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## NEW RESEARCH MODEL IN THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF PROTEST

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**Abstract.** *The article presents a new research model of protest. It outlines the current state of concepts and research in the field of collective actions. Analysis of socio-group phenomena often associated with the initiation and development of civil protests is provided. The authors systematically examine socio-psychological constructs like the motive for justice and the feeling of injustice, the role of socio-group identity and attitudes towards involvement in collective actions, the importance of emotions, dissatisfaction and mistrust as predictors of protest behavior, and the role of social networks in protest dynamics. The article attempts to synthesise a research model with the most essential socio-psychological determinants of collective action involvement.*

**Keywords:** psychology of protest; social injustice; identity and attitudes; emotions and discontent; social networks.

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In the last decade, the world was swept by dynamic social processes, characterized by polarization, high levels of opposition and protests. Those processes called into question the essence of democracy. The USA, Germany, France, Ukraine, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary are only a small part of the countries where many people came out to primarily protect their economic interests. Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, as well as the recent war in Israel, have created an even more stressful environment that has increased people's sense of lack of control and powerless against threats.

This paper presents modern approaches and models with proven research achievements in the field of civil protests. Knowledge, and even more so, the study of social-group phenomena, is a scientific challenge with a high degree of difficulty. Actions that collect the grievances and aspirations not of a single person alone, but those of many and sometimes groups of thousands require a level of knowledge that is multifaceted and takes into account the dynamics in social situations, as well as the specifics of the sociocultural and political context. Protest actions can be expressed through various forms such as public events and demonstrations, rallies, civil disobedience, but also through petitions. In its general definition, "Social protest is a form of political expression that seeks to achieve social or political change by influencing people's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior or the policies of an organization or institution" (Loya, McLeod, 2020:1). But bearing in mind the specific country in which the study of the protest is conducted, we cannot fail to note the fact that in Bulgaria the history of protest actions and movements is young compared to that of Western European countries or the context of overseas countries. Thus, the specific phenomenology of the protest in a concrete - historical time and place are added to the complexity at the conceptual level.

The history of the development of social processes contains sufficient evidence of their cyclicity - starting from the revolutionary seizure of power by the majority, reaching the end of a given cycle to such a degree of opposition between the ruling minority and the ruled majority, that it causes collective actions in the form of protests. The study of protest as collective action presupposes a serious analysis of the theoretical and empirical studies produced up to this point, as well as the new factors of the environment. For example, the influence of the media and various new forms of information seeking (ex. through chat communities or social media groups) are part of the communication environment that

influences the processes of attitude formation and involvement in protest actions. The media context, especially the social media one, is highly dynamic, and trust in it varies depending on the source and other social factors.

Based on the forementioned specifics, this article proposes a new research model for understanding protest actions, which combines conceptually and empirically proven factors in the research field, but also adding new constructs relevant to understanding protest actions on the basis of conceptual analysis. The text consistently presents social injustice and a motive for justice in their relationship with the phenomenology of protests, social-group identity in its role as an integrating factor in collective actions, emotions inherent in mass situations, dissatisfaction - the main reason and impetus for protests, trust as a significant factor for the involvement in civic active actions, and the influence of the mass media and social networks. Of course, the attitudes and readiness to engage in some form of civic activity is a component that can manifest itself under the influence of any one of the components of a pre-protest situation, also presented in the conceptual analysis.

## **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF PROTEST ACTIONS:**

### **Motive for Justice, Social Injustice and Protest**

The economic and financial demands at the heart of the current protests at their core contain citizens' beliefs about the absence of justice, which range from dissatisfaction with pension reform (France), to dissatisfaction with many corrupt practices (Bulgaria), to dissatisfaction from global influences (USA, Ukraine, Hungary). Justice, and more precisely injustice, are multifaceted constructs with their contemporary content and specifics in perceptions, which makes them of special importance for understanding the processes of collective action. Some of the main research questions we pose are a series of factor influences on the perception of injustice; the perception of social injustice; the willingness to seek justice, expressed through the motive for justice; the relationship of different types of injustice with motive for justice, and willingness to protest. These topics outline the main investigated concepts and the new elements in research model.

The notions of "*motive for justice*" and "*social justice*" are at the heart of delineating the relationship with protests as collective action. The justice

motive is the inner force that drives each person's behavior to achieve his own idea of reciprocity, i.e. a match between what the individual gave (invested) and what they got in return. Social justice, on the other hand, is strongly focused on intragroup and intergroup relations that ensure reciprocity and respect.

An important focus in the context of protests is the relationship between the *motive for justice* and *social change*. Lerner and Lerner (1981) approach the topic by distinguishing between particularism and universalism. The particularistic form of social organization and the corresponding particularism in social thinking implies the selection of a person's inner qualities and the imposition of a special attitude. This approach provokes resistance and a natural counterpoint in the face of the universal approach. Universalism, on the other hand, rejects individual qualities, relying on broad and universal standards applicable to every person. Particularism emphasizes context, while universalism enforces trans-situational principles. In the human history particularism is associated with special privileges based on the descent. In turn, universality is associated with privilege as a function of equally accessible qualities that everyone, regardless of background, can possess (Lerner & Lerner, 1981). What is the unfinished business of the universalism that has virtually dominated the modern world through widespread liberal and neoliberal governments? It still does not fully and universally apply to different ethnicities, relationships within families, men and women, LGBT communities, etc. The current period tried to make up for the unfinished business, going to extremes like any ideological niche. As early as 1981, Lerner and Lerner noted that the new form of universalism that we now account for would be directed at second-level relations, which could lead to personal particularism, i.e. what is fair is determined primarily by self-interest and the narcissistic perspective of the justice motive (gender, civil rights, sexual preferences, consumer status). Lerner and Lerner's stated theses make a direct connection with the liberal and neo-liberal period of governance in recent years, which emerged on the background of many protests and was accompanied by widespread discontent directed against the emphasized self-interest and narcissistic form of governance (ibid.).

Three types of justice are generally distinguished: *distributive justice* includes a variety of models. *Relative deprivation* models argue that people are concerned about deprivation in the final distributional outcome, relative to some stand-

ard, but this is not necessarily related to problems of injustice. Various other psychological theories point out that people's reactions do not happen in the abstract. Instead, these responses arise through the comparison of experiences to given reference points (eg, anchoring and tuning, Kahneman & Tversky, 1982, prospect theory, Kahneman, 1992), which again is not necessarily related to justice or injustice. Helson's theory of adaptation level (Helson, 1964) deals with dissatisfaction with discrepancies between obtained and desired outcomes, without necessarily including the mediating factors of justice. In other words, people react to current events based on the level of satisfaction they are used to associated with their personal history. *Procedural justice* involves questions about how decisions are made. Leventhal (Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal, Karuza & Fry, 1980) developed a legal framework that includes both distributive and procedural criteria in an attempt to expand the legal framework provided by theories of justice. Thibaut and Walker (1975) similarly distinguish between distributive and procedural justice concerns, drawing on legal literature that distinguishes between substantive (substantive) and procedural justice and seeks objective criteria for identifying each type of justice. Thibaut and Walker (1978) suggest that people view fair procedures as a mechanism for obtaining fair outcomes—which is the goal in “conflict of interest” cases. These theories of *procedural justice* recognize that people are concerned about how outcomes are obtained. In addition to evaluating the fairness of outcomes, people evaluate the fairness of the procedures by which those outcomes are determined. This is also the reason why in law compliance with the rules of procedure is the main criterion for achieving a fair decision. Retributive justice (retributive justice) deals with the rules and norms that, once established, can be broken and the decisions of legitimate authorities can be disobeyed. In fact, studies of managerial, legal, and political problems show that rules are often not followed and the decisions of authorities are also often ignored (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Hence the question of how to react when rules are broken, which is of fundamental importance for the viability of organized groups.

Retributive justice suggests that victims feel a need to try to restore justice after being victimized. (Austin, Walster & Utne, 1976; Brickmann, 1977). Victims often feel that *restorative justice* is an inadequate response to rule breaking. They believe that in addition to restoring justice, those who have broken the rules should be punished.

The three main types of justice thoroughly describe the conceptual content of justice but there's little research on the dynamics and weight of the three types of justice in the current context, which poses a serious research task for scientific research.

*In the context of the new model, the main question is why do people protest and what is the connection to social justice and the justice motive?* Classical theories propose that people engage in protests to express their grievances arising from relative deprivation, feelings of dissatisfaction, or perceived injustice (Berkowitz, 1972; Gurr, 1970; Lind & Tyler, 1988). However, social movement researchers are beginning to question the effects of grievances on participation in protests and suggest that the question is not so much whether protestors are affected but whether affected people participate in protest. Two theories come the closest to the connection between justice motive and protests: 1. *Grievances theories*. Central among grievance theories is relative deprivation theory. Feelings of relative deprivation result from comparing one's situation with a given standard—be it one's past, someone else's situation, or a cognitive standard such as fairness (Folger, 1986). If the comparison leads to the conclusion that the individual does not get what he deserves, then they experience relative deprivation. Runciman (1966) calls relative deprivation based on personal comparisons *egoistic deprivation* and relative deprivation based on group comparisons *fraternal deprivation*. Research has shown that sibling deprivation is particularly important for engagement in protest (Dubé & Guimond, 1986; Major, 1994). However, Foster and Matheson (Foster & Matheson, 1999) show that the relationship is more complex. They show that when the group's experience becomes relevant to one's personal experience—i.e. when that experience becomes political – the motivation for protesting increases.

People who experience both personal deprivation and group deprivation are the most motivated to go out to the streets. Based on a meta-analysis, Van Zomeren et al. (2008) concluded that the cognitive component of relative deprivation (as reflected in the observation that one receives less than the comparison standard) has less influence on action participation than the emotional component (expressed through feelings like frustration, outrage and dissatisfaction about these results). In addition to relative deprivation, social psychologists also use social justice theory to theorize grievance and protest (Taylor & Smith, 1998). People care more about how they are treated than about the results.

Based on these findings, Tyler and Smith suggested that procedural justice may be a more powerful predictor of participation in social movements than distributive justice, although they never tested this idea directly (Taylor & Smith, 1998). 2. *Prospect theory*. A central idea of prospect theory is that individuals determine their options according to their perceived loss or gain; therefore, they continue to order their preferences rationally. In other words, collective action successes are not deviations from rational decision-making. They are simply outcomes that expected utility theory cannot capture because of its assumptions about how individuals choose. Prospect theory suggests that people behave differently when they fear potential losses than when they feel they will accrue potential gains (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988). As a result, the theory categorizes individual decision-making according to the individual's perception. This shows that feeling of loss motivates people to behave differently compared to acting on utility maximization. Prospect theory suggests that people are more sensitive to losses than gains relative to a reference point, which is usually the status quo. Therefore, one is more likely to act to avoid losses than to acquire more gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). If people's loss aversion is used as their motive for contribution to the collective good, this can explain why people would participate in the efforts of a group even when the group is so large that his or her individual gain cannot be maximized.

Expected utility theory, on the other hand, suggests that expectation that individuals will increase their net worth motivates cooperation. Expected utility theory therefore provides theoretical arguments for why large groups cannot successfully provide collective benefits most of the time. The reason is that when the interested group of people is large the individual has no incentive to cooperate because since best way to increase their expected utility is by allowing other members to provide the collective benefit. As a consequence of the lack of cooperation, groups are not expected to succeed in their collective efforts. Individual cost/benefit calculations are therefore assumed to take precedence over collective cost/benefit calculations. Expected utility theory "has been widely accepted as a normative model of rational choice and widely applied as a descriptive model of economic behavior" (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979:263).

A contribution to the understanding of the relationship between social conflict and social justice was made by Jerrold Mikula (Mikula & Wenzel,

2000). He considers *four different functions of justice for social conflict*: First, the trigger function, means that ideas of justice and perceptions of injustice can trigger social conflict. Second, argument as a function refers to the arguments and rhetoric of justice that can be used to support one's position in an argument. Third, according to the resolution function, core value as well as principles and rules of justice can limit social conflict and help generate ways and means of conflict resolution. Fourth, the acceptance function means that labeling conflict resolution resolutions as fair can help the acceptance of the relevant resolutions. It should be emphasized that Mikula conceptualizes justice as a subjective perception. Rather, it is interested in how perceptions and arguments of justice shape the emergence and course of conflicts. The critical factor that leads from the perception of injustice to dispute and open conflict is the lack of consensus between different parties in their assessment of a given situation. Divergent assessments and subsequent disputes are even more likely because people do not simply differ in their views, but differ in their systematicity of approach, in their identities, roles and perspectives. Three different perspectives can be distinguished regarding the perception of injustice: the perspective of the victim, that is, the individual who suffers injustice; the point of view of the causer, actor or perpetrator, that is, the person who caused the situation of injustice; and the perspective of an observer who perceives the critical situation without being personally affected (The fourth perspective is that of a possible winner, which may coincide with or be independent of the causer's perspective).

Social conflict will not arise from the mere perception of injustice until the perception of injustice is openly expressed in some way. There are a number of different ways in which people can respond behaviorally to perceived injustice (according to Mikula & Wenzel, 2000). People can do nothing, demand action to punish the agent or leave a relationship or a group. An open social conflict arises in only two of these cases, namely when individuals perceive an injustice and make a claim for restitution or compensation, or when they punish the actor in some way.

Social justice research clearly demonstrates the importance of fairness evaluation and related feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of people in social interactions. One goal of future research will be to better understand when and why social justice is driving the collective action.

### **Social-group identity and its role in civil protests involvement**

In the 1970s, a social psychological perspective on intergroup processes and conflicts developed in the form of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Belonging to different social groups is a significant factor - the main object of Tajfel's theory and research on social identity. A person has a personal identity as well as different social identities. Personal identity encompasses personal qualities and characteristics, while social identity represents membership or belonging to different social groups and social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). "Identity is our understanding of who we are and who other people are - and, by extension, people's understanding of themselves and others" (Jenkins, 2004:18). With the development of the scientific field of the civil protest, it became clear that it's not sufficient to clarify causes such as dissatisfaction, emotions, efficacy, etc. as reasons for participating in a protest. Increasingly, the importance of collective identity is highlighted as a factor in engaging in protest. Research shows that the more people identify with a group, the more likely they are to protest on behalf of that group (see details in Van Stekelenberg & Klardermans, 2013). A meta-analysis of different studies confirms this relationship (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). "Social identity is that part of the self-concept that arises from his/her awareness of his/her membership in a social group(s) and the value and emotional significance attributed to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978:63). Uniting for the purpose of collective action and for mass protests has as a basic prerequisite identification with a given social group or community. With specific goals to achieve, participation in protests on behalf of the respective group, is clearly based on identification with that association (Klendermans et al., 2002), (see Zografova, 2016).

Processes of social comparison are inherent in social relationships at both the personal and social-group levels. When social comparison occurs, people may perceive their situation as less favorable than that of other individuals or groups. Opposition between groups can also arise only due to the allocation of some individuals to a certain group, resulting in the so-called "minimal group paradigm" (Tajfel, 1970). But experimental situations with relatively small groups are different from intergroup conflicts among real and large groups or communities where high emotional intensity is manifested, as well as serious socio-political results are seen, i.e. this refers

to “maximal group paradigms” (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2010).

Identification with a given social group or category is associated with a high personal value of the characteristics or status of a this group. At the same time, the individual could leave one social group with low or declining status and join another one with higher status and better resources. However, this would be possible with sufficiently “permeable group boundaries”. Therefore, the structural characteristics of a social group are important for staying or moving to another one. The socio-structural *characteristic permeability* of group boundaries affects the individual’s perceived opportunities to change their membership in a group with higher-status. Permeable group boundaries allow disadvantaged group members to leave their group for a higher status group, whereas impermeable boundaries don’t offer such “exit” (see Hirschman, 1970). Another important socio-structural characteristic is *stability*, the degree to which status positions are stable or changeable. When group status positions are perceived as changing, protest is a possible means of increasing group status (Van Stekelenburg & Klardenmans, 2013).

Klandermans and Stekelenburg develop their model of protest collective action by including *identity, grievances, efficacy and emotions*. The model attributes a central, integrative role to identification processes (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2010). According to their model, grievances stem from interests and/or principles that are perceived to be threatened. The more people feel the interests of the group and/or the principles and values are threatened, the more affected they become and thus more willing to engage in protests to protect their interests and express their anger (see Zografova & Dimitrova, 2021 for a detailed analysis). The process of mobilization itself is considered essential for generating protest and is divided into *consensus mobilization and mobilization for action* (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

Gurr’s theory of deprivation (Gurr, 1970) and, before it, the classic concept of the frustration-aggression relationship (Dollard et al., 1939) create a sound theoretical base for the direction of research on dissatisfaction, factors for protest actions. Social comparison between people is inherent in all kinds of social relations and when they are related to inequality (e.g. access to resources or socio-economic status), they can provoke strong reactions, leading to rebellion, aggression and violence. Dissatisfaction with one’s social status or economic situation is a significant factor in generating grievances and frustration in the individual and/or the group. Social

identity, shared grievances, and group efficacy beliefs are well-studied predictors of collective action, but existing research overlooks the fact that collective action often involves a confrontation between those who are motivated to defend the status quo and those who seek to challenge it. Using nationally representative data from New Zealand (Study 1; N = 16,147) and a large online sample from the United States (Study 2; N = 1,513) researchers explored this contrast. Group identification, group injustice, group anger, and system-based dissatisfaction/anger mediate these relationships. These findings constitute the first empirical integration of system justification theory into a collective action model that explains when people will act collectively to challenge, and/or defend the status quo (Osborne & Jost, 2018).

Based on the many civil protests around the world, which often do not achieve their goals, researchers also ask themselves a logical question: Why do people continue to participate in protests, even though it often does not justify their demands? One of the answers to the question can be deduced from the studies of Drury and Reicher (2009), which set and develop a clear line in the research field regarding the role of the crowd in social changes in society, i.e. they seek a more general and distinct category than that of a group, community, or movement to bring into focus broader, spontaneous processes that can catalyze social change. Thus, the authors clarify the dynamics of intergroup conflicts, as well as the role of social identities. Their interest is particularly focused on the collective empowerment of those involved in social change. Such empowerment is defined as “a positive socio-psychological transformation related to the sense of opportunity to (re) shape a social world, occurring for representatives of subordinate groups” (Drury & Reicher, 2009:708) who attempt to change or challenge existing power relations. This is important because “empowerment” is a subjective experience, changing the lives of participants and associated with possible social change. Social identity is taken as a major factor in social change, as it is through the collective empowerment of those who are subordinated that positions and identities can change (ibid.). The emergence of an inclusive self-categorization as “oppositional” leads to feelings of unity and expectations of support. It gives people the opportunity to insult the authorities. Such action, they continue, creates collective self-objectification, that is, defines the participant’s oppositional identity to the dominant outgroup (ibid.)

At the same time, one’s own opinion about the right to protest can play a significant role both in the manifestation of solidarity and in support of protest

actions (Saavedra & Drury, 2019). ). It is necessary to take into account the role of various factors such as, for example, personal experiences related to the protest, personal and social background, personal experience and views of the events, de/motivation to participate, various changes in personal relationships, friendships, behavior in public spaces etc. (see for detailed analysis Draganova, 2016). According to Jeffrey Juris, the protest creates solidarity between the members of the society that is more flexible and exciting (Juris 2008, cited in Draganova, 2016). In the new research model, to which the current analysis of the researches in the discussed area is directed, both social group identity, grievances, emotions, but also civic activity, involvement in current social processes will be included.

**The social attitudes** of individuals regarding involvement in given collective protest actions are an essential component in the readiness for protest activity. Based on the created social attitudes, the individual decides to participate or not participate (Dimitrova, 2018). Social attitude is defined as an internal predisposition that is activated under the influence of certain external stimuli and provokes corresponding - positive or negative - reactions on the part of the subject in relation to external (for him) objects or social situations. Since social attitude is unobservable, relevant inferences must be made about it from behavior because it manifests itself in, or through, it (e.g. Aronson, 2009). The specific thing about the social attitude is that it is always oriented towards some social object and is formed in specific social conditions. Specific research on attitudes towards civil protest is rare in the literature. And when they are discussed, they are in the context of other variables, assumptions, or context of analysis. Rather, questions such as how group effectiveness is perceived influence the formation of protest attitudes. Effectiveness is associated not only with exercising control over group actions, but also with self-regulation of each group member's thought process and motivation (Bandura, 1997).

Social attitudes of individuals are oriented in the form of relations not only to given subjects, but also to existing political, economic and cultural phenomena in social reality. They are a basic element in personal positions on various issues, in the evaluation and interpretation of information received from the external environment, in relations with various political institutions and their public actions. It is important to examine how social attitudes are formed and how sustainable they are regarding involvement in protest actions for the purposes of the present analysis. To what extent such attitudes develop un-

der the influence of behavioral manifestations and verbal statements of public figures and generally under the influence of the media. The suggestions of the mass media when covering protest actions or by presenting the opinion of various experts and analysts can encourage or, on the contrary, discourage participation in civil protests. In the time of the transition to democracy, as well as in modern conditions, protest actions have increased many times and their number and variety of occasions and manifestations is growing in the current social situation.

Evidence is found that *general protest attitude* is able to explain the effects of mobilization messages on a political issue; such messages increase tendencies and readiness for political action and shift attitudes to protest approval. The results show that overall attitudes toward protest reflect a broad range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors associated with protest, while more specific, already established predictors of collective political action, do not influence as significantly (Sweetman et al., 2019). According to the authors the predictive power of such a general attitude is impressive given the variety of different models developed to test political action in different settings. Moreover, it is a question of a generalized attitude towards the protest or an attitude in general, in contrast to the existing models for measuring specific attitudes in specific situations of protest and protest actions. By outlining the new model here, we aim to tap into people's real attitudes and find the relevant connections with their decisions to engage in collective protest actions, as well as their behavioral responses.

### **Emotions as a catalyst for protest behavior**

Important findings in social psychology suggest that emotions can also be defined on a collective level rather than just on an individual one - the intergroup emotion theory in particular, as formulated by Mackie et al. (2000). The basic postulate of the theory is that when social identity is salient, situations are evaluated in terms of their consequences for the group, eliciting specific intergroup emotions and behavioral intentions. A shared identity is necessary for developing the shared grievances and shared emotions that characterize the mobilizing potential of a protest movement. The strength of motivation to participate in a protest is the result of emotions and grievances shared with a group that the individual identifies. Grievances may arise from interests and/or principles that are perceived to be threatened. The more people feel that the interests of the group and/or group principles and values are threatened, the

angrier they feel and the more motivated they are to engage in protest to protect their interests and/or express their outrage. The model reveals that people participate in the protest because they see as an opportunity to change the state of things they are dissatisfied with (instrumental path), or because they identify with others involved (identification path), or because they want to express their anger with a certain goal because their values are violated (ideological path) (see Klandermans, 2004).

Outrage is the morally justified form of anger, and it is crucial to many aspects of protest. Not only does outrage motivate participation (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013) but it directs the blame at social problems, create sympathy and admiration for protesters, and guide strategic choices.

Anger also appears to be related to efficacy: people who perceive the ingroup as strong are more likely to feel anger and be willing to take action, while people who perceive the ingroup as weak are more likely to feel fear and withdraw (Klandermans, Van der Toorn & Van Stekelenburg, 2008). Group-based anger is mainly seen in normative actions where people with high efficacy and high level of hope go out to the streets to protest. However, for non-normative violent acts contempt appears to be more relevant (Tausch et al., 2008). This suggests two emotional ways to protesting. The path of anger is based on efficacy and is related to normative action. The path of contempt is more likely when legal channels are closed (Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990) and the situation is viewed as hopeless, invoking the nothing-to-lose strategy and non-normative protest (Kamans, Otten & Gordijn, 2010).

The activation and operation of group-level emotions is consistent with processes articulated within social identity, such that group-level emotions can be elicited based on subtle or overt activation of a category, as well as on the evaluation of events and phenomena that are related to the group contexts (Mackie & Smith, 2015). The different emotional experience that arises from such group categorization varies according to the group identity expressed. In other words, emotional profiles of the groups differ depending on the respective social identity, thus “the simple activation of different social categorizations leads to different emotional experiences” for the same individual (Mackie & Smith, 2015: 265). Furthermore, these group emotions differ in form and function from individual-level emotions.

Research has found that individuals with high group identification experience more pronounced

and intense intergroup emotions compared to those with low levels of group identification (Mackie et al., 2004), which then promotes the production of the emotion-specific action tendency (Yzerbyt et al., 2003). The ‘strength’ of an identity comes from its emotional component - the more ‘the group is in me’, the more I ‘sympathize with us’ (Yzerbyt et al., 2003) and the more motivated I am to participate on behalf of the group. In addition to a shared fate, shared emotions, and enhanced efficacy, identification with other participants generate a sense of internal obligation to behave as a “good” member of the group (Stürmer & Simon, 2003).

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine protest apart from anger. Van Zomeren et al. (2004) show that group anger is an important motivator for protest participation of disadvantaged groups. But members of the advantaged group may also perceive the advantage in the group as unfair and feel guilt and anger about it. Anger associated with ingroup superiority and, to a lesser extent, guilt, appears to be a powerful predictor of protest (Leach et al., 2006). There is a relationship with efficacy. People who perceive the group as strong are more likely to feel anger and desire to take action; people who perceive the ingroup as weak are more likely to fear and distance themselves from the outgroup (Klandermans et al., 2008). Anger leads people to perceive more challenging relationships with authority figures than subordinate emotions such as shame and despair or fear (Klandermans et al., 2008).

### Discontent and protest actions

Early explanations of collective action focused on grievances, which were mainly represented by relative deprivation theory and the idea that feelings of unfair disadvantage or injustice can arise when individuals make subjective comparisons of their own social conditions with others (Walker & Mann, 1987) and feel that their interests or principles are threatened or violated. Identity-based explanations derive from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and its claim that the psychological self is interpreted in terms of social categories and group affiliation.

Discontent refers to “resentment at the way the authorities handle a social problem” (Klandermans, 1997:38). At the root of every protest are grievances, be it the experience of illegitimate inequality, feelings of relative deprivation, feelings of injustice, moral outrage or suddenly imposed discontent. Illegitimate inequality is what relates to theories of relative deprivation and social justice; sudden griev-

ances refer to an unexpected threat or infringement on people's rights (Walsh, 1981). However, Foster and Matheson (1999) show that the relationship is more complex. They demonstrate that when the group's experience becomes relevant to one's own experience - i.e. when the personal becomes political - the motivation to protest increases; as a result, people experiencing both personal deprivation and group deprivation are most strongly motivated to take to the streets. Based on a meta-analysis, Van Zomeren and colleagues (2008) concluded that the cognitive component of relative deprivation (as reflected in the observation that one receives less than the comparison standard) has less influence on action participation than the emotional component (expressed through such feelings as dissatisfaction and indignation).

When the combination of identifiable grievances and contextual injustices becomes sufficiently intolerable, then the conditions for protest can be said to be 'ripe'. In other words, protests do not occur without relative frustration. While scholars generally agree that collective action results from perceived injustice, the nature of the relationship between grievances and direct political action is generally poorly articulated. The problem of collective action is often overcome when the magnitude of dissatisfaction becomes unbearable or a "saturation point of dissatisfaction" is reached. However, the concept of "creeping normalcy" (Diamond, 2005) offers a strong argument for how conditions, when they change gradually and over time, are accepted or tolerated, almost no matter how intolerable they become. That is, the same changes occurring in a single step will be experienced as a shock, offering those who reject social conditions a strong rallying cry for mobilization. Thus, small changes, or simply distressing conditions that have "always been this way," may not be enough to catalyze direct action. A persuasive concept is that of the triggering event, an event that, once disrupted or fulfilled, catalyzes the occurrence of the protest event (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002: 80). Such events are not usually associated with a sudden deterioration of conditions, but rather are incidents revealing the true nature of the social system. Triggering events also offer a perpetrator who may be the actual source of discontent, a metonymic figure or scapegoat for convenience without which mobilization is difficult, if not unlikely. Without the maturity (i.e. favorable conditions for mobilization) that comes with collective grievance, the triggering events are likely to remain personal tragedies. At the same time, without a triggering event, a class action complaint related

to unfair terms can never trigger an action. A driving event can be generated, meaning that even from one event (or a second event, depending on one's definition), motion can be generated. However, the movement can be formed earlier: at the moment of triggering (which makes it transcendental to the formation event) or even earlier - perhaps in the transition from concern to dissatisfaction. It is plausible that the movements actually facilitate the formation of grievances.

### **Distrust and protest actions**

Distrust and trust are two conceptually different constructs that need to be treated differently. They are conceptualized as attitudes, actions, or processes that help an individual cope with situations of uncertain outcome or vulnerability by reducing complexity in a world we cannot control (van de Walle & Six, 2014). Trust therefore involves a leap of faith and an expectation that a person (or institution) will reliably comply with and promote one's own interests. Distrust, in contrast, is not simply a lack of trust, but "an attitude in itself" (van de Walle & Six, 2014:162), based on the negative expectation that a person (or institution) seeks to harm its own interests and makes it not accept its own key cultural values (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004).

Yet both involve the same three bases of origin, which, however, are processed differently and lead to either trust or distrust: First, trust or distrust can arise as a consequence of (positive or negative) experience when people, politicians or institutions prove to be trustworthy or not. Second, norms and values can promote trust or distrust of more or less specific entities that are culturally carried over into everyday life (van de Walle & Six, 2014). Third, well-knit social associations and networks shape how people reciprocally learn and develop social capital and are intertwined in reflexive structures or dependencies that engender trust or distrust. Thus, political distrust would be an attitude that involves negative expectations regarding the trustworthiness of politicians, institutions, or a political system based on accumulated experience, one's own norms and values, or personal networks. Therefore, scholars have described trust and distrust as concepts that tell more about the social conditions in which people live and the quality of social systems than about the personal characteristics of citizens or their private property (Lenard, 2015).

Trust is seen as positive and distrust as destructive, while others argue that distrust is rational and trust is naive. Low trust is seen as an indicator that

the government is doing something wrong or that public services are not performing well. This is a cause for concern because low trust is thought to be associated with a decrease in civic behavior and undesirable voting behavior. Levels of public trust are seen as evidence that government is working effectively and democratically. Trust is inevitably important in a democratic society because democracies rely on citizens' voluntary compliance with the rules of government (Lenard, 2008). This puts trust at the center. Citizens must trust that public officials have a public interest, citizens must trust each other to uphold democratically agreed laws. This trust is neither blind nor naive. Citizens must remain vigilant without mistrust. Vigilance "is reflected in a range of institutions and active citizenship" (Lenard, 2008: 312). The main difference between trust and distrust becomes apparent when we treat trust and distrust as basic dispositions. Propensity to trust refers to the degree to which a person shows a consistent tendency to be willing to depend on other people in a wide range of situations (Harrison, McKnight & Chervani, 2001:38). Contrary to trust, mistrust can therefore be seen as "the confident expectation of intended harm by another" (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998: 446), something that clearly goes beyond a simple lack of trust. Mere lack of trust or distrust of someone (or an institution) does not mean active distrust of that person or institution (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004). It follows that the opposite of trust is lack of trust; the opposite of mistrust is also lack of mistrust. This means that mistrust is not a lack of trust, but an attitude in itself. It is the actual expectation that another participant cannot be trusted and will engage in negative behavior. While trust consists of "confident positive expectations regarding another's behavior," distrust consists of "confident negative expectations regarding another's behavior" (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies 1998: 439). These expectations color all aspects of the interaction and affect even the most basic perceptions of the other, resulting in a very biased view of "reality." Just like trust, the decision not to trust may be an established way of thinking, of living, which is reinforced in social life by a self-fulfilling prophecy. The same objective situation can lead to a decision to trust or distrust through the selective use of evidence and clues prompted by one's basic disposition (Einstellung) to trust or distrust.

Moreover, existing levels of distrust have been suggested to have opposite effects on political participation depending on social and individual background (Braun & Hutter, 2016). While some scholars emphasize the mobilizing nature of distrust,

given certain resources such as political interest, political efficacy, or education, others emphasize distrust-induced withdrawal and disillusionment (Schäfer, 2015). As citizen participation has always been understood as a key feature of any vital democracy (Hooghe, Hosch-Dayican & van Deth 2014), analyzing the impact of distrust on willingness to engage is an important cornerstone for understanding its implications for democracy.

It's known that social networks influence trust towards national institutions. For example, a study shows a positive impact of online civic engagement on trust propensity and increase in trust towards institutions (Warren, 2014). Trust is not the only variable influence by social media. Another study shows that World Cup protests in Brazil in 2014 arised from a wide range of grievances combined with a relative sense of deprivation (Calderon, 2015). These grievance led to activation of online protest that brought other forms of collective actions, such as demonstrations (ibid).

### **The role of social networks in organizing mass protests**

Due to their exponential worldwide spread, social network sites have become a main communication channel, especially for some ages and social groups. Major election campaigns (ex. Barak Obama's and Donald Trump's president election) were conveyed primarily through social media, which is an evidence for the magnitude of political influence of this digital channel. This new media provided some game-changing technological affordances to the electorate like building cyber communities, access to real-time protest data, and high-speed transfer of information, that have the potential to drive change in users' behaviors. However, digital activism as we see it know, derived from a limited, one-way communication infrastructure that managed to provide novation in political expression. Protests enabled by digital technologies can be differentiated into two stages: a first stage of web-based activism and a second stage of social media activism (González-Bailón, 2013). Apart from chronology, what sets them apart is the nature of the technologies and capabilities of digital media at the time, as well as the penetration of the Internet into the general population. The first stage is characterized by the efforts of various NGOs, which, through signatures and information distributed by e-mail, generated international digital societies of activists united around a given cause. With the development of digital functionalities, these transnational networks are popularized

and consolidated. Online search engines provide information to everyone concerned, creating a basis for collective action (González-Bailón, 2015). It is important to emphasize that in this first period, civil activism was reactive – triggered by various official organizations.

The second stage of digital activism is characterized by the proactivity of citizens and the ability to take action without the help of external organizations. The World Wide Web and social networks have made local and international movements accessible and open to the average citizen. Ordinary users became the “crucial nodes” in the network (ibid:514). Social networks give citizens the opportunity to self-limit, without the presence of hierarchical structures, through the functions of communication, information sharing and activation of the circle of friends and friends of friends (ibid: 515). The set of digital tools in social networks that enable independent civic engagement is extensive – using GPS location, tracking current location, broadcasting live video, sending notifications to the entire community of friends and followers, sending instant voice messages, sharing of text and audio-visual information in groups with thousands of sympathizers. These qualities allow the aggregation of mass action at a speed and scale unseen in human history.

It should be noted that despite the unprecedented ease of engaging in civil protest, the use of digital tools is distinct from the determinants of protest behavior. Values, attitudes, political efficacy and motivation are still the key theoretical elements that explain mass political mobilization (Opp, 2009; Anduiza et al., 2012). Social networks are a mediator, a catalyst that supports awareness and the realization of civic activity. The protest movements were not caused by social media activity. The latter offer a quick and effective means of supporting the realization of the protest movement. There are also examples of mass organization on social networks that do not turn into actual live protests. In the end, it all depends on how the technology is used and how its capabilities are used (see González-Bailón, 2015).

With the advent of social networks, the line between the private and public domains is blurring - networks that are private and not necessarily political in nature can now be quickly mobilized for political ends (Bimber et al., 2005). This highlights the importance of human connections as essential communication structures, harnessing the power of personal contacts to activate mass action. Whereas in the early stage of digitally organized protests

people had to look for external initiatives to join, now these calls come from friends and acquaintances on social media. This factor has a positive impact on information dissemination, as we are more likely to share information about an initiative if the source is part of our social circles (Bakshy et al., 2012).

Protesters are recognized as early adopters of technology (see O'Rourke, 2011). They have embraced the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, drawing on the ability of these platforms to amplify their voices and self-organize activities. A flatter and more decentralized structure is formed in which power rests in the hands of the individual, making the group significantly more difficult for the police to contain because there is no clear leadership. Inherent risks of this approach identified include a loss of control and direction of the movement by the protest leadership and the potential to lose older members from participation in the protest and the experience they bring as they do not are as tech literate as the new younger generations. The use of social media by protesters continues the tradition of embracing new technologies to promote their messages and is seen as a platform that drives change (see O'Rourke, 2011). The functionalities of social networks present challenges for the police to adopt a defensive posture against groups using a highly flexible social network structure (ibid: 48). The anonymity afforded by the Internet enables individuals and groups to promote worldviews and actions inconsistent with the norms of civil society. Integrated cameras in smart phones embed geographic data into photos before uploading them to a user-selected Internet site.

Command and control exercised by modern police is to a significant extent carried out through information in cyberspace (see O'Rourke, 2011) and therefore police operations are susceptible to attacks on social networks, which can adversely affect logical decisions, taken by police commanders. Arguably, this feature allows protesters to effectively enter the decision-making cycle of law enforcement, thereby preempting their actions (O'Rourke, 2011). Salmond argues that this new momentary community is a form of intelligent crowd and composed around a certain problem and idealistic (Salmond, 2010). This smart grid can also adapt to changing police tactics and quickly deploy and reform when and as needed to achieve a specific objective.

Social media are said to play a vital role in disseminating essential information, such as information about the holding of rallies in Moldova, which

was not covered by the official media (Jost et al., 2018). Twitter has been suggested to be particularly useful for internationalizing protests in Moldova and broadcasting information about mass demonstrations (ibid: 89). These claims are opposed by authors who say that there are too few Twitter users in Moldova for such effects to be possible Morozov (2009). In general, skeptics point to the lack of concrete behavioral evidence that online citizen participation directly shapes offline events; they conclude that social media use is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of protest (see Jost et al., 2018).

## THE NEW RESEARCH MODEL OF THE CIVIL PROTEST

The need to develop a new empirically verified model emerged upon the presented literary analysis. The model reflects different levels of analysis - personal and social-group one. The next step is to highlight approaches to solving potential and/or real social conflicts. The new model includes significant factors and interrelationships between them, causing protest actions, /see fig.1/. They will be explored in their role as psychological factors underlying attitudes to engage in collective protest action, common socio-group identity, angry emotions, grievances and feelings of injustice, as well as the effects of social networks and media on the emergence and the maintenance of protest actions. Additional factors are likely to be observed in the research process and will be formulated after exploratory analysis.

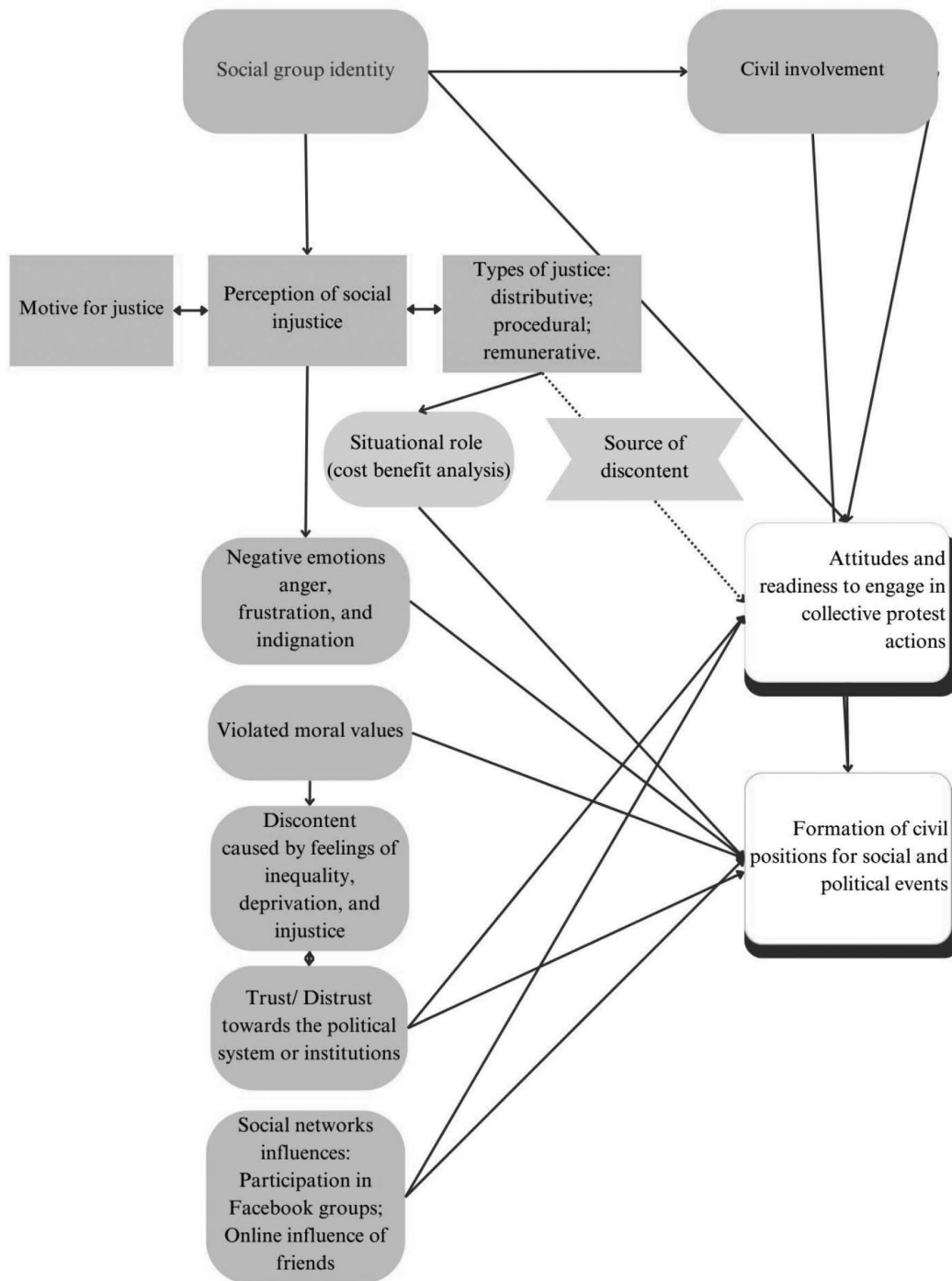
On the basis of the literary analysis, the social group identity is outlined as an integrative factor for the socio psychological aspects of the protest. As the present text makes clear, this phenomenon can both unite and divide and even oppose citizens, and especially in a situation of politicized collective identity and the formation of leadership cores in a pre-protest situation. Collective identity is a decisive factor both in long-lasting structural inequalities and in clear dissatisfactions with the status quo and specific distributions of resources. At the same time, some new phenomena such as civil involvement in socio-political processes, attitudes and readiness for participation in protest actions will be investigated. A new aspect of the research model is the formation of civil positions for social and political events. This is a particularly important component, which has not been given special attention in research until now, and is influenced by the array of factors included in the model. Moreover, it is a strong indicator of per-

sonal and group positions, civic views and beliefs on given events and political persons. The motive for justice and the perception of social injustice are at the core of the model, assuming that dissatisfaction with perceived injustice and its intensity play the role of a stimulus for protest actions. New elements in the model are the search for interrelationships between the motive for justice and the perception of social injustice, as well as the relationship between the perception of social injustice and its association with a specific form of injustice. The aspect of search for interdependence between the forms of injustice and the role of a person in the created unjust situation brings novelty to the model. Tracing the process from the inner force that drives each person's behavior to achieve his own idea of reciprocity, through the situations of social conflict and dissatisfaction, and arriving at the specific role of the individual (victim, perpetrator or observer) will give a clearer picture of contemporary aspects of protest collective action.

Another key factor in the research model is emotions - they are perceived to underpin and often be the catalyst for protest action in the protest scientific literature, so they are a useful tool through which collective protests can be explored and understood in depth. Anger stands out as the main negative emotion - perceived deprivations and a sense of injustice provoke the anger of a certain social group, which often encourages its desire for protest actions. From this perspective, anger appears to be a powerful predictor of protest. At the same time, another important determinant of participation in collective protests is various frustrating events in the person's life that motivate and mobilize him to show solidarity and join a given protest. The specific role of the individual feeling of dissatisfaction, the feeling of injustice and of violated moral values play the role of a major psychological factor for such participation.

Last but not least, the research group included social networks' influence as separate factor to investigate its role in forming attitudes for protesting actions and formations for civil positions. The mediating role of social media for protest inclusion is well-known (Jost, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013; Valenzuela, 2012), however we want to further investigate their predictive power and their unique specifics such as viewing friends' activities related to protests and participation in online activist communities.

The components of the socio-psychological phenomena and their interrelationships are visualized in the following research model:



**Figure 1.** Research model of social psychological determinants of involvement in collective protest action

### Conclusion

One of the greatest research challenges in social and political psychology is the phenomenon of collective action. Civil protest is a particularly complex object of research, both because of low developed research in Bulgaria and because of its dynamic nature, related to the fact that it is about group actions, sometimes too massive and not clearly understood

even by the participants in the protests. Following an overview of the problem area, the authors present modern approaches and models in the field of civil protests. We outline the main components of a new model for studying the phenomenon of “civil protest” and, more specifically, its psychological determinants. At this stage, the model is theoretical, containing both the foundations of accumulated research results and new hypothetically

described interrelationships expected to be verified in qualitative and quantitative research. This would outline directions for solving real social conflicts. The interactions of psychological predictors of attitude generation and readiness for protest action, as well as the deeper processes of experiencing injustice, anger at inequalities and frustration in their role as psychological factors, will be explored. The research will include the effects of social networks and media on readiness to engage in protests, as well as sociodemographic factors.

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