Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9179
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9179

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

After the Storm: Comparing the Determinants of Young People's Protest Behaviour Across South European Contexts

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Submitted: 12 August 2024 **Accepted:** 8 October 2024 **Published:** 5 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Unequal Participation Among Youth and Immigrants: Analyzing Political Attitudes and Behavior in Societal Subgroups" edited by Arndt Leininger (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Sabrina Mayer (University of Bamberg), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i426

Abstract

Young people's mass mobilisation has been key for restructuring political competition in Southern Europe in the last decade. From a comparative standpoint, this article examines the drivers of protest in Greece, Italy, and Spain. The main results point towards a strong heterogeneity among the three cases: while women and people with left-libertarian attitudes form the basis of youth-driven contemporary street protest in Spain, these findings are partially confirmed for Italy and ruled out for Greece. We argue that protest legacies and trajectories need to go together with politicisation and issue salience to get individual-level correlates of protest activated—however, our mixed empirical evidence suggests that some context-specific conditions intervene in this relationship. Our results point towards a strong heterogeneity in the profile of protesters, inviting us to question the use of Southern Europe as a valid unit of analysis for the study of contemporary social movements and protests.

Keywords

deprivation; gender; left-right ideology; social movements; Southern Europe; youth politics

1. Introduction

Southern Europe was a hotspot for popular dissent as protesters contended with the austerity measures that governments advanced in response to the 2008 Great Recession. In these protests, young actors played a key role. While academic interest in generational aspects in Southern Europe is gaining momentum (e.g., García-Albacete & Lorente, 2021; Tsatsanis et al., 2021), there is little empirical and comparative evidence on the determinants of protest behaviour across young people in the region—with some

exceptions, e.g., Lima and Artiles (2013). Which factors lead young people to protest? Are these factors constant across different countries in contemporary (pre-Covid) Southern Europe? These questions are relevant because, beyond the depths of the Great Recession, young people continue to play a central role in organising dissent through contemporary mobilisations, such as initiatives in solidarity with migrants and refugees, feminist marches, struggles for women's rights, and climate justice initiatives testify (della Porta, 2019; Sloam et al., 2022).

Specifically, this article focuses on grievances, gender, and left–right ideological orientation as micro-drivers of protest among young Greeks, Italians, and Spaniards. From a comparative standpoint, we come to three key findings: (a) while young Greek women did not protest more than men, women are clearly overrepresented among Spanish young protesters; (b) in contrast, socio-economic grievances do not account for young people's protest participation in any of the three countries; and crucially, (c) while protest is primarily a cultural left-libertarian affair in Italy, young left-wing people (both in cultural and socio-economic terms) are more likely to protest in Spain—political values and issue position do not emerge as relevant predictors of young Greeks' protest behaviour. The empirical analyses draw on original survey data with booster samples for young people conducted in the framework of the EURYKA collaborative research project, which includes representative samples of young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens aged between 18 and 34 years (N = 6,801; see https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home).

This piece of research adds value in two ways: First, it sheds light on the contextual conditions under which correlates of young people's protests get activated (or not). The political context in which protest occurs is socially constructed, subject to different interpretations, producing changes in the citizens' motivations to protest (Gómez-Román & Sabucedo, 2014). We argue that protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, and politicisation processes and issue salience, on the other hand, need to be coupled together for protest to ensue. Second, not only patterns and trajectories of protest have differed dramatically in Southern Europe over the last decade (della Porta et al., 2016; Kriesi et al., 2020a) but also the profile of young protesters changes dramatically from country to country, as shown throughout. The picture that emerges invites us to question the use of the region as a valid unit of analysis for the study of contemporary street protests.

2. Austerity, Feminism, and Migration: A Decade of Contention in Southern Europe

The 2007–2009 global financial meltdown was met with a set of austerity policies that several national governments and international institutions implemented. Specifically, Greece, Italy, and Spain share "significant features in their labour market policy and wage-setting institutions and were subject to comparably strong exogenous pressures for structural reforms, internal devaluation and growth model reorientation in the Great Recession context" (Bulfone & Tassinari, 2021, p. 515). In the shadow of austerity, standards of inequality increased, and life conditions worsened for many sectors of the population (Blyth, 2013). According to Eurostat (2020), people at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased dramatically between 2006 and 2014 among Greeks (29.3% in 2006 to 36% in 2014), Italians (24% in 2006 to 29.2% in 2014), and Spaniards (25.9% in 2006 to 28.3% in 2014).

The *indignados* ("outraged") campaign that started in May 2011 gave rise to Spain's largest mobilisation not organised by unions or political parties in the country's recent democratic history and formed part of a broader cycle of anti-austerity protests (Carvalho, 2022; Portos, 2021; Romanos & Sádaba, 2022).

Meanwhile, data from Greek police records reveal that over 20,200 protest events were staged between May 2010 and March 2014 (Diani & Kousis, 2014). In sharp contrast to Spain and Greece, Italian anti-austerity protests consisted of weak, fragmented, scattered events, with traditional trade unions playing a prominent role, challengers being unable to forge broad coalitions among social and political milieus, and no campaign comparable to the Spanish *15M/indignados* or the Greek *aganaktismenoi* (Andretta, 2018). Also, direct social actions and alternative solidarity-based organisations proliferated in Southern Europe in 2011–2015, such as barter networks, soup kitchens, cooperatives, food banks, consumer/producer networks, social economy enterprises, and free legal advice (Kalogeraki, 2018; Loukakis, 2018). Since 2014/2015, the processes of institutionalisation have come into play in the three countries, with the challengers progressively abandoning confrontational and non-institutional repertoires and resorting to more routinised formal channels of political influence. Parties that were linked to anti-austerity, anti-political status quo, and street protests (such as Syriza, Movimento 5 Stelle, and Podemos) gained momentum (della Porta et al., 2017; Mosca & Quaranta, 2017).

Besides austerity and inequality, other fronts of contention were feminist as well as migration and refugee solidarity, especially after 2015. On the one hand, authoritarian legacies and familial social protection mean that Southern European cases are often lumped as belonging to the conservative gender regimes, entrenching unequal gender relations, and restricting women's access to the public sphere—though they are increasingly transforming into political economies of generalised insecurity (Alonso et al., 2023). Italian feminist milieus gained momentum after the emergence of the Non Una Di Meno ("Not One [Woman] Less") trans-feminist meta-organisation in 2016, in which young women were clearly overrepresented (Chironi, 2019). With hundreds of thousands participating in events like the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in November (2016–2018), the movement expanded at the local level through permanent monthly assemblies. Similarly, *El País* stated in March 2018:

> This year it was overwhelming, with hundreds of protests taking place across the country, a general 24-hour strike, partial walkouts by five million workers, and massive demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Its success placed Spain at the cusp of a global movement. (Portos, 2019, p. 1463; see Campillo, 2019)

While the Greek situation was different, with no explicitly articulated feminist values and principles, social movements of the crisis promoted modes of feminist solidarity in their shift from claim-based street repertoires to locally embedded solidarity initiatives, which addressed social needs, e.g., food, shelter, health, and education (Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021).

On the other hand, Greece, Italy, and Spain are part of the "soft underbelly" of the EU. These countries experienced a transition in the 1990s from migrant-sending to migrant-hosting countries, welcoming African and Asian migrants with no special historical, geopolitical, or cultural ties. Solidarity campaigns with refugees flourished following the "long summer of migration" in 2015, when more than 60 million people worldwide were forced to abandon their homes, from places of first arrival to places of passage, and, subsequently, to places of destination (della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). For instance, Greece saw one million people passing through the country between 2015 and 2016. The small island of Lesvos, with a population of roughly 86,000 people, witnessed 504,000 people arrive on its shores in 2015 alone (Oikonomakis, 2018). Yet, Greek society reacted largely in solidarity towards refugees and up to 58% showed sympathy towards

moving populations. Organisations focused on meeting the pressing needs of incoming flows of people, combining solidarity initiatives with raising public awareness and advocacy as the "refugee crisis" unfolded (Oikonomakis, 2018). In Italy, a major march targeted the draft law on security policy prepared by the Minister of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini in November 2018. The event gained prominence due to the presence of Domenico "Mimmo" Lucano, the Mayor of Riace, Calabria, for 15 years, who was known for his migrant-hosting and integration plans (Wallis, 2019). The rally became a major opportunity in which to publicly contest racism, anti-migration policies, and the criminalisation of minorities in Italy ("Roma, migliaia in piazza," 2018). In contrast with the Greek and Italian cases, Spain did not experience a massive inflow of refugees during the so-called "refugee crisis"—only 1% of asylum-seekers who filed an application in Europe during 2015 did it in Spain (Galarraga Cortázar, 2017). While direct solidarity actions were less frequent, a strong movement in solidarity with refugees emerged in the country, which involved initiatives at the local institutional level (e.g., the town halls of Barcelona and Madrid launched the "Cities of Welcome" and "safe cities" networks; see Bazurli, 2019) as well as street protests ("Barcelona protest to support," 2017; Piquer, 2015).

All in all, Greece, Italy, and Spain present a great fit for comparison. Following the logic of "most similar systems design," this study covers three countries with similarities in terms of labour market, welfare, gender, and migration policy frameworks, but also increased internal devaluation and levels of inequality in the aftermath of the Great Recession—these aspects particularly affecting younger cohorts. These shared characteristics among South European countries add on many others that social scientists have discussed in depth for decades, including sociodemographic features (e.g., late home leaving; all EU functional urban areas with four/five million inhabitants are in Southern Europe), dominant values about private life (the central role of the family and forms of primary solidarity), how laws are produced or welfare systems work (following a transfer model based on occupational status, with major institutional fragmentation, and national health systems aiming at universal coverage; see Ferrera, 1996; Martin, 1996).

Yet, when it comes to the dependent variable (i.e., youth-driven protest), we observe a great deal of variation. While Greece and Spain saw widely attended waves of protest at times of austerity (2009–2013), protests in Italy were smaller, loosely coordinated, and scattered across time and space. From 2014 onward, Italy and especially Spain saw large numbers of street protests (della Porta et al., 2016; Portos, 2021), with Greece becoming the shadow case. In this period, feminism and migrant/racism issues became more contentious and, together with economic issues, became central to protests. While there is scant available empirical evidence, protest event data from Kriesi et al. (2020b) already signalled a similar pattern for the 2013–2015 period (feminist and women's protest events are coded as "culturally liberal" or "other"; protests around migration can fall under the categories "culturally liberal," "other," or "xenophobic"). What we do not know is if, and to what extent, issues that structured political conflict and contestation over the last decade have translated into different patterns of individual-level protest participation for young people across the three Southern European countries.

3. Accounting for Young People's Protest Participation: Gender, Grievances, and Ideological Orientation

Young people deserve special attention as they have shown distinctive features in terms of political values, attitudes, and mobilisation (Grasso & Giugni, 2022). As della Porta (2019, p. 1408) notes, contemporary

youth suffers from "high levels of unemployment, precarisation, decrease in credit access, cuts in social services, changes in consumption patterns, and a grim outlook for their future…[however, they] are not in general apathetic, disengaged, antipolitical, or removed from political participation." Rather, a large part of contemporary youth has joined contentious politics, coming up with creative ideas for a more just and inclusive society (della Porta, 2019; Earl et al., 2017), a trend that is highly salient in Southern Europe. But what are the individual-level drivers of young people's protest behaviour?

First, women have higher barriers to political participation and they are supposedly less informed, less knowledgeable about politics, less socialised, and not as engaged in politics as men (McAdam, 1992; Schlozman et al., 1994). While the gender gap holds for traditional and conventional repertoires of action (Burns et al., 2001; Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010), evidence shows that (especially young) women prefer small-scale organisation and informal groups and are more prone towards less traditional, less conventional, and less visible forms of action and organisation (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). High levels of gendered economic and political discrimination, strong presence of women's organisations, and higher female population rates in the general population significantly increase women's nonviolent protests (Murdie & Peksen, 2015), with women being more likely than men to engage in a wide array of peaceful protest activities in egalitarian contexts (Dodson, 2015). In sum, in advanced democracies, men and women tend to have similar levels of protest activity, but (especially young) women engage more than men in nonconfrontational activities.

Gender regimes are key to account for cross-national differences in demonstration participation (Roth & Saunders, 2019). Austerity politics, which included deregulatory employment policies, budget cuts in gender equality policies, and restructuring of equality policies, changed Southern European gender regimes in more neoliberal and conservative directions (della Porta et al., 2022; Roth & Saunders, 2020). Not only austerity policies were met with citizens' contestation, but also feminist struggles unfolded. Indeed, young women's resistance towards anti-gender and anti-feminist campaigns might be associated with the insignificant gender gap in demonstrative-confrontational activities (Chironi, 2019). In recent times, gender has been a highly politicised issue in Italy and Spain, forging arenas for political socialisation of new cohorts of activists and the strong feminist movements being able to display high mobilisation capacity (Campillo, 2019; Chironi, 2019; Portos, 2019). In contrast, the Greek feminist movement remains weak and fragmented, with women's demands being mediated through other social representations (Gaitanou, 2017; Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021), and women mostly engaging in small-scale less confrontational events (Kosyfologou, 2018). Importantly, low levels of street protesting among Greek feminist milieus went together with the low salience of the gender issue in the public debate, notwithstanding the very acute and lasting social impact of austerity measures—as public spending cuts and unemployment disproportionately impacted women's lives (Federici, 2012; Kosyfologou, 2018; "When the belt can't get any tighter," 2018). Accordingly, we should expect that:

> H1: Young females will be more likely to participate in protests than young men in Spain and Italy, but not in Greece.

Grievances and the feelings associated with them are troublesome matters or conditions (Snow et al., 1998). While economic strain tended to be regarded as a constant among the disadvantaged, increasing hardship during the Great Recession, inequality and discontent towards the political status quo led to a renewed interest in the sources of inequalities and their link to protest behaviour (e.g., della Porta, 2015; Grasso &

Giugni, 2016; Kern et al., 2015; Kurer et al., 2019). From a comparative vantage point, young and highly educated people with limited career perspectives on the labour market are overrepresented in anti-austerity protests (della Porta, 2015). With large *N* survey data, Kern et al. (2015) find support for a positive relationship between access to material resources and the level of political activity until 2008; but the direction of this association reverted from 2008 to 2010, with rises in unemployment leading to an increase in the level of non-institutionalised political participation. In their analysis of nine European countries—among them, Greece, Italy, and Spain—Grasso and Giugni (2016) argue that the impact of individual-level relative deprivation on protest is conditional upon opening macro-level political opportunities. Importantly, Kurer et al. (2019) introduce an important distinction between the level of grievances (i.e., structural economic disadvantage) and a change in grievances (i.e., the deterioration of economic prospects). While the latter increases political activity, the former unambiguously de-mobilises individuals. Moreover, the level of political mobilisation moderates this direct link between individual hardship and political activity: the presence of visible organised protest acts as a "signal" for political opportunities, hence, in a strongly mobilised environment, even structural economic disadvantage does not deter political participation (Kurer et al., 2019; see della Porta et al., 2022).

Focusing on Southern Europe, Rüdig and Karyotis (2014) find that relative deprivation is a relevant predictor of potential protest in Greece, but it does not predict who takes part in demonstrations or strikes. However, other pieces of evidence illustrate how anti-austerity protests were largely part of an integrated campaign and how "the roots of the campaign lay in the massive and sudden depletion of economic and social rights and well-being that Greek working—and middle-class citizens have suffered as a consequence of 'readjustment' policies" (Diani & Kousis, 2014, p. 401). While the most deprived sectors among Spanish youth do not protest more, some specific subgroups that were losers in relative terms during the recession, e.g., those who had a mortgage and depended on the income of a public employee or civil servant, were found to be more likely to join contentious activities (Portos, 2021). Also in Spain, both financial deprivation and grievances relating to the status and rights of workers/citizens were found to encourage mobilisation: crisis-related grievances triggered negative emotions and both anger and anxiety boosted individual protest likelihood (Galais & Lorenzini, 2017). However, the main socio-economic indicators that worsened dramatically in Italy between 2009 and 2014 (e.g., gross debt, unemployment rate, youth unemployment, and severe material deprivation) seem to have had a demobilising effect among the traditional constituency of progressive social movements, limiting (young) Italians' capacity to stage a coordinated response in the form of sustained mass mobilisations (Andretta, 2018, p. 101). While macroeconomics (monetary policy, inflation, and debt), economic activities (finance and banking), and labour and employment conditions kept being salient and highly politicised issues in public discourse during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession for our three countries (Zamponi & Bosi, 2016, p. 413), different trajectories of mobilisation of austerity anxieties—and the movements' capacity to politicise younger cohorts of activists around deprivation—lead to asymmetric cross-country expectations. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

> H2: Direct experiences of material deprivation will increase the likelihood of protest participation among young Greek and Spanish citizens, but not among Italians.

While the thesis of the "normalisation" of protest suggests that political protest has become an integral part of contemporary life and is being adopted by ever more diverse constituencies (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998), contemporary street protest is still a foremost prerogative of the left: people with a progressive ideological

orientation are more mobilised in protest activities (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Torcal et al., 2016). Indeed, protesting is more common among culturally liberal individuals in the ideological camp that opposed the pre-democratic political order (Kostelka & Rovny, 2019). In the Southern Europe context, protest and unconventional politics have also been the main arenas for the left to express itself politically (Borbáth & Gessler, 2020, pp. 913–914). This may have to do with underlying values: Those with right-wing views subscribe to authoritarian values and favour orderly political action; left-leaning citizens share libertarian values and, hence, prefer unconventional and protest activities (Hutter & Kriesi, 2013, p. 293). As far as the emergence of new cleavages is concerned, the integration-demarcation argument sees conflict over cultural liberalism as one of the foundational elements that structures political competition in the age of globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2020a): While the empirical evidence points towards an increasing homogenisation of the structural basis of leftist movements, sociocultural specialists with libertarian and postmaterialist values remain the main protagonists of protests (Hutter & Kriesi, 2013). Considering specific issue positions, many of the South European challengers in 2017–2018 belonged to a generation that suffered from precarious job conditions, economic hardship, and dashed expectations, which in turn acted as key elements in their collective identification (Zamponi, 2019). While these "natives of the ruins" have been characterised as individualists, lacking the motivation to engage in collective action, their shared identity is framed and large by the precarious socio-economic context they have been struggling with (della Porta et al., 2022; Zamponi, 2019).

However, globalisation is also associated with decreasing national steering capacity over economic and social policy-making and the increased salience of cultural-immigration issues. Although "political mobilization around issues of immigration and ethnic relations…constitute since the early 1990s the most prominent and controversial fields of political contention in West European polities" (Koopmans et al., 2005, p. 3), they have been successfully mobilised by the populist radical right in the electoral arena. Instead, in a context of migratory crisis and high politicisation of the issue, street protests and solidarity initiatives with migrants and refugees are expected to encompass large sectors of the population, especially grassroots youth organizing groups (Terriquez & Milkman, 2021). In sum, young challengers will disproportionately hold left-libertarian values and progressive attitudes around highly politicised—and widely contentious—issues over the last decade in the South European region, such as socio-economic redistribution and migration (see Table 1). Specifically, we should expect that:

> H3: Holding authoritarian—as opposed to libertarian—values will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.
>
> H4: An opposition to socio-economic redistributive and egalitarian issues will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.
>
> H5: Negative attitudes towards migrants will decrease protest participation among young Greek, Italian, and Spanish citizens.

Table 1. Summary of the hypothesised direction of effects on protest participation for young people by Southern European country.

	Greece	Italy	Spain
H1: Sex (female)	o	+	+
H2: Deprivation	+	o	+
H3: Libertarian–authoritarian values	–	–	–
H4: Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	–	–	–
H5: Xenophobic attitudes	–	–	–

Notes: positive (+), negative (–), or null (o).

4. Data and Research Design

The EURYKA survey was fielded between 15 April and December 2018, covering Greece, Italy, and Spain. This database has a rare, unique structure, which makes it particularly fitting for this article. While the dataset is made up of at least 1,000 general population cases per country, it includes two booster samples of young people for each country. These consist of an oversample of 18–24-year-old people with at least 1,000 respondents per country, plus another subset of people aged 25–34 years (also with a minimum of 1,000 further cases for every country). As this research zooms in onto young people (defined as those aged between 18 and 34 years old), our representative sample of Internet users consists of 6,801 young individuals for the three countries (N_{GR} = 2,283; N_{IT} = 2,264; N_{ES} = 2,254). A specialised polling agency collected the data *ad hoc* through administered online panels using balanced country quotas in terms of sex, age, region, and education level to match national population statistics (for detailed sampling procedures, see EURYKA, 2018). To the best of my knowledge, there is no other available and reliable contemporary cross-sectional survey dataset that simultaneously (a) has a larger representative pool of young respondents than this; (b) covers the three countries under scrutiny (e.g., Greece is not covered in the European Social Survey between 2011–2019); and (c) includes information on protest participation and its correlates.

The dependent variable is a binary measurement of protest participation. Young respondents have participated in a protest if they have "attended [a] demonstration, march, or rally" in the last 12 months (see Supplementary File Appendix 2). Protest has distinct features as compared with other types of political action, being still nowadays the "modal" expression of social movement activism (Grasso & Giugni, 2016). While 15% of young Greek respondents and 12% of young Italians declared that they had joined a demonstration in the previous year, 29% of Spanish interviewees engaged in street protest.

Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics of the predictors included in the main models—a correlation matrix is included in Table A1 in the Supplementary File. To measure sex, we use the question "What sex were you assigned at birth, on your birth certificate?" (0 = male; 1 = female). Grievances and the experience of economic strain are captured through resource deprivation that entails the disruption of quotidian everyday routines (Snow et al., 1998)—we include a binary indicator measuring whether the respondent acknowledges that they have "experienced real financial difficulties (e.g., could not afford food, rent, or electricity) in the past 12 months" or not. The left–right ideological self-placement scale is not a good indicator to assess protest participation from a comparative standpoint (Kostelka & Rovny, 2019). Instead, we measure libertarian–authoritarian values, socio-economic, and cultural-migration preferences. An index measures libertarian–authoritarian values that take the arithmetic average of the agreement with the

following three statements (5-point Likert scales: ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*): "A woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled"; "Abortion should not be allowed in any case"; "Homosexual couples should not be allowed to adopt children under any circumstances" ($Mean_{GR}$ = 2.59; SD_{GR} = 1.00; $Mean_{IT}$ = 2.25; SD_{IT} = 0.94; $Mean_{ES}$ = 1.65; SD_{ES} = 0.82). While opposition to redistribution is measured via agreement with the statement: "Government should decrease taxes a lot and spend much less on social benefits and services" (5-point Likert scale: 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), an 11-point scale measures xenophobic attitudes through the statement: "[...country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?"(with 0 = *enriched* and 10 = *undermined*).

Building on research that analyses the determinants of (young people's) protest behaviour, we also include control variables that measure *individual-level resources*; *political attitudes*; and *network exposure* (see Table 2; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Vráblíková, 2014).

First, we know that enhanced resources are linked to increased prospects for citizens' engagement in political action. As well as sex, certain socio-demographic features and personal conditions, such as age, education, and rural–urban domicile facilitate protest participation (Schussman & Soule, 2005). We measure the young respondent's age through a continuous indicator and use a 3-point interval-level variable that captures the highest level of education attained by them (primary, secondary, or tertiary education). In addition, a 5-point ordinal indicator provides a subjective description of how rural or urban the domicile of the respondent is, ranging from "a farm or home in the countryside" to "a big city" (see Supplementary File Appendix 2).

Second, besides political values and issue preferences, other political attitudes can predict protest activity (Beissinger, 2013). Using information on trust in 12 political institutions measured through 0–10 scales, we

Table 2. Summary statistics of variables included in the statistical analyses by country.

			Greece			Italy			Spain		
	Min.	*Max.*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*
Protest	0	1	0.15	0.35	2,283	0.12	0.32	2264	0.29	0.45	2,254
Sex (female)	0	1	0.52	0.50	2,283	0.49	0.50	2264	0.48	0.50	2,254
Deprivation	0	1	0.53	0.50	2,283	0.29	0.45	2264	0.34	0.47	2,254
Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	1	5	3.11	1.11	2,283	3.08	1.14	2264	2.72	1.19	2,254
Xenophobic attitudes	0	10	5.38	2.85	2,283	4.75	2.71	2264	3.88	2.77	2,254
Libertarian–authoritarian scale	1	5	2.59	1.00	2,283	2.25	0.94	2264	1.65	0.82	2,254
Age	18	34	25.72	5.09	2,283	25.39	4.95	2264	25.50	5.01	2,254
Education	1	3	2.19	0.65	2,283	1.89	0.65	2264	2.00	0.86	2,254
Rural–urban	1	5	4.17	1.05	2,283	3.22	1.19	2264	3.81	1.06	2,254
Political trust	0	3.14	0.85	0.54	2,283	1.18	0.56	2264	1.16	0.59	2,254
Political interest	1	4	2.64	0.81	2,283	2.81	0.81	2264	2.82	0.84	2,254
Meeting friends	1	4	2.94	0.92	2,283	2.91	0.93	2264	2.71	0.91	2,254

ran a Principal Component Analysis and built a weighted summated index (Eigenvalue = 5.14, offering a one-component solution; see Supplementary File Appendix 2). This weighted index of political trust meets the minimum threshold of reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.90)—alternatively, we replace political trust with a 0–10 democratic satisfaction indicator (see Supplementary File Appendix 2; $Mean_{GR}$ = 3.51; SD_{GR} = 2.31; $Mean_{IT}$ = 4.23; SD_{IT} = 2.15; $Mean_{ES}$ = 4.16; SD_{ES} = 2.42). In addition, we account for the level of interest in politics, ranging from *not at all interested* (1) to *very interested* (4)—alternatively, we use internal political efficacy, which is measured through a 5-point Likert scale (see Supplementary File Appendix 2; $Mean_{GR}$ = 3.40; SD_{GR} = 0.98; $Mean_{IT}$ = 3.09; SD_{IT} = 1.07; $Mean_{ES}$ = 3.33; SD_{ES} = 1.07).

Third, network exposure and embeddedness are important predictors of protest participation (Beissinger, 2013; Schussman & Soule, 2005), especially among young college students (Munson, 2010). A 4-point ordinal variable captures how often during the past month the respondent has met socially with friends, ranging from *never* to *almost every day* (see Supplementary File Appendix 2).

5. Results and Discussion

Several regression models were fitted for each country, with young people's protest participation as the dependent variable. First, sex, deprivation, support for redistribution, and xenophobic attitudes predictors are included in models 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Then, controls measuring sociodemographic features were added (models 4, 5, and 6), also including political attitudes and network exposure covariates in models 7, 8, and 9 (Table 3). Table A2 in the Supplementary File replicates Table 3, keeping the country breakdown but (a) deleting support for redistribution and xenophobic attitudes and (b) replacing political trust and interest controls by satisfaction with democracy and internal political efficacy.

Overall, empirical evidence in support of the hypotheses is mixed. Young Spanish women are much more likely to protest than their male counterparts in the country: while the chances of having joined a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months are 19% on average for young male Spaniards, predicted probabilities rise to 32% for young Spanish women (Figures 1 and 2). In sharp contrast, there is no such gap for young Greeks, while for young Italians it is much smaller and not robust (predicted probabilities are 8% for Italian men and 11% for Italian women; see Figures 1 and 2). Hence, H1 is partially confirmed. At odds with the expectations, deprivation does not play a strong predicting role in young people's protest behaviour across South European countries: coefficients are never significant at the 5% level, thus H2 cannot be confirmed (Figures 1 and 3).

For the remaining hypotheses, empirical evidence is inconsistent across countries. While pro-redistribution attitudes are a key predictor of protesting among Spanish youth—*strongly disagreeing* with the statement "Government should decrease taxes a lot and spend much less on social benefits and services" relative to *strongly agreeing* increases the probability of protesting from 17% to 32%—they do not have an impact on the protest likelihood of young Italians and Greeks (Figures 1 and 4). However, xenophobic attitudes are negatively correlated with protesting among Italian youth: probabilities of protesting fluctuate between 5% and 15%, depending on whether the respondent believes migrants have come to "enrich" or "undermine" society and culture. Moreover, the probability of protesting decreased from 36% to 14% as young Spanish respondents embraced xenophobic positions, but these did not trigger young Greeks' protest behaviour (Figures 1 and 4). Similarly, young people with libertarian values are keener to protest than those with

Table 3. Logistic regressions for Greece (models 1, 2, and 3), Italy (models 4, 5, and 6) and Spain (models 7, 8, and 9).

	Greece						Italy						Spain					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9	
	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE	Odds r.	SE
Sex (female)	1.00	0.12	0.93	0.20	1.05	0.13	1.10	0.14	1.13	0.15	1.36*	0.19	2.01***	0.20	1.97***	0.19	1.98***	0.21
Deprivation	1.25	0.15	1.31*	0.08	1.24	0.16	1.18	0.17	1.27	0.18	1.28	0.19	0.77*	0.08	0.82°	0.09	0.84	0.09
Opposition to socio-economic redistribution	0.92	0.05	0.93	0.03	0.95	0.05	0.92	0.05	0.95	0.06	1.00	0.06	0.73***	0.03	0.73***	0.03	0.82***	0.04
Xenophobic attitudes	1.00	0.02	1.00	0.02	0.98	0.02	0.86***	0.02	0.87***	0.02	0.89***	0.02	0.87***	0.02	0.88***	0.02	0.89***	0.02
Libertarian–authoritarian scale					1.12	0.08					.87	0.07					0.62***	0.05
Age			0.98	0.01	0.98	0.01			0.93***	0.01	0.93***	0.01			0.95***	0.01	0.96***	0.01
Education			1.22°	0.12	1.16	0.12			1.24°	0.14	1.01	0.12			1.08	0.07	0.99	0.06
Rural–urban			1.11°	0.07	1.08	0.07			1.07	0.06	1.03	0.06			1.03	0.05	1.03	0.05
Political trust					0.64***	0.08					.90	0.11					0.72***	0.07
Political interest					1.66***	0.13					2.06***	0.20					1.53***	0.10
Meeting friends					1.34***	0.10					1.44***	0.12					1.25***	0.07
Constant	0.20***	0.04	0.12***	0.05	0.02***	0.01	0.30***	0.06	0.80	0.35	0.05***	0.03	1.15	0.16	3.48***	1.20	1.03	0.47
N	2,283		2,283		2,283		2,264		2,264		2,264		2,254		2,254		2,254	
Pseudo R^2	0.0027		0.0071		0.0469		0.0264		0.0430		0.0964		0.0751		0.0863		0.1303	

Notes: DV = having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months; coefficients are odds ratios; °$p < 0.10$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

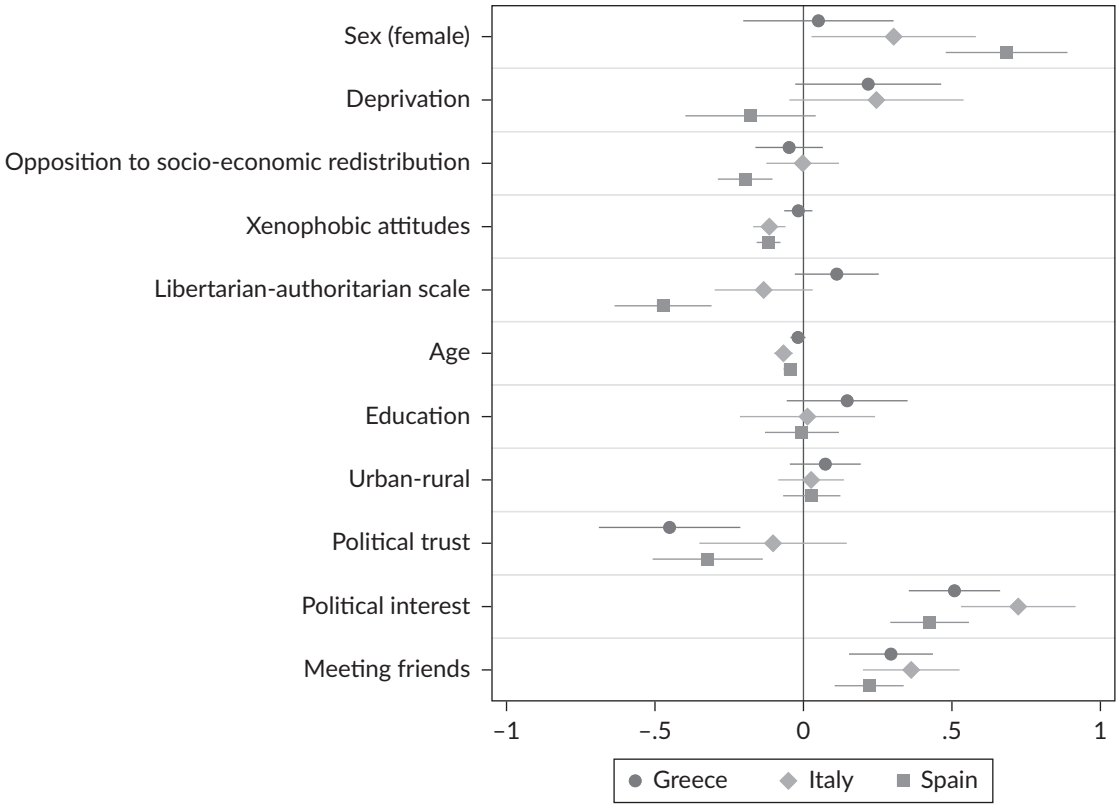

Figure 1. Plot of estimates for protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9). Notes: See Table 3; coefficients are log odds; 95% confidence intervals.

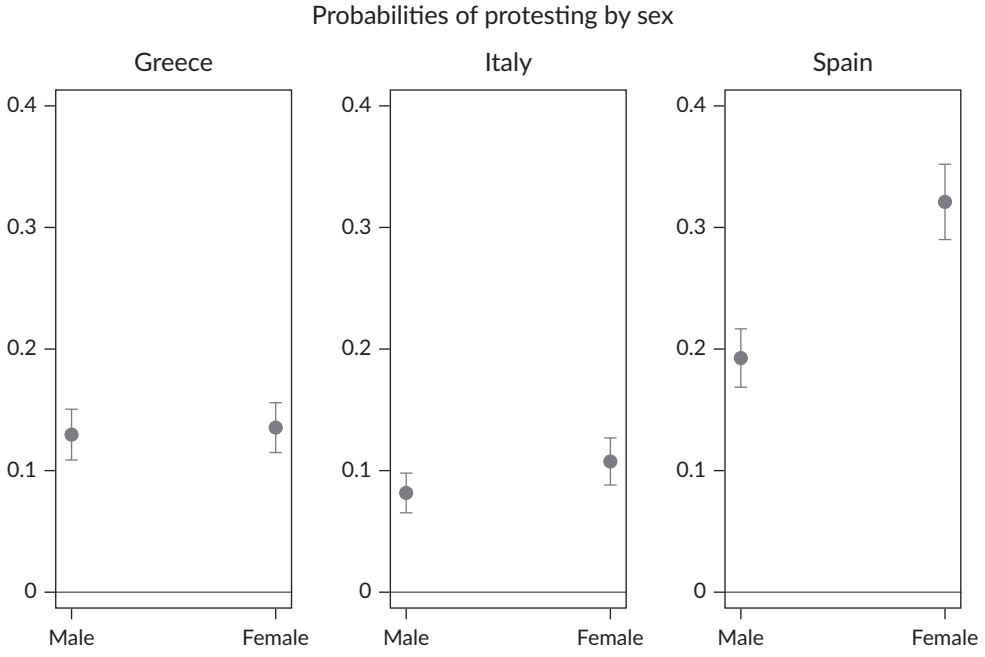

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) by sex among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9; Table 3). Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

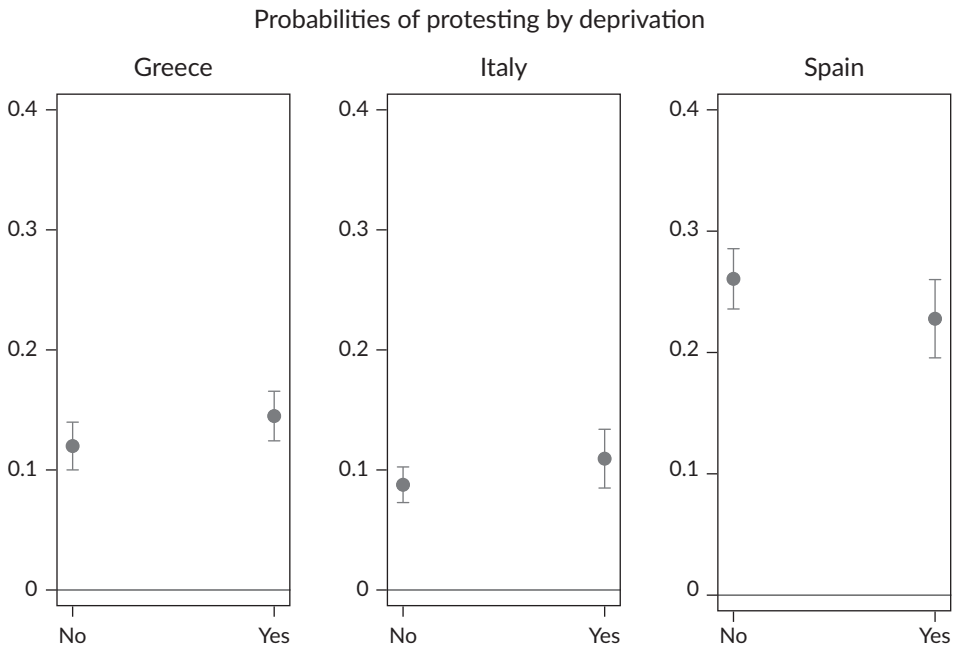

Figure 3. Predicted values of protesting (participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) by relative deprivation among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9). Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

authoritarian preferences in Italy and Spain. While young Spaniards and Italians endorsing authoritarian worldviews have (respectively) a 5% or 4% probability of protesting, the likelihood increases up to 34% or 14% respectively when young Spaniards or Italians embrace libertarian values (Figure 4; Table 3). We can confirm H3, H4, and H5 for Spain, disconfirm them for Greece, and verify H3 and H5—but not H4—for Italy.

In a nutshell, results show that young people who engage in street protest activities in Spain tend to have left-libertarian attitudes on all grounds—unlike young Italians, who display libertarian and progressive cultural (but not economic) values and preferences. In sharp contrast, our analyses do not let us conclude that young Greeks engaging in street protests are more left-leaning than the average under-35 adult population in the country—note these results are robust to a different measurement of the dependent variable. If we define protest as having participated in a lawful demonstration or having joined a strike in the last 12 months, the overall results remain unchanged (see Table A3 and Figures A3, A4, and A5 in the Supplementary File).

Our results relate to the contextual conditions under which protest potentials can(not) get activated. We expected that individual drivers of protest get activated when there is a simultaneously inviting structure of protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, as well as politicisation processes and salience of certain issues, on the other hand. Our results, however, allow us to nuance such expectations.

The large proportion of young Spanish—and, to a lesser extent, Italian—women protesters cannot be detached from the mobilisation capacity of the feminist movement in these two countries in the last few years and their ability to engage new cohorts of activists (Chironi, 2019; Portos, 2019). Similarly, the politicisation of the migration issue following the long summer of migration in 2015, together with the strengthening of the movement against racism and in solidarity with refugees, help to account for the negative impact of xenophobic attitudes on young people's protesting likelihood in Italy and Spain. This goes

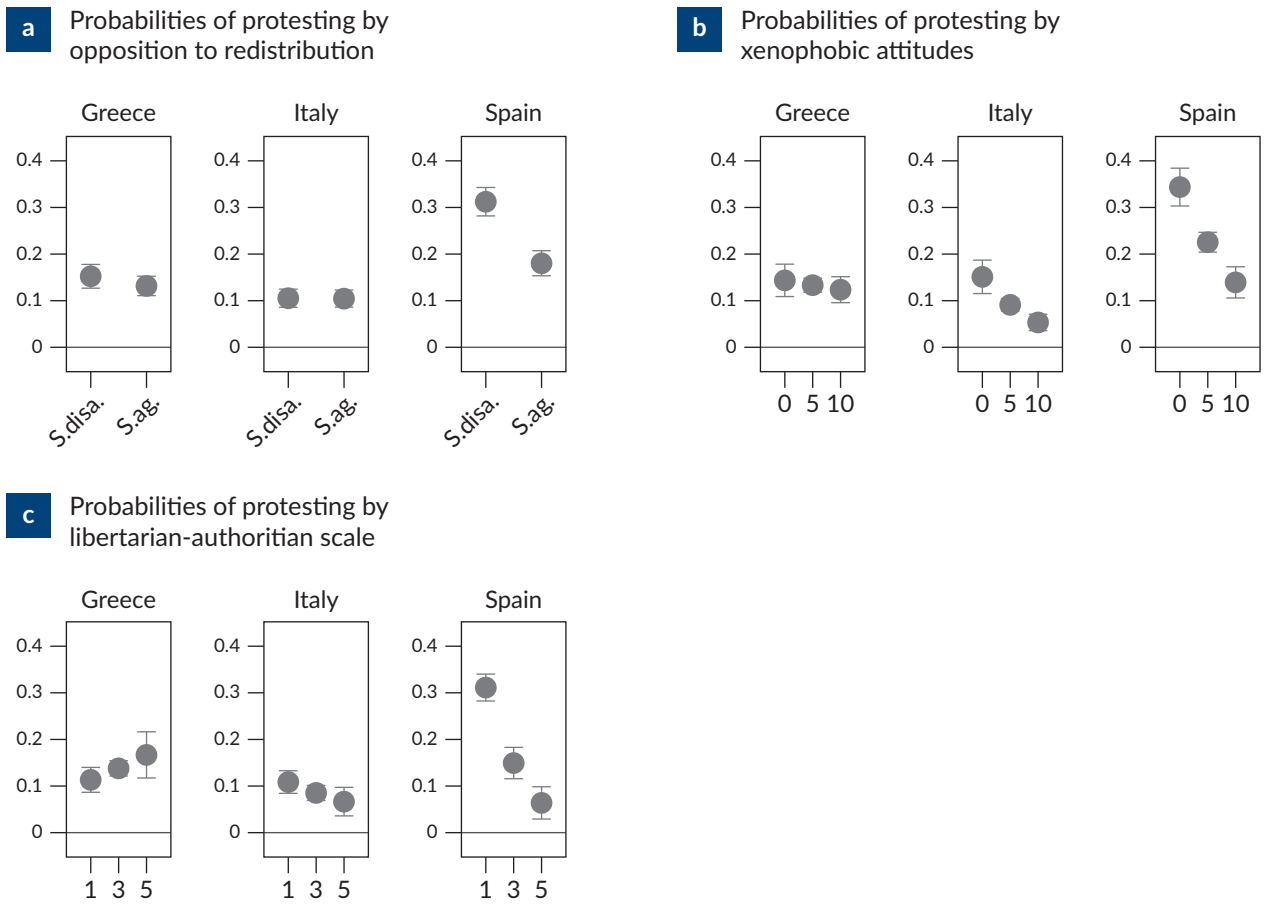

Figure 4. Predicted values of protesting (having participated in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months) among Greek, Italian, and Spanish young people (models 3, 6, and 9) by (a) opposition to redistribution; (b) xenophobic attitudes; and (c) libertarian-authoritarian values. Notes: See Table 3; 95% confidence intervals.

in line with available empirical evidence that shows how social groups participate in demonstrations primarily when it comes to issues that address the core of their ideology (Kleiner, 2018). However, in the Greek case, grassroots mass movements were built around neither the gender nor the migration issue. While these issues awakened solidarity initiatives in the country, as empirical evidence illustrates (e.g., Malamidis, 2020; Kouki & Chatzidakis, 2021; Oikonomakis, 2018), they did not garner widespread support among milieus engaged in street protesting.

Following the depth of the Great Recession and the turmoil of anti-austerity mass mobilisations that politically socialised a whole new cohort of citizens, socio-economic grievances and deprivation do not seem to be determinants of protesting among South European youth (anymore). Other than the well-documented, longstanding problematic empirical record of strain and breakdown theories (della Porta, 2015; Kurer et al., 2019), this could have to do with the normalisation and internalisation of precarity and dashed social mobility prospects among younger cohorts (Zamponi, 2019) as well as the key mediating role of political opportunities and discontent in the material hardship/protest participation nexus (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2020a). Moreover, the left–wing ideology of the Syriza incumbent at the time the survey was fielded (see Altiparmakis & Lorenzini, 2018), the increasing mobilisation of far-right and conservative constituencies through non-institutional repertoires of action (Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019; Pirro &

Portos, 2021), or the generalised apathy following the deep economic recession can help make sense of key predictors' null significance for the Greek context and the overall low levels of street protest in the country.

However, an important limitation hampers our results: with EURYKA survey data, we cannot distinguish protest participation by issue. One would expect the profile of participants (in terms of gender, deprivation, and left–right ideology) to be very different, e.g., pro- or anti-migrant protest events. Further, some of our results might be driven by the mobilisation capacity of specific movements—e.g., the strong effect of gender for Spain is likely to be accepted by the abovementioned mass feminist protests during that period, where young women are overrepresented.

Going beyond the key hypotheses, our results offer further insights into the drivers of young people's mobilisation in Southern Europe. First, some socio-demographic factors, such as living in a rural–urban area or educational level, do not really affect young people's participation in demonstrations. In Italy and Spain, the very youngest respondents are less likely to protest, suggesting that people in their late 20s and early 30s form the bulk of protest milieus. Second, political grievances including trust and satisfaction with how democracy works are negatively associated with protest participation in Spain and Greece, but not in Italy. Along the lines of previous mobilisation experiences in the shadow of the Great Recession, political grievances were collectively organised in the countries that experienced mass opposition to austerity and the political status quo (Kriesi et al., 2020a), possibly in a trend that persists until today. Third, in line with extant cross-sectional evidence (e.g., Earl et al., 2017; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Vráblíková, 2014), political attitudes (interest, internal efficacy) and network exposure (meeting with friends) are relevant drivers of young people's protest behaviour in the three countries under scrutiny.

6. Conclusion

The latest empirical evidence illustrates how a more active public is related to a better functioning government, with an assertive and elite-challenging public being "more of a boon than a curse for democratic politics" (Dalton, 2022, p. 533). In electoral democracies, protest does not only provide an essential voice for minority—and often marginalised—groups; it offers the opportunity to start debates, alter the agenda and ultimately trigger major political transformations. Southern European countries are landmarks in this respect, as they show how major protest campaigns with high levels of participation amongst younger cohorts have unfolded since 2011. These protests were organised first to contend with austerity policies and the political status quo, and then around issues such as feminism and solidarity with migrants and refugees. To what extent the increased participation in protest among young people in South European countries is transforming civic culture, acting as a catalyst for democratic deepening and far-reaching transformations in political institutions, that largely failed to deliver to the people, remains an empirical question—and an open-ended process.

From a comparative vantage point, this article has explored the determinants of young people's protest participation in three countries of Southern Europe. The main findings are three-fold: First, young women are much more likely to participate in Spain, less clearly so in Italy, and certainly not so in Greece, relative to young male nationals. Second, deprivation is not a determinant of protest among "the natives of the ruins": austerity policies and precarity, which have left a deep imprint upon younger cohorts as regards material and subjective economic prospects but also in terms of political socialisation, do not seem to trigger protest. In other words, socio-economic grievances are not organised collectively through extra-institutional political

repertoires of action. Third, we observe important differences in terms of the ideological profile of young protesters in the three countries under scrutiny. In line with authoritative literature on the topic (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Torcal et al., 2016), protest is first and foremost a left-libertarian affair in Spain, but our results add some nuance: young Italian challengers are not left-wing in economic terms and young street protesters in Greece are not more libertarian and left-leaning than the overall young Greek population.

How does this article help advance social movement theory? We expected that the concatenation of protest legacies and trajectories, on the one hand, and politicisation and issue salience, on the other, would activate individual-level determinants of protest. However, as we have discussed throughout the article, our results suggest that other context-specific traits can prevent protests from happening, thus limiting these conditions' explanatory power. Indeed, the mobilisation process coevolves with regimes and other actors in their environments, with "stochastic or random processes," being adaptation and competition key to understanding protest dynamics (Oliver & Myers, 2003, p. 1). Yet, the research design and evidence deployed are correlational: other types of evidence (e.g., experimental) could develop causal claims and shed further light on mechanisms triggering protest in Southern European countries and beyond. In addition, longitudinal data would let us test whether these results hold beyond the specific temporal setting where the survey was fielded and are robust in the mid- and long-term, possibly being conditional upon opening windows of political opportunity at the aggregate-institutional levels. Also, further research is needed to understand how Covid-19 spawned new forms of activism and how young activists modulated their tactics to changing circumstances, as physical street demonstrations, rallies, protests, and sit-ins largely ground to an abrupt halt in many places (Chenoweth et al., 2020), including Southern Europe.

This article tried to fill in a lacuna in the field: notwithstanding the huge importance of young people's protests for the reconfiguration of political structures in three (seemingly similar) South European democracies in the last decade, there is scant available systematic empirical evidence on their comparative drivers. The overall results are that socio-economic grievances do not lead young people to protest, but while women and people with left-libertarian attitudes compound the basis of contemporary street protests in Spain, these findings are only in part confirmed for the Italian context and clearly at odds with the Greek scenario. This suggests, on one hand, that there is a strong diversity in terms of young people's determinants of protest across the three countries. We should thus implement context-sensitive analyses, adding a word of caution against using Southern Europe as a unit of analysis in social movements and political sociology. On the other hand, different profiles of mobilised youth could foresee future developments. As Earl et al. (2017, p. 8) put it: "while youth will age into adulthood, they will only age out of some of the dispositions, habits, and routines they developed as young people, which could have significant consequences for the future of social movements and protest." Only time will tell whether and to what extent the cross-country asymmetries among the protesters discussed in this article will translate to the general population in the years to come.

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of this work were presented in different seminars (InCite, Université de Genève, 2022; MOVICON, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2023; CBEES, Södertörn University, Stockholm, 2024) and conferences (ASA Philadelphia, 2023; ASA Montreal, 2024; SISP Trieste, 2024). The author is grateful to participants and discussants in these events, and especially to Massimiliano Andretta, Kerman Calvo, Caroline Close, Eva Fernández Guzmán, Sergiu Gherghina, Marco Giugni, Valentina Holecz, Hara Kouki,

Daniel López-Roche, Eduardo Romanos, Katia Pilati, Virginia Salaorni, and Lorenzo Zamponi. He also thanks Arndt Leininger, Sabrina Mayer, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

Funding

The EURYKA project was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 727025. Martín Portos also acknowledges support from the Conex-Plus Marie Curie framework (G.A. No. 801538) and the Ramón y Cajal grant (G.A. No. RYC2021–032179-I), which is funded by the MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Union's 'NextGenerationEU'/PRTR.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Replication material is available at the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/T6OHSG)

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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