

An interrogation of the character of protest in Ireland since the bailout

Mary Naughton

Abstract

This article identifies and examines the features of protest events in Ireland in the aftermath of the EU-IMF bailout in order to understand why the patterns of protest in Ireland have not mirrored those in the other EU countries that received bail outs. To identify characteristics of Irish protest I used contemporary newspaper articles to compile a database recording objective features of protest events that took place in Ireland between 22 November 2010 and 1 February 2013. Participants from three protest campaigns were then asked to respond to a questionnaire aimed at establishing their motivations for participating in protest. The results of the research show that the largest protest events recorded during the period were in response to the bailout and that the bailout was the most frequently protested issue, challenging the characterization of the Irish as a passive nation dutifully taking its medicine.

Introduction

Since 2008 the financial stability of the Euro zone, even its very existence, has been under threat due to a severe economic downturn. Spain, Greece, Portugal and Ireland have been the economies worst affected, with the latter three states accepting bailouts from the EU and IMF in order to ensure the viability of the European banking system. In response to the crisis, and as a condition of the deals negotiated for bailouts each country has implemented a policy of austerity, imposing cutbacks across services and social welfare, reducing public sector pay and significantly increasing the burden on the taxpayer. In Greece and Portugal the response to these measures has been fierce, sustained protest on a massive scale (Mann 2012). The majority of protestors are young people; unemployed graduates and the working class. For the most part the protest movements have arisen independently of official labour and pre-existing civil society organisations (Mann 2012; 184).

In Ireland, where the government had already turned to austerity to control the crisis (Hardiman & Dellepiane 2012; 5), the consequences of the bailout have been extremely damaging. Yet the massive mobilisations reported on the continent did not appear to have their counterpart in Ireland. The contrast between the Irish reaction and events in Greece, Spain and Portugal was highlighted by both Irish and international media. Ireland has been portrayed as the model pupil, uncritically obeying the edicts of the EU-ECB-IMF troika (Allen 2012, 3). The media has posited that the Irish are an innately passive nation, less inclined to protest than their Mediterranean counterparts (Allen

201, 3, Mann 2012; 188). This characterisation does not correspond with historical experience in Ireland. As one participant in protest points out ‘the history of Ireland is oppression, and the answer to that has been rebellion’ (Survey response 6, Ballyhea bondholders protest). The media accounts concentrated on what was not in evidence in Ireland; visible mass protests and riots. There was a lack of empirical data on what protests *was* taking place in Ireland, and the commentary overlooked questions such as what issues were protests addressing; who was organising these protests; whether any pattern could be discerned in the types of protest taking place and; if so what were the reasons for this.

This article challenges the view that the Irish do not protest and that the consequences of the bailout were accepted quietly. In order to understand why protests of the type seen in Greece and Spain did not develop in Ireland I examine the nature of interaction between the state and civil society in the years leading up to the bailout, and the type of protest that took place before it was imposed, in order to gain an understanding of the types of issues that have generated protest before and the characteristics of these protests, applying social movement theory as a frame of analysis. Based on this examination I hypothesise that rather than displacing them, the bailout would tend to reinforce previous patterns of protest.

In order to determine the nature of the protest after the bailout, and to test my own assumptions, I compiled a database of the protest events that occurred in Ireland from November 2010, when the bailout was agreed, to February 2013 by searching the archives of two national newspapers and five local newspapers. Participants from three protest campaigns were also contacted in order to examine individual motives for protesting and subjective interpretations of the significance of protest.

The data demonstrates that, contrary to common assumptions, protest in Ireland has been frequent, has arisen predominantly in response to issues resulting from or linked to the bailout and has involved a broad cross section of Irish society.

Analytical approach

The purpose of this study is to examine why Ireland responded differently to the acceptance of a bailout package and the consequent imposition of austerity policies and to increase understanding of the factors that influence protest and the form it takes. The Irish experience in the years 2010-2013 was held up as exceptional because macro level changes in Ireland, Spain and Greece did not yield a uniform response. The media accounts painted a general picture of the Irish as innately passive, conveniently forgetting that recent Irish history is rife with examples of successful mobilisations and protest movements. The anti-nuclear movement’s resisted the establishment of a nuclear power plant at Carnsore Point was a victory that gave courage to the international anti nuclear movement and inspired further environmental activism (Dalby 1984-5, 31) .

Further consistent, creative and confrontational opposition to the construction of a Shell pipeline in Erris, Co Mayo has been ongoing since 2001. The accounts focused solely on the imposition of the bailout and austerity policies while ignoring other macro and individual level factors that influence the emergence of protest. I used Karl Dieter Opp's structural cognitive model (SCM) as a framework for identifying these factors and integrating them into my analysis.

Dieter Opp developed SCM in response to approaches such as resource mobilisation theory and political opportunity theory which privilege macro level variables in their explanations. According to SCM macro level factors, eg. A change in government, changes in a country's economic fortunes, an opening of the political system, influence the emergence of protest and the form it takes only to the extent that they affect variables on the micro level, the main determinant in the emergence of protest and the form it takes is individual choice. In other words an event like the bailout on its own is not sufficient to explain protest, researchers must examine how this event affected individual incentives to protest.

Employing rational actor theory (RAT) as its starting point, SCM assumes that individuals make choices to maximise their utility or well-being by analysing the balance of incentives for a given behaviour (Dieter Opp 2009; 46). Incentives at the micro level include preference for the public good and the perception that one's own contribution to the protest will influence the outcome (efficacy) (Dieter Opp 2009; 89). There are also social benefits and costs to participation—individuals may protest even if they do not believe that protesting will influence the achievement of the good (Dieter Opp 1986; 87); there can be social rewards for cooperating or individuals may identify with the group that is to benefit from protest meaning group success is related to their own sense of self worth (Gamson 1990; 57). At the same time social norms can add to the costs of protesting; where protest is not seen as normal or acceptable this will act as a disincentive. Protest can also involve an economic cost, where participants must travel to demonstrations and meetings or take time off work (Dieter Opp 2009; 157).

Changes at macro level, such as the imposition of a bailout can influence the balance of incentives to protest eg. by creating or enhancing grievances or removing structural obstacles to protest, but it is not inevitable that they will have such an effect, nor will they always affect incentives in the same way, as Ireland's contrasting response demonstrates. According to SCM to understand why a macro level event produces a given outcome, researchers must look at the 'structure of cognitive preferences', that is the existing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individuals regarding protest in a given society (Dieter Opp 2009; 328). Of course the structure of cognitive preferences varies from one society to another and is influenced by structural macro level features such as culture, political system and the level of deprivation. Further the behaviour of activists themselves influences individual attitudes and how events at the macro level are interpreted. Activists employ narratives that frame events as threats or opportunities in order to garner support (Benford and Snow 2000;614). SCM

assumes that all relevant macro variables enter the framing processes of individuals but their effect on the cognitive system will only create incentives to protest if the existing structure of cognitive preferences is favourable, and these preferences will also determine the type of protest which emerges.

In the following section I apply Dieter Opp's model to develop hypotheses on the characteristics of Irish protest after the bailout. In order to get a sense of the structure of cognitive preferences I outline features of the Irish political system as well as the nature of civil society participation and the characteristics of protest prior to the bailout.

Irish political culture and protest before the bailout

Protests in Ireland in the first decade of the twentieth century, prior to the bailout, tended to be small scale, motivated by a single demand on the state rather than an appetite for systematic reform of the political system, and organised by local organisations and communities (Leonard 2007; 463). Scholars have identified Ireland's political culture, specifically populism, clientelism, and the dominant political discourse of nationalism, as salient macro factors in explaining this phenomenon (Laffan 2008; 186-187 Cox 2006; 218). Here I add to this explanation by sketching the origins of this political culture and how it could have impacted on the structure of cognitive preferences. I will then speculate as to how the changes at macro level brought about by the economic crisis and bailout have interacted with these preferences to change individual incentives to protest, and what I expect the character of post-bailout protest to be.

Irish politics are often characterised as non-ideological. The two largest parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael are both considered to be catch-all and centre right in their outlook and policies. The absence of a left/right divide has influenced the style of these parties in government and in turn the political culture that has developed since independence. Fianna Fáil, has been by far the most electorally successful of the two, holding power for 69 out of the past 89 years. Its approach to government has been populist rather than programmatic. Where dissent emerged the party adopted an often successful strategy of co-optation, offering the aggrieved constituency piecemeal reforms and small scale projects that responded to the immediate problem, rather than attempting to engage in a holistic re-assessment and revision of its policies (Kirby and Murphy 2009;10).

However, closer analysis reveals that several protest movements have emerged in Ireland as a result of successive governments' attempts to implement right-wing economic policies. From the late 1950s Fianna Fail began a transition away from policies of autarky and economic nationalism towards a greater reliance on international capital (Dalby 1984-5; 4). As the neoliberal economic logic gained hegemonic status the government increasingly linked progress to economic growth and sought to attract international investment and boost economic output. While some constituencies benefited from this shift, many sections of

society and their needs were simply left out of the picture, and these constituencies would make their voices heard..

In the 1970s the government's drive to increase economic production and growth generated a proposal to build a nuclear power plant at Carnsore Point in Co Wexford. The energy minister at the time was committed to nuclear power as a means of increasing energy output and commissioned only minimal research into the possible safety and environmental issues such a plant could create (Dalby 1984-5, 9). In the wake of the announcement of Carnsore as a site, an energetic anti-nuclear movement which used both pressure group tactics and visible, creative protests to challenge the proposed construction (Dalby 1984-5; 14). The movement organised several mass rallies, the first of which drew over 20,000 attendees and succeeded in pressuring an obstinate Fianna Fail minister into holding a tribunal investigating the safety of such a plant and eventually into postponing the development (Dalby 1984-5, 14-16).

While on the surface the Carnsore protest on the surface seems to have been in response to a single issue- the proposed construction of the nuclear power plant, Dalby's analysis shows that for many the movement was about challenging the government's chosen path to development and economic growth (Dalby 1984-5, 35).

In the 1980s and 1990s communities in inner city Dublin organised protests against decisions of the local planning system which proposed displacing local communities in order to create space for the proposed International Financial Services Centre. Street protests, leafleting and a 3-month sit in were just some of the actions organised at a grassroots level to resist the detouring of the inner city. While destruction of the social housing complexes went ahead in many instances, the protests put pressure on the government to rehouse people locally and drew attention to the moral issues involved in the urban regeneration policy. As one activist pointed out the government's actions suggested that attracting international investment was the most urgent priority, while the people living in these parts of the city were expendable (Punch 2009; 95).

The establishment, in 1987, of social partnership profoundly changed how the state related to civil society, particularly trade unions. As Allen notes, prior to the imposition of social partnership, there was strong support for economic nationalism and solidarity in the Irish labour movement. However social partnership purported to link workers' interests with those of Irish capital (Allen 2012, 4). The parties' dependence on reaching agreement in order to secure wage stability and funding made it difficult to question state policy and stifled meaningful debate from emerging within that space. The community and voluntary sector were also included in the social partnership process. The trade off for their participation was that these groups, which had their origins outside the state and had emerged as a response to social exclusion, were now expected to act as service providers and were discouraged from taking a stance on political issues.

The deeply controlling nature of the Irish state thus muted the ability of the trade union sector and the community and voluntary sector to be socially transformative (Kirby and Murphy 2009; 12). This had an impact on the balance of incentives for participating in protest at the individual level. Participating in protest is costly in terms of time and resources. Presumably where the demands of protest are for large-scale or systematic change these costs will be even higher. However the costs of individual participation will be reduced where a social movement organisation with social networks of activists and experience in successfully mobilising constituencies exists already as individuals will not have to build a movement from scratch. However in Ireland the civil society groups which might have had the necessary resources to form such an organisational core were co-opted, so the costs for individuals of attempting to mobilise for systematic change remained high. Thus nationwide protest movements seeking broad policy change have not generally been part of the repertoire of contention of Irish protestors in the early 21st century.

Their involvement in social partnership also meant that many social movement organisations found themselves inside the boardroom' (Punch 2009,), trying to win funding from state officials for their projects. This changed their structure and how demands were made and in turn affected the incentives to protest. Previously, though movements for change may have been 'out in the cold' they belonged to their members. The people who were affected by the issue the movement addressed were also those organising the meetings, handing out leaflets, attending protests. Involvement in social partnership meant that community groups' activities moved from organising within the community to engaging with state officials, writing proposals for funding, research on policy: activities that required specialist skills. Meanwhile traditional forms of protest activity came to be frowned upon since groups were working within state structures and wished to maintain cordial relations with the government (Cox, 2010, Cox 2011, 5). This reduced the incentives for non-professional members of movements to protest. Where before they had been participants in their own struggle now the message was that their participation was no longer required: they were expected to behave as consumers of services won for them by NGOs rather than participants in their own struggle (Cox 2010).

Cultural norms and localism also affected social incentives. Community rights have been an important discourse in Irish politics. Where mobilisation was around a local issue, activists often drew on traditional discourses of community rights in constructing their claims (Garavan 2007; 848). Since protests were often based in rural areas with small populations there was an increased probability individuals would be integrated into the social network that was promoting protest. Prior contact with protesters affects selective incentives to participate as it can introduce social costs for non-participation, while offering increased status for those who do protest. Since the group is mobilising for the good of 'our community' it creates a norm to protest for other members (Dieter Opp 2009; 116).

Defence of the local community has been a prominent element of protests that have taken place in Ireland since the turn of the century. While at first glance it may seem that protests on decisions affecting one locality are not challenges to the broader economic policy of the government the two are often linked. While the narrative of a movement may be one of community defending itself and its own frontiers, often the need for a community to defend itself arises because neoliberal economic policies ignore the local and the specific.

The most prominent example of such a community mobilisation is the conflict in Erris, challenging the construction of a gas pipeline through the coastline. Since 2001 the local community has opposed the project. Activists have framed the pipeline as an attack on a local space and participation has been motivated, at least in part, by the sense of a local duty to defend this space against 'the prioritisation of corporate profits over local concerns' (Leonard 2006, 378). The experience in Erris demonstrates the importance of selective incentives to the individual decision to protest. After members of the community were imprisoned for refusing to obey a High Court injunction restraining them from preventing Shell from laying pipes on their land many people who had previously favoured the laying of the pipeline joined the movement out of the duty to defend friends, family and local property (Leonard 2006, 380).

The economic downturn and the bailout have impacted incentives in several ways. The overall decline in national wealth coupled with the imposed policy of austerity has led to an increase in grievances. The provision of public goods such as hospital services and primary education has suffered, with cuts having a particularly severe impact in rural areas (Lucey 2011; 9, Walsh & Ward 2013; 5). Thus individuals continue to feel grievances at the local level.

The media's treatment of the bail out and austerity may also have impacted incentives. The carefully circulated message was that the government had no choice but to implement austerity, that it was not the result of a political choice but the only realistic option (Allen 2012(a), 9). The conduct of the nominally left-wing Labour party as minor-partner in the coalition reinforces this. Labour have defended their implementation of austerity with a rejoinder of 'our hands are tied'. It is possible that would-be participants in protest have interpreted this as meaning that the conditions of the bailout preclude a top-down solution: even a change in government did not lead to any reversal of austerity, the message is that it must continue, and that the battle ground where choices can still be fought relates to which cuts will be made and which services and projects will survive.

If individuals willing to take part in protest in the period under review operated under these assumptions, they would have been less likely to perceive that their participation in protests that aimed to bring about a radical change in economic or redistributive economic policy could make a difference. At the same time the success of mobilising around a single issue, for example retaining ambulance services to a given area, would still appear to have a viable chance of success. For the individual deciding what to protest about, the latter would appear to score higher in terms of efficacy. This type of protest is also likely to involve

strong social incentives, potential activists can employ the same community frames that have previously been successful in creating protest norms. These are likely to have been even more compelling post-bailout as all kinds of important services had become 'fair game' for cuts under austerity and activists could conceptualise these cuts as threats to the community. The costs of non-participation and the power of the protest norm would also have been enhanced by the fact that communities were now in greater competition with other groups seeking to prevent their services from being cut.

Taking these consequences of the bailout into account my expectation is that the data will show that the patterns of protest in Ireland that persisted in the first decade of the 20th century will be reinforced, rather than displaced. Protests will address decisions affecting their local community. People in Ireland have experience organising protests in response to decisions affecting their local community or county and such protests have been successful in achieving their goals in the past. While the challenged decision or policy may result from the government's pursuit of neoliberal development the rhetoric of the protest will not necessarily challenge this underlying logic. The efficacy of protesting on individual issues rather than for system wide reforms arguably increased after the bailout, as did the social incentives to protest about issues which affect one's immediate community. Meanwhile the costs of mobilising for systematic reforms remained high due to the lack of existing nationwide social movement groups, and I would expect that the potential efficacy of such a movement, as perceived by individuals deciding whether or not to participate, was reduced since perceived constraints on policy choice at government level meant that its demands would be unlikely to be achieved. Therefore we can expect when analysing the data collected for this study that protests will in general focus on single issues, relating to local demands and that mobilisation will involve discourses of community rights. This could offer some explanation as to why the international media has depicted Ireland as passive. If protest is mainly local, and concerns narrow issues rather than demanding systemic change that would involve violating conditions of the bailout, it is less likely to be front page news in Ireland, or feature in international media at all. So from the outside, or indeed to Irish people not directly involved in protest, it would simply appear that people are not protesting.

Sources and methodology

The object of the study was to establish the type of protests that have emerged in Ireland since the bailout and why they took on this character. My first task was to compile a database which recorded the objective features of protest events that occurred in the Republic of Ireland between the 22nd of November 2010 and 1st February 2013. In order to gather the necessary data I conducted a comprehensive search of the archives of two national newspapers, the Irish Times (IT) and the Irish Examiner (IE). I supplemented the national level findings with a further search of 5 local newspapers the Kerryman, the Corkman, the Tipperary Star, the Leitrim Observer and the Carlow People

(Oliver & Maney 2000; 495). The search of newspaper archives was conducted through the database NEXIS. I used filters for subject (protests and demonstrations) and geography (Ireland). The features I took note of were: the issue the protest addressed; the number of participants; the location; the form protest took; the organisation or group (if any) that coordinated the protest and; whether the participants were mainly drawn from a particular sector of society e.g. students, pensioners. When I had completed this examination I contacted participants from three campaigns and sent them a questionnaire aimed at establishing their motivations for participating in protest.

It is difficult to draw a bright line around what constitutes a ‘protest event’. Protest messages are not solely conveyed through demonstrations. Demands can be made through petitions or court cases or campaigns can have their primary presence online. For the purposes of this study however I limited the definition to a contentious, public display or gathering organised to draw attention to an issue or put pressure on a target to change their course of action (Peillon 2001; 96). The principal reasons for doing so were pragmatic; it was more likely that newspapers would systematically report on protests which fit this description. This is because deviance and drama are defining characteristics of what journalists deem to be newsworthy (Ericson 1998; 84). Protests which conveyed their message through a disruptive demonstration or a march are further from the norm than protests taken through court cases or petitions because of their dramatic form and hence more newsworthy.

Protests addressing local issues were those that made a demand or reacted to a grievance that did not affect the country at large but only one administrative area eg county, or within a county a town or village. The analysis also refers to ‘narrow’ issues or demands. By this I mean that the protest concerned one decision of government eg. a particular cut or closure, or a series of decisions affecting a single sector eg. nurses, rather than the overarching policy that was the source of the cut,.

I used news archives as a source as they represent the most readily available and continuous record of protests. However the ‘news hole’ –the amount of space available for news in a newspaper limits the number of events that newspapers can record on a given day (Oliver & Maney 2000; 466). The proximity effect- that is the tendency of media outlets to give greater attention to events that occur in their own metropolitan area, particularly in central locations- also has an impact on which events that receive media coverage (Oliver & Maney 2000; 495). I was concerned that the combination of these factors would mean that national newspapers would report more consistently on protests occurring in or near Dublin and that this would give an unrepresentative picture of the frequency and character of protest in rural areas. To account for these risks I chose national newspapers which were based in different parts of Ireland- the Irish Times is Dublin-based while the Irish Examiner has its offices in Cork. I included the local newspapers as a further safeguard against the news hole. My rationale was that the proximity effect would increase the chances of rural protests being recorded in local papers.

In order to grasp the significance of the data collected from the newspaper search I sought to gain perspectives from participants in some of the protest movements. Protestors involved in three campaigns agreed to answer some questions on their involvement and I sent a short questionnaire to each. The campaigns were: the 'Save Waterford' hospital; the Union of Students Ireland (USI)'s campaign against the introduction of third level fees and cuts to third level budgets and; the 'Ballyhea Bondholder' protest.

Save Waterford arose in response to the government's proposals to downgrade services at Waterford General Hospital. I was interested in Waterford because it had the characteristics which were identified in the previous chapter as typical of Irish protest; it addressed a local issue, the change it sought was limited to a single narrow demand on the government, and its participants spoke of the need to defend their community (Kane 2012; 8). At the same time the campaign was distinguished from the majority of similar protests due to the size of the protest events; there were 15,000 people at the first rally, while a second attracted a crowd of 12,000. These were two of the largest protest events that took place in the entire period under review. I hoped the motives of individual survey respondents would indicate why this particular issue had attracted so many participants.

The student protests also had a mix of typical and atypical features. The student campaign dates to 2008 when the government raised the possibility of reintroducing fees for third level education. After the bailout it also campaigned on issues such as reductions to student grants and cuts to university budgets. Protests usually took the form of marches through Dublin culminating in rallies either outside the Dáil but there were also several demonstrations outside the constituency offices of TDs outside Dublin (Burke 2011; 8, see also responses to survey). The student movement was interesting because there was a pre-existing organisational structure which had orchestrated large-scale nationwide protests on the same issues before the bailout, as was noted earlier, social partnership had made the existence of such movements unusual in Ireland. Respondents were asked whether the existence of this structure had a positive impact when it came to attracting participants.

The Waterford and student protest movements were two of the most prominent movements to emerge in the years immediately following the bailout but as Cox points out, their stated aims- to preserve their own level of services, amounted to a request for special treatment in a context where nominally at least, austerity was supposed demand equal sacrifice from society as a whole (Cox 2011,2). Bearing this in mind I was interested to learn the attitudes of participants to the general policy of austerity.

Ballyhea was organised to express public anger at the decision to make taxpayers liable for bondholder bank debt. The campaign involved marches through the village of Ballyhea, which took place every Sunday after mass (Kelleher 2013; 7). Ballyhea was unusual due to the number of protest events it involved- 100- each following a set pattern. The protests occurred every Sunday from March 2011 until the end of the period under review. The campaign was

also unusual in that the events were based in a small town relatively far from the capital, it addressed a national issue- the bailout of the banks. Although it was a policy that affected the country at large the protestors seemed to be responding through their identity as members of the community in Ballyhea. Since the campaign targeted the Government's general economic policy as dictated by international obligations I was interested to learn whether participants believed their efforts would be efficacious.

Results

My search of national and local newspapers identified 415 protest events. The highest number of protest events reported occurred in Co Cork (158). One hundred of these were part of the Ballyhea campaign. Dublin city centre was the next most frequent site of protest with 135 reported events. Reports only contained estimates as to the number of participants in 219 of these protests. The average attendance at these 219 protest events was close to 1,700. Protests above 10,000 people were exceptional, with only 7 reported. When these were removed the average number of participants dropped to just over 900. The largest protest event was in response to the programme of austerity imposed by the bailout. The protest, a march on the house of the Oireachtas (the Irish parliament) in Dublin, involved 50,000 participants. The vast majority of protests targeted the government. Protest predominantly took the form of either rallies or marches though there were instances of more novel forms being used. For example the Occupy movements in Cork, Dublin and Galway set up camps near banks in city centre locations to protest against injustices caused by the global capitalist system (Nihill 2011; 5), protestors occupied the camps for over 6 months (Carberry 2012; 2). Each occupation was classified as one event. The vast majority of protests did not involve any violence. There were only 2 events described as 'riots' by either newspaper and these were in response to the state visit of Queen Elizabeth.

The largest proportion of protest events (53% of the number of events recorded) addressed the EU-IMF bailout or the government's policy of austerity. Both of these issues affect the entire public. Protests focusing on a single local grievance eg. loss of infrastructure, proposed development that threatened the environment, and protests in response to an issue that affected a particular sector of society nationwide eg. People with disabilities, teachers, farmers, accounted for about 20% of protests each.

Analysis of results

Several patterns can be discerned from the data. The majority of the protest events (90%) fall into three broad categories:

- i. Protests concerning an issue that affects the public at large
- ii. Protests concerning an issue that is national in scope but that directly affects only a certain section of society
- iii. Protests concerning a local issue where participants are from the affected community

The first two categories made up over 70% of Irish protest. It is clear that this does not conform to my expectation that the majority of protests would concern local issues. On examining the protests that have occurred, and the survey responses of protest participants it emerges that my assumptions about the structure of cognitive preferences were incorrect; the effect of the bailout on incentives across different issues was uneven; and I had not accounted for the extent to which variation in one incentive can have a knock-on effect on the balance of the others. However SCM can still be applied to analyse the protest that took place and to understand how the bailout interacted with the structure of cognitive preferences to produce these results.

The majority of the first category of protests (roughly 90%) addressed the issues of the conditions of the bailout and austerity. Some campaigns conflated the issues, others addressed one or the other exclusively. Protests on these issues took place most commonly in Dublin, which is unsurprising given that their target was the government. Usually the protest would involve a rally outside the Dáil, often preceded by a march. Marches often began at a historic site in Dublin such as the Garden of Remembrance or Kilmainham Gaol. Though this was never expressly commented on by any of the newspapers, my speculation is that part of the reason behind this was to infuse the protests with a sense of history and importance, though it could simply have been pragmatic; these sites would be easy to direct protestors to if they were not familiar with the city. Though the average size of each protest was around 1,200, a small number drew crowds between 20,000 and 50,000 (Whelan 2012; 14).

Examining the campaign at Ballyhea, which accounted for the lion's share of protests against the bailout, helps to clarify where my predictions that protest after the bailout would predominantly concern local issues and/or narrow demands went awry. I expected that the bailout would reduce the likelihood of people making broad demands through protest because the increased constraints on the government made it less likely that such demands would be efficacious. The survey responses of participants in the Ballyhea protest reveal that in spite of the bailout obligations individuals still believe that protesting could challenge and reverse its conditions and austerity policies and change the behaviour of both governments and financial institutions (Survey responses 3,5,6,7, Ballyhea bondholders protest). In particular I did not account for the effect that participation itself has on efficacy: according to some respondents, their initial incentives for protesting were social rather than a belief that protest would bring about a change in policy, but the act of protesting as well as interacting with others who shared their anger over the bailout made them

believe the campaign could make a difference (Survey response 6, Ballyhea bondholders protest), participation had a similar effect on efficacy in the Save Waterford campaign (Survey response 1, 2, Save Waterford).

At the same time, while the campaign departed from previous patterns of protest insofar as it aimed for systemic change, the campaign still has many of the characteristics of Irish protest that were typical before the bailout, and these help to explain the persistence of the protest. The campaign was locally based and the organiser is a well known local figure who started the protest by contacting friends. Though numbers at the first protest stood at just 18, the small size of the village and the fact that the marches took place after mass on a Sunday make it likely that most residents would have had prior contact with at least some of those protesting and this would have increased the costs of non-participation, even for individuals for whom efficacy was low. Thus by the 100th week of the protest, about 250 of the village's 1000 residents had participated at least once in the march and the average number of marchers per week rose to about 60.

The nature of the grievance itself also seems to have influenced the characteristics of protest. As previously mentioned, prior to the bailout there had been success in organising protest against economic grievances that were local in character, often framed as threats to the local community. The responses of those who participated in the Ballyhea campaign indicate that the bailout was also represented as an attack on 'us' which created a duty to 'take a stand' but this time its consequences affected the entire state and therefore the us, the community in question was the Irish people (Survey response 3,5,6,7, Ballyhea bondholder protest). The leaders who had accepted it and were implementing its conditions had failed as stewards of independence and brought the Irish people under a foreign power once more (Anon 2010; 17). Participants saw protesting as an act of rebellion against oppression which was part of their Irish identity, and felt a duty to future generations to protest (Survey responses 3, 5, Ballyhea bondholder protest).

This perception of the bailout as a new event in the narrative of independence helps to explain why, even though the existing structure of cognitive preferences had tended to lead to protest on local issues, there were a large number of protests addressing the bailout and these had relatively high levels of participation. Framing it as a loss of sovereignty (Collins 2010; 1) and a betrayal of those who had lost their lives fighting for independence (Anon 2010; 17) gave it a special emotive significance. Since it was no ordinary grievance it was not enough to respond with the type of protest that was ordinary before it was imposed.

In protesting the conditions of the bailout and the behaviour of the banks, the Ballyhea participants were also challenging the current economic model. This marks a significant departure from previous patterns of protest and state interaction with civil society where the headline demand of a movements tended to focus on a single issue. However as noted above, often the grievances addressed in these protests flowed from the state's pursuit of neoliberal

economic policies and some participants protest was directed against this logic as a whole.

Many protests addressed the social consequences of the bailout such as unemployment and evictions due to high levels of mortgage debt and criticised the injustices that flowed from the application of law. While it is unlikely that all those participating in these campaigns aimed for the abandonment of the neoliberal economic model, the fact that some of the most well attended protests during the period under review belonged to this category, is evidence of the strength of public opinion against the bailout.

There were almost as many protest events concerning issues that were national in scope, but directly affected only certain sectors of the population, as protests concerning local issues. I expected that demands would be local as single issue campaigns would have more chance of success, however a campaign that is national in scope can still address a single issue, as where the decision affects a single sector of society, e.g. people with disabilities.

These protests were also something of a departure from the type of protest that preceded the bailout. As noted above the collaborative nature of social partnership and the favourable working conditions negotiated under that structure had reduced the preference for protest. However the impact of the bailout increased the incentives to protest. These protests most often addressed either: proposed cuts to health services; work conditions for a particular sector eg nurses, teachers, farmers or; cuts to education (including third level). As was the case with protests challenging austerity people often travelled to Dublin to stage their protests about these issues and marches and rallies were the mainstay in terms of protest form and the average number of participants was 1,317.

Even though they do not concern local issues the fact that protests made narrow demands eg. for services to be retained, is consistent with the effect I expected the bailout to have on efficacy. A participant in one such protest framed the proposed cuts to services as being 'within [the government's] power at the stroke of a pen to reverse' while acknowledging that there were certain areas in which the government no longer had any flexibility (Nihill 2011; 8). The data on protests concerning cuts to the health and education sectors in particular support the statement that the bailout increased the norm to protest.

However the norm to protest was not strengthened across all issue areas. Responding to the survey the organisers of the student protest campaign found the campaign was damaged rather than galvanised by the bailout as public sympathy for the movement declined. In protesting cuts to resources the movement found itself in conflict with other civil society groups, such as trade unions, who were also trying to maintain their levels of funding (Survey response 4, Third level funding protest). Arguably a norm *not* to protest had emerged as the public now expected students to 'do their bit' and get on with it' like everybody else who is dealing with the consequences of austerity (Carroll 2012; 8). The explanation for this variation would seem to be the nature of the

grievance the students were protesting. The entire public avails of the health service and primary and secondary level education and the majority can accept that they are among the most vital goods the state provides, and must be protected even in the face of significant costs. There is not the same level of consensus as to whether third level education should be free. Realising the students' demands would force the government to make up the cost elsewhere and this could be through further cuts to another sector which the public values more.

The experience of these campaigns has interesting implications for the impact of costs on the emergence of protest. As noted earlier the existence of a social movement organisation with experience in protesting the grievance at issue lowers the individual costs of participation and thus increases the likelihood of participation. Yet if we look at the Save Waterford campaign, the group did not exist before the services at Waterford hospital were threatened. Further, the two women who started the campaign did not have any previous experience of activism (Survey responses 1,2 Save Waterford). Yet the campaign succeeded in organising several large rallies. This would seem to be in line with Dieter Opp's prediction that until costs reach a certain threshold they will not prohibit the emergence of protest where the other incentives are present to a sufficiently high level (Dieter Opp 2009; 60). This can be contrasted with the experience of the student movement, which did have the advantage of a pre-existing organisational structure. The grievances affecting students had also increased since the bailout, while the financial and logistical costs of organising protest had remained stable. Yet the difficulty its leaders experienced in attracting participants after the bailout suggests that overall the bailout reduced the incentives for participation, by changing perceptions of the urgency of their grievance, and reducing students' belief that protest could be efficacious (Carroll 2012; 8).

Though the proportion of protests that concerned local issues was lower than I had expected, those that did take place broadly followed the patterns anticipated. The local issues that were addressed by protest fall into four categories: cuts to health services; cuts to local schools; loss of infrastructure and; environmental issues. The large number of protests that concerned the first two types of issue support my observation that the high value society places on these services being universally available creates a strong norm to protest when they are threatened. Protests were often outside the constituency offices of local TDs, at local authority headquarters or events that government Ministers would be attending. Community frames were also widely used, with the loss of services or infrastructure commonly cast as 'the death of the community' or 'tearing at the local fabric' (Holland 2012; 4). Interestingly the groups that coordinated local protest campaigns to save services were often *sui generis*, popping up in response to whatever issue was at stake. Many participants had never protested before but felt a duty, where services like education were threatened 'to protect our kids'(Irish Examiner 2011).

While the results of the study did not reflect the expectations set out above, we can still draw on the data collected to explain why the media has characterised Ireland as passive. Although there have been frequent, relatively well attended protests addressing the bailout, those that have been reported in mainstream media have had different characteristics to those seen in Greece, Portugal and Spain. The majority of protests targeting the bailout have been part of a small, sustained local campaign, taking place in a village in Cork where it is less likely to attract the attention of national and international media due to the proximity effect. The majority of the larger protest events that took place (those numbering above 10,000) tended to address the social consequences of the bailout, such as cuts to hospital services (Save Waterford), third level funding and the difficulties experienced by certain industries. It would be more difficult for journalists writing about Ireland from the outside, lacking an understanding of the nature of participation and protest in Ireland to make the link between these protests and the bailout, and to perceive the Irish as passive.

Conclusion

This study only offers a glimpse of the characteristics of protest in Ireland since the bailout. However, even from this brief introduction one can see that protest is taking place. While the protests addressing the bailout have not been as visible as those seen in other states where a bailout was imposed there have been a large number of protests addressing the issue and its social consequences and the average participation has been quite high relative to the population. The fact that protest in Ireland displays characteristics that can be contrasted with protests seen elsewhere does not justify the characterization of the Irish as passive.

Although protest did not have the characteristics I hypothesized they would have based on SCM, this model remained useful both for explaining the gap between my expectations and reality, and analysis of the data on protest and survey responses were in line with the central propositions of the model. The contrast between protest in Spain, Greece and Portugal and protest in Ireland in response to austerity and EU-IMF bailouts supports Dieter Opp's central proposition in developing SCM: that the emergence of protest and the form it takes do not depend solely on macro level factors. SCM holds that to understand what causes individuals to protest and the type of protest they engage in we must examine how macro level factors affect existing preferences and incentives at the micro level.

Based on the type of protest that took place before the bailout, those participating in protest felt a strong sense of community and attachment to their local place, and this meant that frames which conceptualized government actions as a threat to that community were often successful in incentivizing protest. The preference for local control and the sense of duty to protect services in the community influenced the types of protest that addressed the bailout. Though protest addressing national issues became more common these often

followed the patterns of earlier protest since these are the patterns organizers were familiar with. The organizers of the Ballyhea campaign named it the Ballyhea Bondholders Protest, ensuring that there was a link with their community even though the issue they were addressing affected the entire country. It was a call on people from that community in particular to stand up and be heard.

Campaigns on national issues relied less on framing issues as attacks on a particular village or area but other existing beliefs and attitudes in the structure of cognitive preferences were drawn on to engage people in protest. Prior to the bailout Ireland's people felt relatively secure in Ireland's sovereignty and this may explain why protest on national issues was less prominent. Unpopular government decisions tended to disproportionately affect one community more than another and so it was their own community, rather than the Irish nation, that people felt bound to defend. After the bailout government policy threatened the welfare of the whole country, and the bailout itself was represented as a loss of hard won independence. This led to a reawakening of latent nationalist sentiment and changed the balance of incentives to protest on national issues.

The data on protest after the bailout also gave some insight into the importance of efficacy in determining the type of protest that emerged. I expected that in the case of Irish protest after the bailout the result of this proposition would be that protest addressing the bailout and its consequences would be less widespread than those addressing narrow issues because there was more likelihood of changing narrow policy decisions. In reality the majority of protests did address the bailout and its consequences, but efficacy was still an important incentive: those participating responded that they did believe their protest would be efficacious and that they would not be protesting otherwise. The results also highlighted the importance that social incentives have in Irish protest. Participants from each of the campaigns surveyed spoke of a duty to protest in order to defend a common good. Survey responses also highlighted the interdependent nature of incentives and how the balance of incentives can change as a campaign develops: participants may get involved initially out of a sense of duty or of identification with a group rather than a belief that protest will make a difference but the experience of protesting and interacting with a wider group changed their measure of their own efficacy.

As well as providing evidence that protest is part of the repertoire of contention in contemporary Ireland, the findings demonstrate how the characteristics of protest in Ireland changed after the bailout. Protest came to focus predominantly on national and industrial issues. There was a move away from the patterns of participation and protest seen before the bailout, when contention was limited to piecemeal reforms rather than broader change. Protests that address austerity and the conditions of the bailout, and that challenge the current economic model and advance a different vision of justice became much more prevalent.

The far reaching impact of the bailout is also evident in the rise of industrial conflicts and the utilization of nationalism in framing protest. The reduction in

economic resources and autonomy in policymaking reduced the capacity of the social partnership model to contain conflict. The state also found itself the frequent target of protests in its employer capacity. The conciliatory relationships that had prevailed between state, employees and employers had broken down in favour of confrontation. The struggle for independence is at the centre of the Irish national identity and historical narrative. The characterization of the bailout as a betrayal of sovereignty and a reversal of the gains made in the struggle for independence gives it a special significance that is reflected in the protest that emerged in response to it. While these may have been less dramatic and visible than those seen in other countries, the prominence of large scale protests addressing a national economic issue was a new departure for Irish protestors in the 21st century.

Bibliography

- Allen, K., 2012. How the rich wage a class war *Irish Marxist Review* pp2-16
- Allen, K., 2012 Recession and the new resistance *Irish Marxist Review* pp3-12.
- Anon., 2010. Was it for this? The state of the nation (letter to editor) *Irish Times*, 18 November, p. 17.
- Anon., 2011. All we'll be left with is bigger class sizes. *Irish Examiner*, 20 December.
- Anon., 2012. Protests against house and septic taxes spread across Cork. *Corkman*, 23 February.
- Anon., 2012. Public Show of Defiance against Charges. *Corkman*, 1 March.
- Benford, R. & Snow, D. 2000 Framing Processes and Social Movements: an Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* pp 611-639.
- Carberry, G., 2012. All things have their best before date. *Irish Times*, 17 May, p. 2.
- Carroll, S., 2012. I predict a riot...or maybe not: Irish youths steer clear of protest. *Irish Times*, 26 September, p. 8.
- Collins, S., 2010 Majority back bailout but say sovereignty lost. *Irish Times*, 18 December, p. 1.
- Cox, L., 2006. News from nowhere: the movement of movements in Ireland. In: L. Connolly & N. Hourigan, eds. *Social Movements and Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 210-229.
- Cox, L. 2010 Another world is under construction? Social movement responses to inequality and crisis *The Irish Left Review*.
- Cox, L. 2011 Popular responses to the Irish crisis and the hope for radical change: organic crisis and the different meanings of counter-hegemony *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest Conference 2011*, April, 2011, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Dalby, S. The Nuclear Motion: Victory for the Irish Anti-Nuclear Movement
Dawn Train 1984-1985.

Dellepiane, S. & Hardiman, N., 2012. The New Politics of Austerity: Fiscal Responses to the Economic Crisis. *UCD Geary Institute Discussion Paper Series 07/2012*, pp. 1-59.

Ericson, R. V., 1998. How journalists visualize fact. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Volume 560, pp. 83-95.

Flood, A.N., 2013. Massive national rally of community campaigning against new household tax in Ireland, *Anarchist Writings*,
<http://anarchism.pageabode.com/andrewnflood/national-rally-community-campaign-household-tax-ireland> accessed 26 April 2015

Gamson, W., 1990. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Garavan, M., 2007. Resisting the costs of 'development': local environmental activism in Ireland. *Environmental Politics*, 16(5), pp. 844-863.

Holland, K., 2012. I love my Patients but the HSE seems to want us out. *Irish Times*, 13 October, p. 4.

Kane, C., 2012. *Irish Times*. Thousands protest over Waterford hospital, 12 November, p. 8.

Kelleher, O., 2013. Ballyhea against bank debt 100th rally. *Irish Times*, 28 January, p. 7.

Kennedy, E. B., 2011. Students pay respects to education. *Irish Times*, 25 November, p. 8.

Kirby, P. & Murphy, M., 2009. State and Civil Society in Ireland: Conclusions and Prospects. In: D. Ó. Broin & P. Kirby, eds. *Power, Dissent and Democracy*. Dublin: A & A Farmar.

Laffan, B. & O'Mahony, J., 2008. 'Bringing Politics Back In'. Domestic Conflict and the Negotiated Implementation of EU Nature Conservation Legislation in Ireland. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 10(2), pp. 175-197.

Leonard, L., 2007. Environmentalism in Ireland: ecological modernisation versus populist rural sentiment. *Environmental Values*, Volume 16, pp. 463-483.

Leonard, L. 2006 Moral framing in a resource dispute: the Shell to Sea campaign in North Mayo *Studies: AN Irish Quarterly Review* pp. 375-386.

McAdam, D., 1996. Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions. In: D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy & M. N. Zald, eds. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 23-40.

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. & Tilly, C., 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, D. S., 2004. Protest and Political Opportunities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 30, pp. 125-145.

Nihill, C., 2011. Occupy Dame Street Campaign Prepared for Long Haul. *Irish Times*, 5 November, p. 5.

Nihill, C., 2011. Protest against Special Needs Cutbacks. *Irish Times*, 14 July, p. 8.

Oliver, P. E. & Maney, G. M., 2000. Political Processes and Local Newspaper Coverage of Newspaper Events: From Selection Bias to Triadic Interactions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(2), pp. 463-505.

Opp, K.-D., 2009. *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique and synthesis*. First ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Peillon, M., 2001. The constitution of protest as sign in contemporary Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 16(1), pp. 95-110.

Punch, M., 2009. Contested urban environments: perspectives on the place and meaning of community. *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* pp 83-107 .

Whelan, N., 2012. We may top the austerity class but the pain is very real. *Irish Times*, 8 December, p. 14.

About the author

Mary Naughton graduated from University College Dublin in 2013 with a degree in law with politics. She is currently living in Colombia. She can be contacted at mary.naughton89 AT outlook.com