



# Perceptions of Justice and Violent Mobilization: Explaining Petroleum Related Riots in Southern Tanzania

Tanzania has remained remarkably peaceful despite being characterized as a high conflict risk country. Recent natural gas discoveries led to waves of protests and riots and loss of civilian lives in a region never before marked by any political unrest. The mobilization was fuelled by local perceptions of injustice and unfair treatment, which in turn was linked to years of neglect, a strong local identity, and broken expectations about the benefits arising from resource extraction. The case is relevant to other emerging petroleum producing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Brief Points

- Violent mobilization is often driven by perceptions of inequality rather than by objective economic differences.
- Poor resource management fuelled grievances and led to mobilization in Southern Tanzania.
- The demands of marginalized groups should be taken seriously by providing basic public goods as well as realistic information on petroleum developments.
- The lessons from Tanzania are relevant for other new petro-states in Africa such as Uganda, Mozambique and Kenya.

Elise Must *London School of Economics (LSE) & PRIO*

Siri Aas Rustad *Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

## From Periphery to Petroleum Producer

Tanzania is set to become a major natural gas producer within the coming decade. The country's recoverable resources of at least 57 trillion cubic feet could launch the country into middle-income status. The International Monetary Fund estimates annual revenues of USD \$6 billion from developing just half of the gas resources in a country where total government revenues were USD \$4.4 billion in 2011–2012.

These prospects created expectations of increased revenue flows and better public services, in particular among the population in the southern regions closest to the discoveries. Heightened expectations were also fuelled by ambitious politicians, such as former President Jakaya Kikwete, who declared in 2010 as part of his electoral campaign that "Mtwara will be like Dubai". These types of statements increased local hopes of change in an area that has long been socially and economically marginalized.

Riots erupted in 2012 and 2013 in Mtwara over the construction of a 532-kilometre pipeline bringing onshore natural gas from the Mtwara region to Dar es Salaam. This infuriated the local population, who had expected the gas to be used for local industries.

As in Tanzania, many new discoveries of high-value resources are being made in remote areas that are inhabited by marginalized groups. Petroleum has been found in the impoverished Turkana areas of Kenya, Uganda's oil discoveries overlap with the territory of the marginalized Kingdom of Bunyoro, and Mozambique's large offshore gas reserves are located in the underdeveloped Northern Region. Claims of unfair revenue distributions have already arisen in all these countries.

What lessons can be learned from the Mtwara case and applied to the management of resource wealth in other emerging petroleum countries? In this brief, we examine how perceptions of inequality and injustice can drive violent social mobilization around resource extraction, and suggest policy actions to address the perceptions-conflict link in resource-rich developing countries.

## Informed Policy Making

What are the specific perceptions of inequality and injustice that fuelled the Mtwara protests? Prior to our research, no systematic information existed to inform politicians about the needs, priorities, and expectations of local communities. This lack of information about marginalized communities is a typical scenario. Arguably, for investments in the natural gas sector to yield local development benefits, such investments should be made based on a rigorous evidence base.

To fill this basic information gap, we conducted an 800 respondent survey in Mtwara and Lindi in June 2015. In addition to the survey, we carried out 35 semi-structured interviews in 2014 and 2015, which included discussions with six riot participants. Figure 1 shows the contracted petroleum blocks, the pipeline and the surveyed districts.

## Real vs. Perceived Inequalities

Conflict scholars now largely agree that inequalities between identity groups – so called 'horizontal inequalities' – increase the risk of violent conflict. Similarly, the presence of non-renewable resources, particularly petroleum, increases conflict risk. However, we know little about the intermediate steps in the causal process between structural factors like group inequalities and resource endowments and mobilization for violent action. Studies on the inequality-conflict link generally assume that group inequalities create grievances, which in turn drive group mobilization, but never measure or test for the influence of these grievances. Rather, analysis often focuses on how objectively measured inequalities affect conflict risk.

Southern Tanzania is a case in point for understanding the difference between real inter-group differences on the one hand, and subjective perceptions of such on the other. **A key lesson learned is that while group-based inequalities may be a necessary condition for the outbreak of violence, they are probably not sufficient on their own.** Mtwara and Lindi have been marginalized compared to the rest of the country at least since independence. The two regions have persistently lagged both Dar es Salaam and the country average on all available development indicators, such as connection to the electricity grid as shown in Figure 2. Despite being marginalized, the

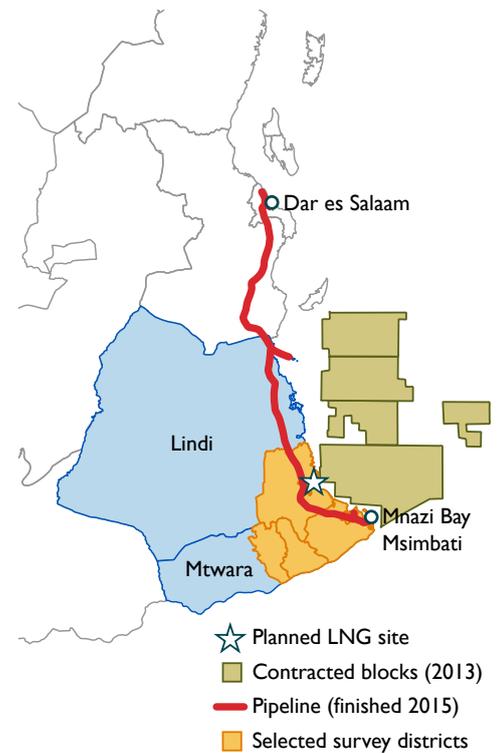


Figure 1: Map of natural gas operations and selected survey districts

inhabitants of these areas remained at peace for at least 50 years before riots erupted.

The marginalization has paved the way for a strong regional group identity, with both people from Lindi and Mtwara identifying themselves as 'Wakusini' – the Swahili word for 'Southerners'.

Despite the clear objective economic marginalization, only 46% from Mtwara and 71% from Lindi perceive their region to be economically worse off than other regions in Tanzania. Next, if we look closer at the two regions, Figure 3 shows that economic conditions in Mtwara and Lindi are relatively equal on measures of household asset ownership.

**A second lesson learned from southern Tanzania is that relatively similar objective economic conditions in Mtwara and Lindi translate into quite different public perceptions about their situation.** Some of these differences in perceptions are likely to be linked to the fact that thus far Lindi has not seen many benefits from the gas. In contrast, Mtwara – the site of the protests – has been the hub for all exploration activities,

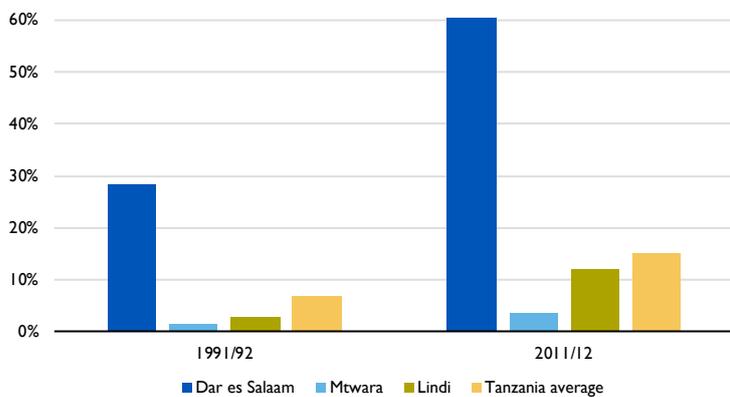


Figure 2: Percentage of households with electricity in Mtwara and Lindi vs. Dar es Salaam and Tanzania in total. Source: Demographic and Health Surveys.

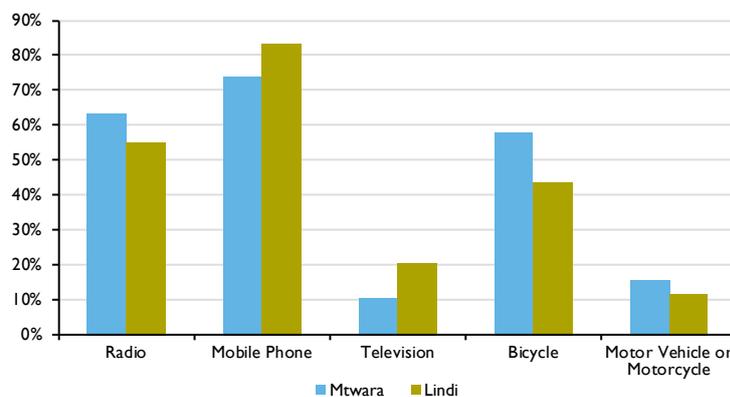


Figure 3: Asset ownership in Mtwara and Lindi. Source: Survey 2015.

and is also home to the smaller onshore field feeding the disputed pipeline. A number of cross-country studies find similar patterns in discrepancies between objective and perceived inequalities.

### Perceived Inequality vs. Perceived Unfairness

The perception of horizontal inequalities does not necessarily generate grievances around which people take action. **A third lesson is that for frustrations to arise, people must evaluate inequalities relative to other groups, and consider those inequalities to be unfair.** It is well documented that the acceptance of inequality is context-dependent, varying greatly among both individuals and groups. This is also evident in our data. While more people in Lindi (where there have not been protests) perceive that their region is economically worse off than other regions, more people in Mtwara (the site of the protests) perceive that their region is treated unfairly by the government. The share of people thinking the region is treated unfairly is lower in districts further away from the natural gas discoveries, and among those with no prior knowledge of the gas.

### Perceptions and Participation in Civil Unrest

These three lessons are important because perceptions and felt grievances drive behavior. While scholars no longer seem to question the salience of perceptions in driving mobilization, many studies still assume that objective and subjective inequalities amount to the same thing. Our study demonstrates that this is not

the case. Therefore, we developed measures to better test the effect of group grievances on conflict risk. Based on results from regression analyses, we conclude that people who think that their region is treated unfairly by the government are significantly more likely to both support and participate in civil unrest than people who do not hold this opinion. Frustrated collective expectations and perceived economic regional inequality are also significantly associated with support for civil unrest, but not with participation.

If the perception of unfairness shapes behavior, what drives the feeling of unfairness? What makes people move from accepting their position of relative deprivation compared to the rest of the country, to becoming frustrated enough to stand up against the government?

### Dashed Expectations Drive Perceptions

A first insight is linked to Gurr's theory of relative deprivation: **when people receive less than they expect, frustrations will arise, grievances develop, and mobilization for violent action will ensue.** We find evidence of each of these steps taking place in Tanzania.

In the initial euphoria following the first petroleum discoveries, government pledges of local development were plentiful. Nearly all of our 35 interviewees strongly emphasized how frustrated expectations over these failed development benefits infuriated them. The frustration was particularly linked to the decision to pipe the gas to Dar es Salaam. The survey responses reflect this feeling of dashed expectations. When asked how satisfied they were with the development in

living conditions for the people in the region so far, 57% in Mtwara and 70% in Lindi reported that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

While frustrated expectations are likely to be linked to a perception of unfair treatment, the interviews provide further insight into what fuels a feeling of unfairness and injustice. Generally, **it seems that a notion of injustice is strongly linked to a perception of being 'robbed'.** In general, each time a respondent stated that an injustice existed, it was linked to a feeling of other – often richer – people taking what was not rightfully theirs. On the other hand, none of the informants highlighted the lack of development as an injustice. The feeling of injustice is also strongly linked to land rights, with several respondents emphasizing that the government has 'grabbed' land for the gas developments and not paid a proper price for it.

Finally, **opposition party politicians took the opportunity to capitalize on the sentiments among the locals.** They organized several large community meetings where people were urged to take to the streets and protest against the natural gas management and the building of the pipeline. What started as peaceful protests developed into violent riots that were even more violently crushed by the police and the army.

### High Expectations, Modest Demands

Since dashed expectations are key to fuelling the feelings of injustice, we take a closer look at respondents' current expectations.

Close to 60% of the survey respondents expect their future living conditions to become better

or much better as a result of the natural gas developments. But what does this entail? We asked an open-ended question on what the most important things the government should do for the local communities are. The demands are modest, reflecting the very low existing level of development. Basic public goods such as access to water, health care, roads, electricity and education rank highest. In the interviews, local employment, information and inclusion in decision making are also emphasized.

### Information Is Key

Avoiding inflated local expectations depends on educating and informing people about realistic future scenarios regarding gas revenues. This has not been done in a satisfactory manner so far in Mtwara and Lindi. This is evident in the general low knowledge of the gas developments and of the companies involved in it. 9% of the survey respondents had not heard of the gas discoveries at all.

One of the most urgent information deficits is the time it takes before any revenues can be expected. Production start of the main discoveries is at least seven years away. Still, 22% of the survey respondents expected to notice an improvement in their own living conditions in 2015 or 2016, while 25% expected the same within a two to five year period. Another gap that needs to be addressed is how the local population can benefit from the gas production even if the gas is exported. This was highlighted by many of the interviewees, who claimed that the rage linked to the pipeline decision would have been substantially reduced if only the government had spent some time at the time of the announcement informing the local population about the decision and its economic rationale.

Effectively reaching as many local inhabitants as possible requires knowledge of their

information sources. In Mtwara and Lindi, the most frequently used and trusted source of information is the local radio.

### People Want Jobs, but Not High Skilled Jobs

The Mtwara and Lindi regions are marked by low levels of education and high levels of unemployment. 33% of the population have no formal education or have not finalized primary schooling – 11 percentage points above the national average. 47% of inhabitants are unemployed, although only 11% state that they are currently seeking work.

Creating jobs for locals is a substantial challenge in all developing countries. In a marginalized and underdeveloped region in one of the poorest countries in the world it may seem nearly impossible. However, the survey and interview responses offer some sources of optimism. First, people are very aware of their low skill level, and that this makes them unable to work in high-skilled jobs. Second, when asked which job they would like to have if they could choose, the large majority mention low-skilled jobs such as farming, fishing, and trader/hawker/vendor. Those who already have a job want to keep it, or have a minor upgrade.

At the same time, interviewees made clear that in the future, they want their children to get education and subsequently high-skilled jobs.

### Policy Implications for Tanzania and Beyond

In Tanzania, natural gas mismanagement seems to have increased group grievances to such an extent that a historically marginalized, but peaceful, population violently turned against the government. Broken promises of development, insufficient information, and

exclusion from the benefits of resource wealth played a central part in fuelling these group grievances. After suffering years of neglect and underdevelopment, the locals refused to accept being left out once more.

Similar sentiments can be expected from marginalized groups in emerging petroleum producing countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique and Ghana unless their demands are taken seriously. In order to manage expectations and reduce the conflict potential, governments should prioritize:

- Realistic information on future negative and positive effects of petroleum operations via trusted and frequently used information sources – local radio in the case of Tanzania
- In Southern Tanzania: Targeted investments in basic public goods such as clean water access, health care, electricity and education; inclusion of the local community in relevant petroleum development planning
- In emerging petroleum producing countries: data gathering on the priorities, attitudes and needs of local groups inhabiting petroleum regions, policy initiatives based on it ■

### Further Reading

Must, Elise and Rustad, Siri Aas (2016). “‘Mtwara will be the new Dubai’”: Dashed expectations, grievances and civil unrest in Tanzania’. Under review.

Must, Elise (2016). ‘From silence to storm. Investigating mechanisms linking structural inequality and natural resources to mobilization in southern Tanzania’. Under review.

## THE AUTHORS

Elise Must is a Visiting Researcher at PRIO and a PhD Candidate at London School of Economics. Siri Aas Rustad is a Senior Researcher at PRIO. Their research examines how group members’ perceptions and judgements of group inequality and natural resource management affect peace and conflict.

Email: E.Must@lse.ac.uk / sirir@prio.org

## THE PROJECT

The Conflict Trends project aims to answer questions related to the causes of, consequences of and trends in conflict. The project will contribute to new conflict analyses within areas of public interest, and works to produce thorough and quality-based analysis for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.