ineq	0.30	0.29	0.31
<b>Attribution Crime</b>			
people	0.22	0.26	0.19
police	0.14	0.15	0.12
government	0.31	0.20	0.43
poverty/ ineq	0.33	0.38	0.27

result could be a great variety of targets".<sup>7</sup>

In the police data, the descriptions of the incidents can give an impression of such differences in attribution. Consider the following examples:

“60 residents of Koffiefontein marched from Steve Tshwete main road to the municipality offices. Participants are concerned with poor service delivery at their area. They displayed posters with the following wording: “We want good services and down with corrupt town manager”. The convenor [...] handed over memorandum to Chief Financial Officer.”

“/- 30 participants 70% males and 30% females picketed and with placards written. “1. We cannot pay for electricity and water. 2. President Zuma hired criminals, 3.“Democracy does not work for Africa”. A memorandum was read and handed to director from the president office.”(30th November 2013).

In both cases, the grievance is service delivery but the first event points at a narrow attribution, asking for the dismissal of a municipal manager, whereas the second suggests a broad attribution of blame linking the problems with services to Zuma’s leadership and the political regime more generally.

In our survey, we find a similar variation in the scope of attribution of blame. Two survey items measure where respondents attribute the blame for two specific

<sup>7</sup>A similar point comes from a different line of research, about rape survivors, that finds that different women lay the blame for the rape to very different targets, namely themselves, the perpetrator, the circumstances surrounding the assault, and society (Donde 2015).

problems, delivery of water and electricity, and crime.<sup>8</sup> The answer options range from blaming the people (i.e. bad parenting for crime, people stealing electricity for services), to state agencies (the police, ESKOM, water authority), the government, or the wider system (poverty and inequality).

Table 3 shows that, indeed, there is large variation in the scope at which people articulate their grievances. A substantial amount of respondents emphasizes each type of response. In particular, around 60 to 65% of respondents attribute crime and public service problems to systemic causes, with a roughly equal share attributing it to the government and poverty/inequality. This variation suggests that it is indeed a priori unclear, who should be blamed for a specific problem.

Such differences in the scope of attribution should be closely linked to the scope of protest. Intuitively, blaming the system for one's problems appears to be a pre-condition for engaging in system-related protest. In turn, blaming individuals (e.g. particular politicians that are considered to be "rotten apples") ought to be associated to protest about these particular individuals. In the extreme, blaming the people themselves (e.g. "if only people worked hard enough they would solve their problems") implies contentment with the existing social structures and should not lead to any protest. In essence, the large share of localized protests would imply that many people - while feeling aggrieved - do not attribute their problems to broader, systemic issues but to local failures. Why would this be the case?

## 3 Efficacy, Blame Attribution, and Protest Scope

### 3.1 The mechanism

What determines blame attribution? What drives individuals to attribute the same problem to different levels of scope? In this paper, we focus on the role of *perceptions of efficacy/ powerfulness*, which we define as the extent to which individuals believe that they can affect their environment to pursue their goals. Beliefs about efficacy feature prominently in the collective action literature, mostly as affecting the cost-benefit calculus of engaging, and remaining engaged, in protest (see (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears 2012; Van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears 2008)). The link between efficacy and protest is thought to be direct and straightforward "the more effective an individual believes protest participation is, the more likely s/he is to participate" (Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg 2013, p.3). Analogously, one could argue that efficacy may lead people to believe that they can successfully take on bigger causes (i.e. Ben Ali or the Tunisian regime, instead of food subsidies).

Although this may be a sensible perspective - and our survey includes an item to investigate this - our main focus is on a different, and more complex, role of efficacy, namely one where *efficacy affects protest scope via its effect on blame attribution for grievances*. This argument is based on findings in the social psychology literature that has shown efficacy/power to be a driver of system justification (SJ), a concept

---

<sup>8</sup>The question wording is as follows: "Many people think that lack of affordable services of good quality such as water and electricity is an important problem. Could you please tell me which you think is the most important factor responsible for this problem?."

that is closely related to blame attribution. SJ is defined as social psychological process by which existing social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements are justified even at the expense of personal self-interest (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon and Sullivan 2003; Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke et al. 2015). A core finding in this literature is that disadvantaged individuals sometimes justify the very system that generates their disadvantage. The theory argues that this may be because believing consistently that the system is unfair has high psychological costs (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004; Jost et al. 2003).

System justification can be viewed as a coping mechanism vis-a-vis a situation that an individual feels she cannot change. A disadvantaged individual who feels powerless cannot cope with the stress from such disadvantage by acting (“problem focused” coping), and will tend to cope rather by reappraising his/ her place in the system (“emotion focused” coping) and construing it differently (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). According to system justification theory, such reappraisal would involve considering that the system is, to a certain extent, fair and legitimate. Linking this to blame attribution, the reappraisal would involve blaming direct proximate causes - such as for example absent teachers or nurses - rather than system injustice that might, for instance, lead to unequal funding of public services. In such a context, protest issue scope could be expected to be narrow.

Efficacy plays an important role in this process. A heightened sense of efficacy may break the mechanism as it decreases individuals need to justify their disadvantage and may lead them to reappraise their situation and who is to blame for their problems. In turn, feeling powerless and inefficacious may activate the need to justify the status quo and attribute blame to oneself or lower level targets. Support for such a role of efficacy comes from laboratory experiments where beliefs about either efficacy (“perceptions of changeability”) (Johnson and Fujita 2012) or power (Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke et al. 2015) were manipulated. Johnson and Fujita (2012) find that enhanced beliefs of efficacy causes participants wanting to learn about systemic weaknesses whereas Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke et al. (2015) find that priming powerlessness increased individuals’ legitimation of economic and social systems and prevented them from challenging hierarchies.

Following these findings, we hypothesize a causal mechanism linking efficacy to protest scope involving two potential channels (see figure 1 below). For both channels, efficacy is the starting point and - all else such as grievances being equal - blame attribution is linked to protest scope in the sense that attributing blame for grievances to more systemic targets leads to more systemic protest issue scope whereas attributing blame for grievances to narrower targets leads to narrower issue scope.

The first channel links efficacy to a more general need/ lack of need of system justification - as suggested by the system justification literature - and via this, to blame attribution. The second channel proposes a “watered down” version of this. It proposes that disadvantaged individuals, faced with a lack of power and efficacy, cope rather via system *disengagement* instead of justifying it actively. Lack of efficacy may not necessarily lead individuals to believe that the system is fair, only to refrain from blaming it actively and challenging it directly. Therefore, this channel suggests a more direct link between efficacy and blame attribution where

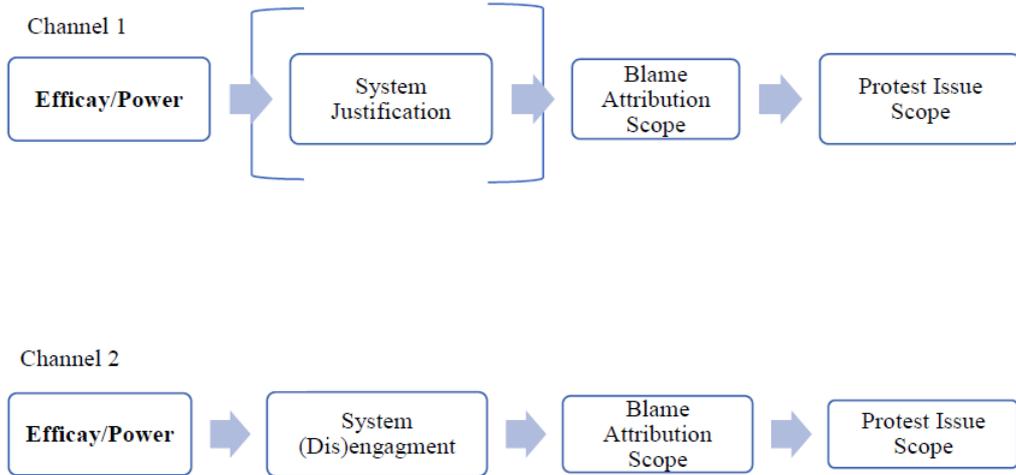


Figure 1: Mechanism Linking Efficacy and Protest Issue Scope

lack of efficacy leads individuals to channel their grievances towards narrow targets (instead of systemic ones) and seek small-scale solutions for them.

Our empirical strategy follows this causal chain. Our survey provides a treatment that seeks to affect the beliefs of efficacy/ power, and traces the effect of these on indices of system justification, blame attribution scope, and preferences for protest issue scope.

### 3.2 The experiment

We define efficacy as the perception that individuals are able to affect political outcomes and seek to manipulate these perceptions. In the efficacy treatment we ask respondents to recall a successful (high efficacy treatment) or unsuccessful (low efficacy treatment) protest. We then ask a number of questions about that protest in order to make respondents engage with the treatment. For example we ask what it was about, whether they or someone they know participated, why they felt it was successful/ unsuccessful, or how empowered/ powerless they felt when they realized that the protest was successful/ unsuccessful. In addition, there is a control group.

In order to make it more likely that respondents recall a successful (unsuccessful) protest event, success / failure was defined very broadly. In the high efficacy treatment, we define success as including the increase of awareness, in the low efficacy treatment, we define failure as including a protest where not all demand were met.

The treatment is designed primarily for comparisons between the “high” and the “low” condition which is what we conjecture would affect perceptions of efficacy. High and low conditions differ only in one word, namely whether the respondent is asked to recall a *successful* vs. an *unsuccessful* protest. In contrast, comparisons between each treatment condition and the control can incorporate other effects, since each treatment condition asks a host of questions not present in the control

(ex. recall a protest, being asked to recall characteristics of such protest, etc.) and these questions may affect respondent in unforeseeable ways.

### 3.2.1 Balancing

The experimental randomization was programmed into the survey so that the different treatment groups should not differ significantly from each other. Table A.2 shows results from OLS regressions of demographic and pre-treatment attitudinal variables on the treatment groups showing that, indeed, all treatment groups are similar *ex ante*.

## 4 Results

In this section, we investigate the treatment effects on perceptions of efficacy, as well as on attribution and protest scope. We present treatment effects that compare high vs. low conditions as well as effects that compare each of these vs. the control.

Key concepts such as different forms of efficacy, power, blame attribution or system justification are measured using 5 point Likert scales composed of three to four items. We construct the scales taking the mean of the constituent items. Unless otherwise indicated the answer options range from disagree strongly to agree strongly.<sup>9</sup> The mean, minima and maxima of the main variables are displayed in Table A.1.

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

We first consider whether our treatments have succeeded in manipulating different measures of efficacy and power perceptions.

The survey includes a number of efficacy measures. The first focusses on protest efficacy and represents our manipulation check for the protest efficacy treatment. It includes items such as "Protests/Marches can make politicians respond to people like me" or "Protests/marches are mostly a waste of time". Besides our protest efficacy measure we also probe political and social efficacy to understand whether a successful manipulation of beliefs about protest efficacy would carry over to beliefs about efficacy in other realms. Political efficacy includes items such as "At election time, I can punish ward councilors who don't do their job" or "My community can put pressure on local politicians to do their job". Social efficacy measures beliefs about people's ability and willingness to stand up for a just society. Political and social efficacy measures are used to understand whether a successful manipulation of beliefs about protest efficacy would carry over to beliefs about efficacy in other realms.

A *power scale* measures the extent to which respondents feel that they are respected and heard in their personal relationships with others. Different from the concepts of efficacy discussed above, power is someone's perception of her capacity

---

<sup>9</sup>As is standard practice in social psychology, we treat the 5-point scales as continuous variables even if, strictly speaking we cannot be sure if the distance between answer options such as disagree strongly - disagree - neither agree nor disagree is the same.

to influence others, not politics or society as a whole. Our measure uses items from the power scale from social psychology as developed in Anderson, John and Keltner (2012) such as " In my relationships with others my ideas and opinions are often ignored" or "In my relationships with others I can get them to listen to what I say".

Table 4 shows the treatment effects on indices of protest, political and social efficacy. The top two panels compare the high vs. the low condition for the efficacy and the power treatment, respectively, while the bottom panel compares all treatments to the control.

Table 4 shows that the efficacy is successful in affecting all types of efficacy perceptions as well as power. Individuals asked to remember a *successful* protest (relative to those remembering an unsuccessful one), are more likely to believe generally that protests are effective, that politicians can be held accountable and that social groups can improve their situation. Moreover, they more likely to feel powerful in a personal sense. The size of the coefficients is substantial. The high efficacy treatment (relative to the low efficacy one), increases protest efficacy by almost 0.3 standard deviations, and increases political and social efficacy by between 0.1 and 0.15 standard deviations.

All the action comes from the high efficacy treatment. This can be seen in the bottom panel of the table: respondents in the low efficacy treatment are essentially indistinguishable from the control. This could be an indication that the “default” perception of this population is rather inefficacious and pessimistic so that perceiving protests as generally unsuccessful is the norm.<sup>10</sup>

Table 4: Treatment effects on manipulated perception: Power and efficacy

	1	2	3	4
<b>Efficacy, high vs. low</b>				
High efficacy	0.116 (0.066)*	0.284 (0.069)***	0.119 (0.07)*	0.143 (0.073)*
N	776	776	776	751
<b>All, vs. control</b>				
Low efficacy	0.042 (0.06)	-0.012 (0.064)	0.022 (0.064)	-0.044 (0.064)
High efficacy	0.161 (0.058)***	0.269 (0.06)***	0.136 (0.061)**	0.095 (0.065)
N	1498	1498	1498	1498
outcome	Power	Protest effic	Political effic	Social effic

<sup>10</sup>Notice that (Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke et al. 2015) also make the general argument that disadvantaged individuals often feel powerless. This could explain why we cannot further “decrease” such perceptions experimentally.

## 4.2 System justification and blame attribution scope

The mechanism we investigate suggests two different channels. A first one, where efficacy reduces the psychological need of individuals to justify the system more generally, makes them attribute blame for their social problems at a broader scope and increases protest scope; and a second channel where efficacy does not operate via system justification but directly affects individuals' appraisal of the origin of their problems and hence blame attribution and protest scope.

We seek to measure system justification by adapting an existing economic system justification scale (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004; Jost et al. 2003). Our version justifies economic inequality in South Africa, including items such as "If you are born poor in South Africa, it is really hard to make it to the top" or "The rich in South Africa deserve their high income".<sup>11</sup>

Blame attribution scope is measured in the way laid out in section two, by asking who respondents believe is mostly to blame for crime or service delivery problems with responses ranging from the people themselves to structural factors (poverty/inequality).

Table 5 shows the treatment effects on the system justification index as well as indices of attribution scope. For attribution scope, we distinguish its constituent components, political and social system blame attribution (i.e. whether individuals attribute their service and crime grievances to government unwillingness or to poverty/ inequality, respectively) as well as non-systemic attribution of blame, to people and to agencies. We focus only on the efficacy treatment, with the top panel again showing the comparison high vs. low and the bottom panel showing the comparisons of both with the control.

Table 5 shows that respondents in the high efficacy conditions are indeed more likely to attribute their grievances to system wide factors; i.e. of broader scope. Columns 3 to 6 show that these results apply to the two narrow and the two systemic attributions; i.e. efficacy is associated with *less* attribution to both people and agencies, and *more* attribution to both the political system and poverty/ inequality.

For system justification, however, the bottom panel of 5 shows that respondents in the high efficacy treatment do not show lower levels of system justification than the control group. The coefficient is negative but it is not statistically distinguishable from the control group. This implies that there is rather a direct effect of efficacy on attribution scope that does not include system justification, at least not as measured by our index. We return to this matter in the discussion section below.

## 4.3 Protest scope and Petition

We now consider the effect of the efficacy treatments on our outcomes of interest, protest scope, and the willingness to sign a petition supporting protests of different scope. Table 6 shows the results. These results turn out to be more complex than expected, although the message seems ultimately quite clear: a higher sense of

---

<sup>11</sup>Although there are well-developed scales of system justification and economic system justification these are not necessarily the one's applicable to South Africa. In fact, the system justification narrative of post-Apartheid South Africa is not very developed and in discussions with fieldworkers no clear-cut concept emerged.

Table 5: Treatment effects on system justification and attribution scope variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Efficacy, high vs. low</b>						
High efficacy	-0.102 (0.072)	0.124 (0.025)***	0.056 (0.026)**	0.068 (0.026)***	-0.047 (0.017)***	-0.077 (0.021)***
N	776	764	764	764	764	764
<b>All, vs. control</b>						
Low efficacy	0.081 (0.061)	0.01 (0.023)	0 (0.022)	0.009 (0.022)	0.025 (0.016)	-0.035 (0.02)*
High efficacy	-0.018 (0.066)	0.134 (0.021)***	0.057 (0.023)**	0.078 (0.024)***	-0.023 (0.014)	-0.112 (0.018)***
N	1478	1453	1453	1453	1453	1453
outcome	Sys just.	Attr. Sys	Attr. Political	Attr. Ineq.pov.	Attr. agencies	Attr.people

efficacy seems to indeed lead to more systemic protests, as hypothesized, although only by targeting the social system, and not the political system.

This conclusion is not apparent at first sight. The pattern in the top panel, where the high efficacy condition is compared to the low efficacy one, shows actually no effect of efficacy on protest scope. Columns 2 and 3, however, shows that this zero effect masks counteracting effects for social and political system targets, with positive effects when it comes to choosing protests targeting the *social* system, namely inequality, but negative effects on choosing protests targeting the political system, namely corruption. How severe of a problem is this negative result on political system protest for the mechanism we propose? We believe that this is not a substantial problem. The bottom panel, where both high and low conditions are compared to the control group shows that this negative result is driven by the low efficacy treatment which, as we saw above, had no impact on efficacy. In other words, the puzzling negative effect on political system protest, whatever its origin, appears to be unrelated to efficacy and thus has no bearing on our hypothesis. The high efficacy treatment, the one that did affect efficacy perceptions, delivers a strong and positive effect on social system protest and no effect on political system protest. Hence, we conclude that our evidence suggests that efficacy leads to more systemic protest, although only targeted towards the social system, and not towards the political system.

Table 6: Treatment effects on protest scope and petition

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Efficacy, high vs. low</b>						
High efficacy	0.02 (0.035)	-0.081 (0.033)**	0.101 (0.031)***	0.01 (0.037)	-0.083 (0.035)**	0.093 (0.033)***
N	772	772	772	711	711	711
<b>All, vs. control</b>						
Low efficacy	0.029 (0.031)	0.054 (0.03)*	-0.025 (0.026)	0.029 (0.032)	0.059 (0.031)*	-0.03 (0.027)
High efficacy	0.05 (0.031)	-0.028 (0.029)	0.078 (0.029)***	0.039 (0.032)	-0.024 (0.031)	0.063 (0.03)**
N	1465	1465	1465	1358	1358	1358
outcome	Protest system	Protest political	Protest ineq. pov	Petition system	Petition political	Petition ineq. pov

Columns 4 to 6 in the table show that these effects carry over to people's will-

ingness to sign a petition targeting either narrow scope complaints, or complaints targeting the political system or the social system. In fact, results for our petition outcomes are almost the same as those for expressed choice of protests, only with coefficients generally smaller in absolute value. This was to be expected given that a large majority of respondents chose to sign a petition. Still, it is reassuring that our results apply beyond a costless survey response outcomes to an outcome that involves respondents signing a petition that will be forwarded to Parliament.

## 5 Discussion

The efficacy treatment does affect several dimensions of perceived efficacy: perceptions that protests can have an impact on politicians, that politicians can be held accountable and that citizens have a chance to affect the society they live in. This, in turn translates into a broader and more systemic attribution of blame for commonly held grievances: respondents, after receiving the efficacy treatment and reporting feeling more efficacious do have more tendency to attribute blame for crime and service problems to government inaction and, even more strongly, to poverty and inequality. Moreover, when asked about different protests to address a local problem of health services, such respondents are also more likely to prefer a protest that targets the sharing of wealth, i.e. the social system, and this preference carries over to signing a petition that will be forwarded to Parliament. These results support the channel linking efficacy to blame attribution and protest scope proposed above.

The results are by no means obvious from a rational choice approach. Whereas a simple rational choice framework would imply that more efficacy ought to lead directly to a higher propensity to protest, such framework does not directly deliver predictions on the type of protest individuals ought to engage in. The results regarding blame attribution would be even more difficult to be rationalized. Whereas efficacy perceptions are related to rational beliefs about success of protests, it has no direct bearing on how respondents construe the origin of their social problems. It may be possible to construct a complex fully rational model that would account for such an effect, but it appears more sensible to attribute it to appraisal strategies that relate to psychological coping processes, as we do in this paper.

At the same time, our survey experiment delivers a puzzling result: the effects on protest scope seem to apply exclusively to the social system, and not the political system. Moreover, we could not find evidence for efficacy operating via system justification, as would be suggested by the social psychology literature. In addition, a general issue that requires discussion in any survey experiment which seeks to affect individual perceptions concerns the validity of the results: Are results really driven by efficacy? This section discusses these issues in some detail.

### 5.1 Different effects for political and social protest scope

The results for protest scope seem to apply particularly to the socio-economic structures (poverty/ inequality) but less so to the “political” system: efficacy increases protest about systemic social issues such as poverty and inequality, but not protest

about systemic political issues such as corruption. This was not the case for attribution where efficacy equally led to blaming the government (“The government does not take the problem seriously enough”) and poverty and inequality (e.g. “poverty and the gap between rich and poor” for crime).

One explanation for these differences in findings could be a design problem, namely that the “political” protest scope was possibly not well framed in the survey and was inconsistent with how we asked about political attribution. The attribution question involved the government as a political institutions whereas the suggested march was about corrupt politicians.<sup>12</sup> A problem could be that beliefs about widespread corruption are quite common in South Africa and the topic is very prominent in the media. Indeed, in another survey we conducted among a similar population in Cape Town, two thirds of the respondents thought that either many or all government officials are corrupt. Possibly, efficacy is not required for respondents to support protest against corruption. It could simply be a topic that is of concern to and enrages a majority of respondents. Moreover, considering our wording, the protest theme could also be interpreted as a more “narrow” protest target as it states that “the healthcare problem cannot be solved unless corrupt politicians are removed from office” which would lend itself to a “rotten apple” type of interpretation as well. In sum, we believe that this survey item was possibly not able to capture systemic political protest scope properly.

## 5.2 Validity issues

The experimental approach allows us to establish causal effect of our treatments. However, our mechanism concerns the role of efficacy perceptions. Attributing the causal effect to efficacy requires the assumption that the treatment has not brought about other changes in the individual relevant to our results besides affecting their efficacy perceptions. How sensible is this assumption?

Certainly, the treatments have been designed with this concern in mind, to minimize the chances that they affect individual dispositions besides efficacy. This is why the treatments were designed with a “high” vs. “low” condition differing only in one word: whether a *successful* or unsuccessful protest was to be remembered. The objective of this was precisely to induce a difference in efficacy as large as possible, but nothing else.

Still, asking individuals to recall successful vs. unsuccessful protest may induce different memories that may lead to different thoughts. While we cannot exhaustively partial out all these thoughts, what we can do is to verify two important types of information. First, we examine if respondents in the high vs. low condition had different recall rates, which would induce potentially problematic sample selection. Second, we examine if the characteristics of the protests recalled by respondents

---

<sup>12</sup>The full wording of the protest scope introduction is: “Imagine that some action is planned in your neighborhood about bad healthcare. In a meeting, people disagree what the protest/ march should target. Some say that the march should only focus on getting more doctors and nurses to reduce queues in your local clinic. Others say that the march should be about corruption because the healthcare problem cannot be solved unless corrupt politicians are removed from office. And still another group says that the healthcare problem cannot be solved unless South Africa’s wealth is shared fairly and people have the means to buy the healthcare that they want.”

in the high vs. low condition differ in systematic ways. Table 7 shows the results. Reassuringly, recall rates between the two conditions are identical so no problem of sample selection exists. Furthermore, some characteristics of the recalled protest are similar, such as whether the individual was present or knew someone in the protest in question. However, other characteristics differ substantially. Respondents asked to recall a successful protest are more likely to recall a larger one and one having occurred during Apartheid.

Table 7: Treatment effect (high vs. low) on characteristics of remembered protest

	1
Recall protest	0 (0.025)
Knew someone	0.009 (0.034)
When apartheid	0.133 (0.023)***
When last 10 years	-0.078 (0.032)**
When recently	-0.053 (0.035)
More 1000 people	0.119 (0.034)***
Topic services	-0.103 (0.03)***
Topic crime	-0.002 (0.026)
Topic work	-0.012 (0.024)

These differences could potentially have important implications for the validity of our results. In particular, larger protests and protests during Apartheid were more likely to be of broad scope. It is then plausible that respondents asked to recall a successful protest subsequently report more attribution and protest scope, not because of efficacy perceptions, but because of their mental association with larger and/or Apartheid-era protests.<sup>13</sup>

We can obtain insights into whether this is the case or not by restricting our sample only to individuals recalling recent protests or to individuals recalling small or large ones. If we find a similar pattern of results when focusing only on recent protests, it would follow that our results are not driven by those recalling Apartheid (or large) protests. Table 8 shows the results, focusing on key outcome variables,

<sup>13</sup>Strictly speaking, the coefficients of this regression are hard to interpret because type of protest is endogenous to the treatment (although this concern is not so acute when focusing on recent protests, shown in table 7 to be balanced between the high and low efficacy condition). Nevertheless, we believe that the exercise is useful because if results are similar across specifications this is likely to imply that our results are indeed not driven by these mental associations.

with all efficacy indices combines into an average denoted simple “efficacy index”. Column 1 reproduces the results from before with the whole sample and Columns 2 and 3 focus on recent protests and large (over 1000 people) protests, respectively. The table shows comparisons between the high efficacy and the low efficacy condition, because there is evidently no information on types of protest for the control group. The pattern of results is very similar across subsamples, mirroring the results in the overall sample. Some coefficients become statistically insignificant but this is due to higher standard errors coming from a lower sample size rather than lower coefficients. Actually, many of the coefficients appear even larger, suggesting that the treatment is more effective when prompting a recollection of recent and large protests.

Table 8: Treatment effects on key outcome variables for different subsamples

	1	2	3	4
Efficacy index	0.253 (0.072)***	0.376 (0.105)***	0.412 (0.132)***	0.336 (0.098)***
System justification	-0.102 (0.072)	-0.221 (0.113)*	-0.143 (0.131)	-0.188 (0.094)**
Attribution political	0.056 (0.026)**	0.077 (0.043)*	0.045 (0.044)	0.051 (0.033)
Attribution social	0.068 (0.026)***	0.04 (0.041)	0.076 (0.044)*	0.082 (0.034)**
Protest political	-0.081 (0.033)**	-0.118 (0.052)**	-0.051 (0.056)	-0.109 (0.043)**
Protest social	0.101 (0.031)***	0.111 (0.047)**	0.097 (0.055)*	0.158 (0.042)***
Subset	All	Recent protest	Large protest	Motivated
N	772	325	277	457

We had built an additional validity check into the survey. If results are driven by our intended treatment effect, then results should be stronger for people having engaged more intensely with the treatments which were thought/ recall experiments that required effort/ good will from the respondents. If, in contrast, the treatments generated unintended effects, such as rejection, and these are driving our results the opposite should be the case. In order to be able to address this, we asked fieldworkers to subjectively rate (on a scale from 1 to 5) how engaged respondents were with the treatment, as well as how bored they looked how distracted they were (possibly by the presence of other people or chores, etc.). Most respondents were reported to be engaged and attentive. We construct a variable that measures capturing the most motivated respondents, taking value 1 if respondents had the highest value in engagement, and lowest in boredom and distraction (59% of respondents are in this category, and we check that this group is balanced between the high and the low efficacy condition). Column 4 in Table 8 reports the treatment effects on the key

outcomes for this subsample. Again, the pattern of results is the same as in the overall sample and, indeed, almost all coefficients are higher than in the regression with the full sample. This suggests that results are driven by our treatments as intended.<sup>14</sup>

### 5.3 Channels

A possible alternative channel linking efficacy to protest scope could be “efficacy scope”. Efficacy scope refers beliefs about the potential effectiveness of broad vs. narrow protests, i.e. if only small targeted protests can work or that also broad systemic protests can work. As discussed above, efficacy could affect the cost-benefit calculus of individuals leading them to believe that they could successfully take on bigger causes. High efficacy may directly lead one to be more optimistic regarding the chances of broad systemic protests to succeed, and this may lead to higher attribution and protest scope. We had anticipated the possibility that our results are driven by this competing hypothesis and asked in the questionnaire about beliefs regarding efficacy scope. We code efficacy scope as minus one if individuals believe only small targeted protests can succeed, as zero if they believe no protests ever succeed, and plus one if they believe either that only broad protests can succeed or that success of a protest is unrelated to its scope (implying that both narrow and broad protests can succeed). Column 5 of table 9 shows the treatment effects on this variable, with coefficients being close to zero. There seems to be no effect of efficacy on efficacy scope, and therefore our results do not seem to operate via this channel.

We also do not find evidence that our results are driven by system justification as it is conceptualized in the social psychology literature. One reason may be that we do not measure system justification properly. System justification scales have been developed for the US, but the myths that justify the system in the US may not be the same as those in South Africa. For instance, the “rag to riches” myth is a powerful system justifying belief in the US, but may not be so in South Africa. It could be that we have not succeeded in accessing the ideas that capture system justification in South Africa. Our index of system justification has some “rag to riches” type of questions but also others, most notably, a direct question on whether the respondent agrees with the statement that “South Africa is a deeply unfair society”. To enquire into whether the lack of results is driven by some particular system justification questions, columns 1-4 of table 9 shows the treatment effects for each of the component of the system justification index (coded so that higher values imply more system justification). These are: if hard work brings success, if rich deserve their high income in South Africa, if it is very hard for the poor to make it to the top (reverse coded), and if South Africa is a deeply unfair society (reverse

---

<sup>14</sup>One interesting point to observe is that the coefficient for system justification is substantially larger in absolute value for all subsets compared to the full sample, from 50% to more than twice larger. It could then be that the puzzling results we observe regarding system justification are driven by measurement error and noise. It would be of great interest to explore the differences between the high efficacy and the control group in the subsamples of columns 2-4. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, this is not possible because the variables that define the subsamples are not present in the control group.

coded). The high and low efficacy conditions are compared to the control group. It appears that the high efficacy treatment does not generate a substantial decrease in system justification in any of these questions. Although we cannot rule out that none of our questions appropriately captured system justification in South Africa, the absence of an effect on system justification is not due to individual, inaccurate measures, of the concept.

Table 9: Treatment effects on system justification variables and efficacy scope

	1	2	3	4	5
Low efficacy	0.014 (0.068)	0.011 (0.073)	0.194 (0.082)**	0.002 (0.076)	0.076 (0.056)
High efficacy	-0.099 (0.074)	-0.05 (0.076)	0.073 (0.085)	0.006 (0.08)	0.062 (0.057)
outcome	Hard work	Rich deserve	Poor not hard top	SA fair society	Efficacy scope
N	1478	1478	1478	1478	1462

## 6 Concluding remarks

This paper has argued that understanding “protest scope” (whether protests target narrow or broad/ systemic topics) and individual preferences towards this scope can be relevant for making sense of protest dynamics and for understanding the political behavior of the poor, and, as a result, the stability of systems in spite of a high level of grievances. We conducted a survey in two South African townships that shows that different people attribute blame for their grievances differently, some to broad systemic factors and others to more precise factors.

The survey had an experimental component that tested the role of efficacy for protest scope preferences. Drawing on social psychology theories, we hypothesized that lack of efficacy can inhibit the articulation of grievances towards systemic targets. We provide evidence that individuals experimentally induced to feel more efficacious are indeed more likely to attribute their problems to systemic factors and to express preferences for more systemic protests. Such results do not only apply to survey responses, but also to a behavioral measure that consists of signing a petition.

These results suggest that efficacy perceptions may help explain why protests that start focusing on narrow targets sometimes become broader and systemic and sometimes do not: features in the environment or the way protests are handled by authorities can either increase or decrease the sense of efficacy of protesters and observers, thus leading to different protest dynamics. Further research could undertake case studies of protests to examine these hypotheses. Similarly, our results suggest that lack of efficacy may, not only discourage protests by the poor, but also contribute to redirecting protests when they happen away from systemic targets towards narrow topics thus consolidating their disadvantage.

## References

- Alesina, Alberto and Paola Giuliano. 2011. Preferences for Redistribution. In *Handbook of Social Economics*, ed. Ori Heffetz, Robert H Frank, Jess Benhabib, Alberto Bisin and Matthew Jackson. North Holland pp. 93–132.
- Anderson, Cameron, Oliver P John and Dacher Keltner. 2012. “The Personal Sense of Power.” *Journal of Personality* 80(2):313–344.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. “Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment.” *Annual review of sociology* 26(1):611–639.
- Chenoweth, Erica and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict*. Columbia University Press.
- De Juan, Alexander and Eva Wegner. 2017. “Social Inequality, State-Centered Grievances, and Protest – Evidence from South Africa.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* .
- Eisinger, Peter K. 1973. “The conditions of protest behavior in American cities.” *American political science review* 67(01):11–28.
- Finkel, Steven E., Edward N. Muller and Karl-Dieter Opp. 1989. “Personal influence, collective rationality, and mass political action.” *American Political Science Review* 83(03):885–903.
- Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking politics*. Cambridge university press.
- Johnson, India R and Kentaro Fujita. 2012. “Change We Can Believe In Using Perceptions of Changeability to Promote System-Change Motives Over System-Justification Motives in Information Search.” *Psychological Science* 23(2):133–140.
- Jost, John T, Brett W Pelham, Oliver Sheldon and Bilian Ni Sullivan. 2003. “Social inequality and the reduction of ideological dissonance on behalf of the system: Evidence of enhanced system justification among the disadvantaged.” *European journal of social psychology* 33(1):13–36.
- Jost, John T, Mahzarin R Banaji and Brian A Nosek. 2004. “A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo.” *Political psychology* pp. 881–919.
- Klandermans, Bert and Dirk Oegema. 1987. “Potentials, networks, motivations, and barriers: Steps towards participation in social movements.” *American sociological review* pp. 519–531.
- Klandermans, Bert and Jacquelin Van Stekelenburg. 2013. “Social movements and the dynamics of collective action.”
- Lazarus, Richard S and Susan Folkman. 1984. *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company.

- McCall, Leslie. 2013. *The undeserving rich: American beliefs about inequality, opportunity, and redistribution*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and political opportunities." *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 30:125–145.
- Norris, Pippa, Stefaan Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst. 2005. "Who demonstrates? Antistate rebels, conventional participants, or everyone?" *Comparative politics* pp. 189–205.
- Shaykhutdinov, Renat. 2010. "Give peace a chance: Nonviolent protest and the creation of territorial autonomy arrangements." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2):179–191.
- Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford Jr, Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation." *American sociological review* pp. 464–481.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2005. *Why societies need dissent*. Harvard University Press.
- Van Der Toorn, Jojanneke, Matthew Feinberg, John T Jost, Aaron C Kay, Tom R Tyler, Robb Willer and Caroline Wilmuth. 2015. "A sense of powerlessness fosters system justification: Implications for the legitimation of authority, hierarchy, and government." *Political Psychology* 36(1):93–110.
- Van Dyke, Nella, Sarah A Soule and Verta A Taylor. 2004. The targets of social movements: Beyond a focus on the state. In *Authority in contention*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited pp. 27–51.
- Van Stekelenburg, Jacquélien and Bert Klandermans. 2013. "The social psychology of protest." *Current Sociology* p. 0011392113479314.
- van Zomeren, Martijn, Colin Wayne Leach and Russell Spears. 2012. "Protesters as passionate economists a dynamic dual pathway model of approach coping with collective disadvantage." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16(2):180–199.
- Van Zomeren, Martijn, Tom Postmes and Russell Spears. 2008. "Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: a quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives." *Psychological bulletin* 134(4):504.

## A Appendix Tables

Table A.1: Distribution of responses to attribution and protest scope questions

Means	All	Min	Max
<b>Pretreatment</b>			
female	0.61	0.00	1.00
matric	0.34	0.00	1.00
age	42.12	18.00	96.00
grievance average	3.23	0.00	4.00
would not leave	2.08	0.00	3.00
group identity scope	2.22	0.00	3.00
<b>Protest efficacy</b>			
Protests make politicians listen	2.34	0.00	4.00
Protests waste of time	1.81	0.00	4.00
Protests make politicians respond	2.34	0.00	4.00
Protest efficacy index	-0.06	-2.37	1.66
<b>Political efficacy</b>			
Can punish politicians	2.40	0.00	4.00
dishonest politicians can be shamed	2.86	0.00	4.00
community can pressure politicians	2.93	0.00	4.00
Political efficacy index	-0.06	-3.54	1.46
<b>Social efficacy</b>			
Fair society achievable	3.19	0.00	4.00
Community could stand up for fair society	0.27	-1.00	1.00
Inequality inevitable	0.38	0.00	1.00
Social efficacy index	0.00	-3.03	1.58
<b>Power</b>			
people listen to me	3.13	0.00	4.00
my opinions are ignored	1.50	0.00	4.00
my wishes not valued	1.66	0.00	4.00
Power index	-0.07	-3.33	1.57
<b>System Justification</b>			
Hard work brings success	2.82	0.00	4.00
Rich deserve high incomes	1.88	0.00	4.00
Poor hard to reach top	2.18	0.00	4.00
SA unfair society	2.28	0.00	4.00
System justification index	-0.04	-2.84	2.55
<b>Attribution Services</b>			
people	0.29	0.00	1.00
agency	0.11	0.00	1.00
politicians	0.30	0.00	1.00
poverty	0.30	0.00	1.00
<b>Attribution Crime</b>			
people	0.22	0.00	1.00
police	0.14	0.00	1.00

politicians	0.31	0.00	1.00
poverty/ ineq	0.33	0.00	1.00
<hr/>			
<b>Protest Choice</b>			
more doctors	0.46	0.00	1.00
corruption	0.30	0.00	1.00
redistribution	0.24	0.00	1.00
<hr/>			
<b>Petition</b>			
	0.93	0.00	1.00
<hr/>			

Table A.2: Treatment effects on manipulated perception: Power and efficacy

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Efficacy, high vs. low</b>						
High efficacy	0.017 (0.035)	-0.011 (0.034)	0.281 (1.183)	0.034 (0.039)	-0.133 (0.088)	0.057 (0.066)
N	779	779	776	779	772	776
<b>Power, high vs. low</b>						
High power	0.01 (0.037)	0.023 (0.035)	2.042 (1.203)*	-0.059 (0.042)	0.14 (0.096)	-0.047 (0.068)
N	721	721	720	721	716	716
<b>All, vs. control</b>						
Low efficacy	-0.027 (0.031)	0.018 (0.03)	2.24 (1.029)**	0.004 (0.034)	0.128 (0.077)*	-0.042 (0.058)
High efficacy	-0.01 (0.031)	0.006 (0.03)	2.521 (1.038)**	0.038 (0.035)	-0.004 (0.08)	0.015 (0.059)
Low power	-0.031 (0.033)	-0.036 (0.031)	-0.011 (1.055)	0.036 (0.037)	-0.155 (0.087)*	0.042 (0.061)
High power	-0.022 (0.031)	-0.013 (0.03)	2.03 (1.036)*	-0.023 (0.036)	-0.015 (0.08)	-0.005 (0.059)
N	2203	2203	2198	2203	2187	2195
outcome	female	matric	age	grievance	not leave	group ID

## B Results power treatment

Table B.1

	1	2	3	4
Efficacy index	-0.01 (0.074)	-0.029 (0.091)	-0.032 (0.119)	0.067 (0.064)
Power index	-0.014 (0.068)	0.039 (0.086)	0.158 (0.104)	0.123 (0.061)**
System justification	0.039 (0.07)	0.014 (0.09)	0.002 (0.108)	0.108 (0.062)*
Attribution political	0.025 (0.026)	0.023 (0.033)	0.034 (0.042)	0.034 (0.022)
Attribution social	0.002 (0.027)	0.02 (0.034)	-0.009 (0.045)	0.051 (0.022)**
Protest political	-0.016 (0.035)	-0.056 (0.044)	-0.036 (0.056)	-0.002 (0.029)
Protest social	0.071 (0.032)**	0.133 (0.04)***	0.07 (0.049)	0.03 (0.028)
Subset	All	Very Motivated	Frequ. Power Exp	High vs. control
N	709	440	308	1071

Table B.2: Treatment effects of power treatment on main outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Power, high vs. low</b>							
High Power	-0.01 (0.074)	-0.014 (0.068)	0.039 (0.07)	-0.023 (0.028)	0.004 (0.027)	-0.016 (0.035)	0.071 (0.032)**
N	700	720	720	700	700	709	709
<b>All, vs. control</b>							
Low power	0.094 (0.066)	0.146 (0.06)**	0.087 (0.064)	0.04 (0.024)*	0.012 (0.023)	0.015 (0.031)	-0.043 (0.027)
High power	0.073 (0.064)	0.128 (0.061)**	0.113 (0.062)*	0.018 (0.023)	0.014 (0.023)	0 (0.029)	0.028 (0.028)
N	1388	1422	1422	1389	1389	1402	1402
outcome	Efficacy	Power index	Sys just	Attri political	Attri social	Protest pol	Protest soc