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The Regional Determinants of Collective Action in the Era of American Resistance

Abstract

This study investigates the regional determinants of collective action in the era of "American Resistance." Drawing on a new dataset from "Count Love"—a machine learning tool that collects data on protest events, timing, location, and number of attendees—we explore the regional determinants of collective action in the first three years following President Trump's election. In particular, we investigate how socio-economic factors, political partisanship and demographic composition of states affect the rate of protest events and protest participants. We also examine the regional determinants of mass mobilization for specific causes, such as civil rights, anti-gun violence, compassionate immigration policies, and climate change. Negative binomial regression results demonstrate that states with higher economic growth, more democratic political partisanship, and greater organizational capacity to police and contain mobilization witnessed more protest events.

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INTRODUCTION

In the years following President Donald Trump's election to office, movements challenging his administration, his policies and actions persist. Americans have marched for a variety of progressive causes, including racial justice, women's rights, climate change, gun violence, and compassionate immigration policies, among others. Just a day after Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017, over 5 million Americans participated in the Women's March (Chenoweth and Pressman, 2017). More recently, though sparked by police brutality, waves of massive protests against racial violence swelled in American streets, indicting the Trump administration for stoking white nationalism and racism. These unprecedented waives of collective action leave little doubt that the Trump administration has ushered in an era of contentious politics, which has acquired the sobriquet of "American Resistance" (Fisher, 2019). The post-Trump election era, as Tarrow and Meyer argue, is reminiscent of the mass mobilizations that Americans experienced during the period of the Civil Rights and the movement against Vietnam War (Meyer and Tarrow, 2018). While the scale of protests may be comparable, there is arguably a difference in the nature of the mass mobilizations of the current era, as compared to those of the Civil Rights and the Vietnam anti-war era of the 1960s (Fisher 2019; Fisher, Dow & Ray, 2017). The Civil Rights and anti-war movements came after many years of organizing, starting small and growing over time (Hall, 2005), whereas the resistance to President Trump, was launched with protests on a vast scale and relatively spontaneously.[1]

While the overall turnout for marches, rallies, protests, and vigils since the 2016 presidential inauguration falls somewhere between 10 and 15 million, there is considerable

[1] To be sure, there are other large-scale, spontaneous movements that have emerged over the past few years such as the Tea Party (2009-10), the Occupy Movement (2011-12), the Black Lives Matter (2014-16), but the "American resistance" too shares some of the characteristics of those movements.

variation in both the number of protest events and the number of participants across U.S. states. Net of population effects, some states have witnessed substantially more frequent protests, with more participants, than others. What accounts for this variation in the number of both protest events and participants across the United States? In other words, what are the *regional* determinants of collective action since the Trump presidency and what might such regional variation suggest about the geo-politics of resistance in the post-Trump era?

Drawing on a novel protest-event dataset, constructed by using machine learning tools, we examine the regional determinants of protest events related to civil rights, anti-gun violence, immigration, and climate change in the first three years following Donald Trump's election in the United States.[2] In so doing, we provide extensive descriptive analysis of the protest events with explications of their underlying causes and motivations. We explore competing explanations for both event mobilization and participation at the state-level, paying close attention to how socio-economic, political, and demographic variables affect protest activity across the U.S. states. Importantly, we also incorporate a measure of states' organizational capacity to police, contain and sometimes, repress collective action, given that the state's capacity to defuse mobilizing forces is crucial in understanding variation in the number of protest events and their participants. By systematically exploring protest events in the era of right-wing populism culminated by President Trump's election in 2016, we assess competing explanations for the American resistance.

Given our interest in regional contexts, states as units of analysis provide us with a significant degree of comparative leverage. But while state-level analysis is informative on the regional dynamics of collective action, it limits an examination of intra-state heterogeneity. Due

[2] Since the socioeconomic variables that we use as independent variables are only available until 2018, we are unable to extent are analysis for the entire 4 years of Trump's four-year tenure.

to data limitations, we are not able to disaggregate to lower levels, such as counties or metropolitan areas. A county-level analysis would capture more local nuances about the social-structural factors that explain variation in the number of protest events and protest participants. Nevertheless, focusing on state as a unit of analysis still allows us to investigate regional variation in the "structuring of social relations" that individuals are embedded (McVeigh et al., 2014, p. 636). Afterall, state-level characteristics do influence shared perceptions and collective outcomes. There is also another reason as to why a state-level analysis is particularly informative. Many of the participants in protests since Trump took office actually travel from surrounding smaller towns in the state to larger central cities, where events take place. Thus, state-level analysis is appropriate in order capture the characteristics of the population resident in a given state. Finally, as we are interested in how political environments and partisan politics affect protest activity, aggregating to the state level allows us to incorporate state-level measures of partisanship.

EVENT ANALYSIS AND DETERMINANTS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

This project engages a line of research in collective action that is commonly referred to as "event analysis," which investigates the duration, number of participants, presence of violence, and outcome of collective action. Though its origin can be traced to Sorokin's (1937) early compilation and collection of protest events, systematic studies employing event analysis as both a methodological and analytical strategy emerged in the 1960s to document the mass mobilization and activism of the era. For example, the Dynamics of Collective Action dataset, which comprises 22,280 protest events that occurred between 1960 and 1995 as reported by the *New York Times,* has enabled researchers to document variation in movements for a variety of issues, such as anti-war and pro-environment collective action, among others (Wang et al., 2012; Olzak & Soule, 2009; Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003; Fisher et al., 2019).

The event analysis tradition has examined many determinants to collective action or variation therein. Economic performance is one factor long thought to trigger anti-government collective action (Buechler, 2004; Burt, 1980). This was reflected in the works of early scholars of social movements, such as Neil Smelser (1968), Ted Gurr (1970), Francis Piven and Richard Cloward (1977). They viewed economic conditions, expressed in grievances, as a precondition for mobilization. However, more recent paradigms, including resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), political processes (McAdam, 1982; Tilly, 1978), and new social movement theory (Kriesi et al., 1995; Melucci, 1980) view economic performance crucial only to the degree that actors involved in the social movement can construct or frame the problems (i.e., the grievances) as relevant for collective action. As McVeigh shows, states that fail to deliver economic growth may see demonstrations, riots, or strikes, as individuals struggle with economic decline (2009).

Recently, led most notably by Neal Caren's research, there has been a renewed interest in investigating the role of social-structural issues (i.e., economic decline, demographic composition, etc.) as components that lead to collective action (Caren, Gaby & Herrold, 2017). In this paper, therefore, we test whether regional economic, political, and demographic factors explain variation in the number of protest events and participants across the United States. We also examine issue-specific protest events separately—including those directly related to civil rights, compassionate immigration policies, anti-gun violence, as well as climate change and environment—to explore how the regional determinants of protests may vary by issue.

Economic Factors

Research on event analysis in social movement studies has used socio-economic variables at the state-level to examine variation in the number of protest events across space and in different

contexts. Koopmans and Olzak (2004), for instance, use state-level gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as well as unemployment rate in Germany as measures of socioeconomic deprivation to examine variation in radical right violent events. Lue and Tao (2017) have used fiscal transfer from government as an economic factor to predict collective resistance in rural China. Hence, depending on the context of the research, state-level socio-economic variables have been taken as measures of both relative economic deprivation and overall socio-economic conditions.

In this study, we incorporate two socio-economic measures, namely GDP growth and poverty rates at state level in the US. On the one hand, theories of relative deprivation would predict that protest events would emerge in areas where economic conditions are on the decline, poverty rates are high, and states are unable to deliver on economic growth. A conspicuous example of this is the recent riots in Iran as the result of economic downturn, which was caused by the Trump administration's tightening of economic sanctions (Movahed, 2018, 2020). However, resource mobilization perspectives draw attention to the need for economic resources to frame, organize, and engage in collective action, suggesting that street protests would be more common in economically opportune areas, where resources are more readily available. Our analysis tests these competing perspectives.

Threats to Minority Groups and Collective Action

Social movement theory has recognized that minority groups may opt for collective action as a response to real or perceived threats (Almeida, 2003; Andrews & Seguin, 2015; Einwohner & Maher, 2011; Millán, 2016), particularly when such groups experience a decline in their social, economic, and political status. Construed in this way, threats can be an opportunity for mobilization by creating a sense of urgency, particularly for groups that have the capacity to

organize and carry out protests as political opportunity theory predicts (Andrews, Caren & Lu, 2020; Almeida, 2018). While threats can create opportunities for collective action, they can also be limiting toward that end, because minority and marginalized groups become ever-more vulnerable as they are targeted by authorities (Oliver, 2017).

Collective action during Trump's presidency provides an ideal scenario for testing this hypothesis (Andrews, Caren, & Lu, 2020). Throughout his presidential election campaign, President Trump targeted various social groups: women, immigrants, Muslims, and other ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. Our demographic variables allow us to capture whether the presence of targeted minority groups (i.e., percent population of African Americans and foreign-born at state level) predict both the overall number of protests and participants generally, but also those that are specifically related to compassionate immigration policies. Given the progressive nature of anti-Trump resistance, we expect resistance protests to be more common in areas with larger populations of targeted minority groups, and more so for protest events that pertain to compassionate immigration policies and civil rights.

Intersectional Interests

A careful analysis of mass mobilization in the era of American resistance cannot ignore the *intersectional interventions* that influence collective action and participation in protest events. Here, we stress the role that intersectionality plays in motivating participants who are characterized by shared grievances. Indeed, a recent body of research presents significant evidence for the intersectional dimension of choices and motivations when individuals opt to participate in protest events (Fisher, Dow & Ray, 2017; Fisher, Jasny & Dow, 2018). Intersectionality has been used both as a theory and an analytical framework (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Choo & Ferree,

2010; Crenshaw, 1991) in order to investigate how a combination—*an intersection*—of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and other sociological categories are linked to social structures that produce inequality and generate advantage and disadvantage (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2015).

The categories of protest events in our dataset certainly demonstrate strong intersectional dimensions in individuals' motivations to participate in mass mobilization. For instance, the civil rights category encompasses the Women's March to racial justice riots for minority groups, among others. Therefore, it is impossible to ignore the intersectionality of participants' motivations in our dataset. There are at least three major protest events which exhibit intersectionality in a more pronounced way, as compared to others, that are worth highlighting. First, the Women's March, which has been an intersectional coalition of veteran activists that mobilized "the largest single-day demonstration in recorded U.S. history" (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017). Second, the March for Science, which was aimed at defending "the role of science in policy and society" (Winking, Struminger and Wedemeyer-Strombel 2018). Third, the March for Racial Justice is a large African American and indigenous-led movement demanding racial equity (Fisher, 2018a). While these three events are grouped under the civil rights category in our dataset, survey data of individuals from other research indicate that participants in those protest events come with variegated grievances, interests, and motivations (Fisher, Dow & Ray 2017).

DATA

We draw on data from "Count Love," which crawls local newspaper and television sites on a daily basis in order to collect information on protest events using machine learning techniques (Leung & Perkins, 2019). Quantitative social scientists have long been seeking to apply the

computational power of information technology to the task of generating protest events data. Count Love uses machine learning tools to collect data on protest event, timing, place, and number of attendees. Drawing on this unique dataset on protest events in the United States since Trump's inauguration, we identify the regional determinants of collective action in the first three years of Trump presidency across the US states. Since Count Love data project only collects information on the number of protests and attendees, locations, as well as the underlying causes of those protests, we supplement the Count Love dataset with information on economic, political, and socio-demographic data drawn from a number of sources. As discussed below, we construct a dataset for researchers (present and future) that includes a variety of socio-economic, political, and demographic variables, as well as information on protest participants across states in the United States.

We analyze a total of 11812 protest events with at least 11 million participants. Our analysis focuses on protest events in the Count Love dataset that are reported to have at least 15 participants. Count Love takes the most conservative attendance number from news articles in an attempt to generate unbiased data on protest events. For instance, "a dozen" is interpreted as 10, "dozens" as 20, "hundreds" as 100, and so forth. If an article mentions a protest event but does not include the number of participants, Count Love notes the event but leaves the participants' number empty (Leung & Perkins, 2019). For a protest event to bear conceptual meaning, we impose a restriction of a minimal number of participants of 15 individuals because having a sizeable number of attendees is a crucial component of the concept of 'protest event.' Thus, we dropped 810 protests that were recorded in the Count Love data yet had fewer than 15 participants.

VARIABLES

Dependent Variables

We examine the impact of socio-economic, political, and demographic variables on two outcome measures: the count number of recorded protest events and the number of participants at all protest events per state in 2017, 2018, 2019. Both dependent variables are drawn from the Count Love data. We could also include the protest event and protest participants data for 2020, but since our independent variables are drawn from the U.S. Census data, there is a two-year lag for the data reported and thus data from 2020 is not yet available.

Independent Variables

Socio-economic. The socio-economic variables are drawn from multiple sources, including the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), and American National Election Studies (ANES). GDP growth and poverty rates are drawn from the Bureau of Economic Statistics. GDP growth rates capture the degree of economic dynamism and vitality at state level. Poverty rates measure the degree of economic disadvantage. In states with high poverty rates, more people are likely to suffer from relative economic deprivation compared to those with lower rates of poverty. It is important to note that poverty is (by definition) a function of inadequate income relative to the size of family or household. The inability to generate sufficient income—hence, poverty—is an important indicator of economic deprivation (Brady, Regina & Ryan, 2013).

Demographics. To assess how the presence of groups targeted by the Trump administration influences collective action at the state level, we include variables that measure racial and ethnic demographics. The demographic variables include African American and foreign-born populations (in percent) as well as the total population of the state, which are drawn from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Political Partisanship. To measure the effect of democratic political partisanship and ideology on the number of protest events and their participants, we gathered data on voting patterns in the 2016 presidential election from the MIT Election Lab. Specifically, we incorporated a variable that contains the proportion of votes casted for the democratic candidate (Hilary Clinton) in the 2016 presidential election at state level.

State's Organizational Capacity. In order to assess whether the repressive capacity of the state bears on the number of protests or the number of protest participants, we incorporate a variable, "police officers per 1000 individuals" that is a proxy for the state's organizational wherewithal to police, contain, and potentially repress unrests. Prior research has shown that depending on how disruptive the protest events are and the degree to which they threaten the interests of political elites, local law enforcement agencies often take repressive actions against the protestors (Earl & Soule, 2006; Reynolds-Stenson, 2018). Hence, we believe that incorporating a variable that captures the organizational capacity of the state to curtail protest events is crucial when examining the politics of activism in the United States. We hypothesize that the greater organizational capacity on part of the state limits the capacity of the people to organize around a political or social cause, depending on the degree of its sensitivity to the interests of the elite. Hence, when examining competing explanations for observed variation in the number of protest events and participants, it behooves us to adjust for the state's organizational capacity to contain protest events.[3]

[3] The data for the number of police officers are drawn from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) website. Since the law enforcement officers carry a firearm and a badge, have full arrest powers, and are paid from governmental funds set aside specifically for sworn law enforcement representatives, a measure of police officers per 1000 of the population at states is useful as a proxy of organizational capacity to defuse protests. It must not go unnoticed that while police forces are local, a per 1000 individuals measure of law enforcement officers can still be taken as a proxy for organizational capacity.

METHODS

We use negative binomial regression models since the outcome variables for this study are observed counts of both protest events and participants. Negative binomial regression is a generalization of Poisson model that loosens the assumption that the variance is equal to the mean (Long, 1997). Negative binomial regression can be formally written as:

$$Y_i = exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + .. + \beta_9 X_{9i} + \varepsilon_{it}) \quad (1)$$

Where Y_i is the outcome variable namely the count number of protest events and protest participants, and X_i denotes the independent variables that predict the outcome variables as well as their variations. Coefficients in negative binomial models can be interpreted such that a one-unit increase in X_{ij} multiplies the expected outcome variable by a factor of $exp\ (B_j)$. Our dataset contains protest events only for the first three years after President Trump was elected. In auxiliary analysis, we added a dummy variable for each year in the study to measure the effect of time, but the results were consistent with models that did not contain a dummy variable. In our final models presented in the paper, we do not add a dummy variable for year.

THE PATTERNS OF PROTESTS: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Figures 1 and 2 below show the number of issue-specific protest events and protest participants. Figure 1 demonstrates the distribution of protests events amongst issue-specific categories. While events related to the civil rights issues have the highest number (more than 2500), those related to the compassionate immigration policies (more than 2000) and anti-gun violence (about 2000) are quite sizable. Events related to the environmental issues constitute the lowest number compared to other categories (about 600). Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of protest participants amongst issue-specific events. Civil rights events have the largest number

of participants, while events related to the environmental issues have the lowest (see Figure 2 below). Of the total 11,812 protest events that have been counted in our data for the first three years of Trump presidency, 2690 (22 percent) are related to civil rights issues. There are 2149 and 1688 protests related to compassionate immigration policies and anti-gun violence, respectively. These two categories constitute 20 and 16 percent of the total protest events in the first three years of the Trump presidency.

Figure 1. The Total Number of Issue-Specific Protest Events, 2017-2019

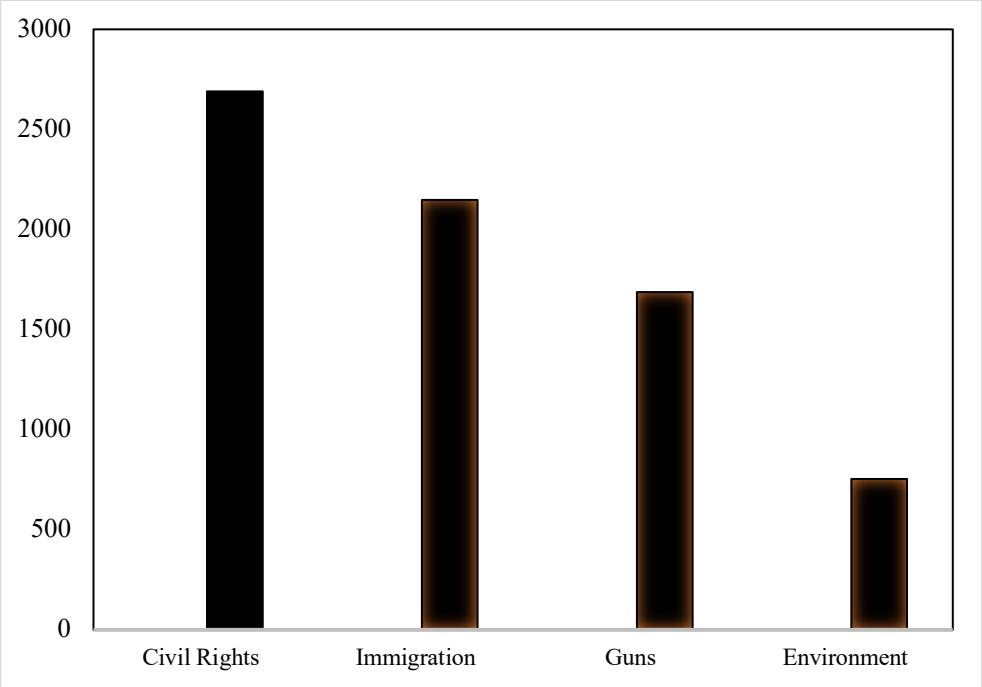


Figure 2. The Total Number of Issue-Specific Protest Participants, 2017-2019

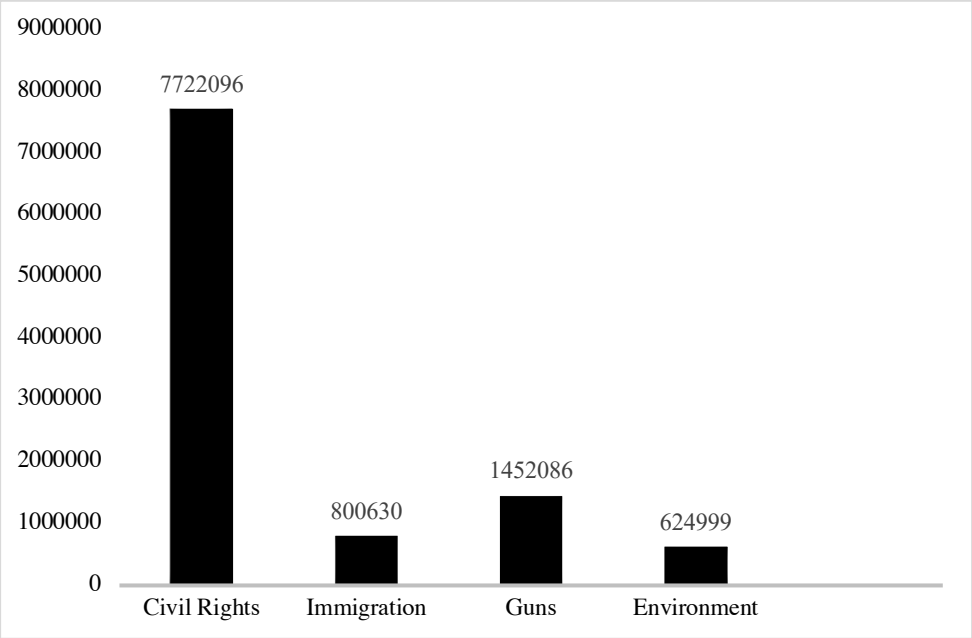
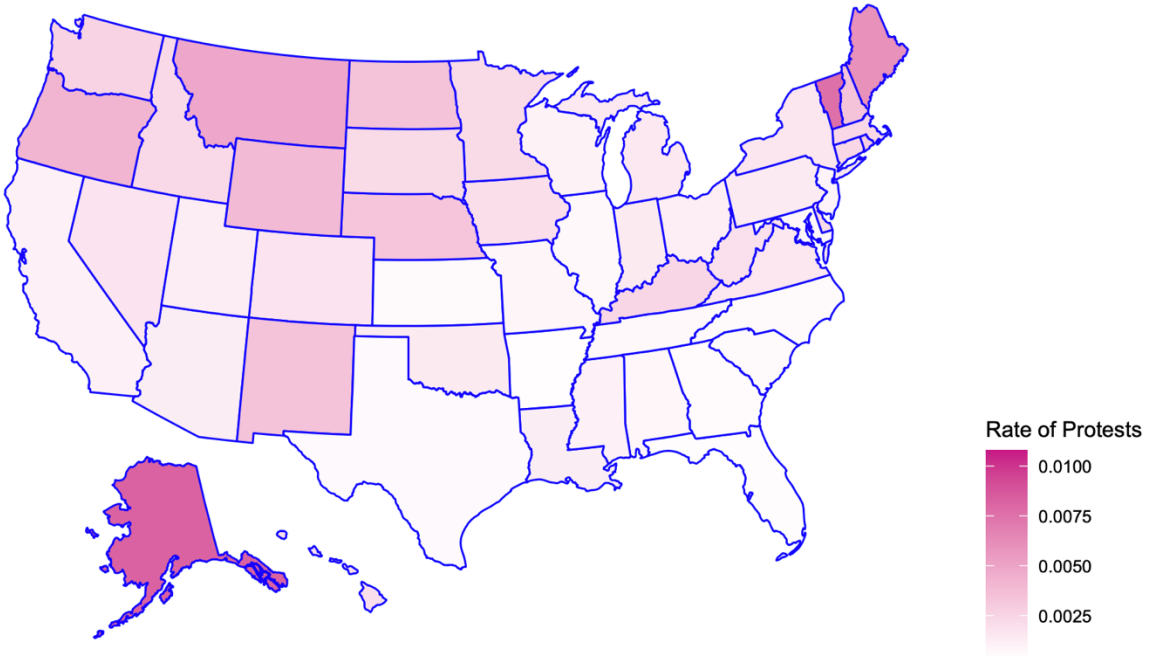


Figure 3 below demonstrates the distribution of the average rate of protest events across US states. In order to control for the population of the state in a robust way, we generated a rate of per 1000 individuals for protest events in Figure 3 below. Thus, Figure 3 three maps the *spatial* distribution of protest events while controlling for the population. Net of population, the Midwest, Northwest, and Northeast areas have higher rates of protest events compared to other regions. Alaska, surprisingly, has one of the highest rates of protest events. According to our dataset, almost 11 million participants attended protest events between 2017-2019, The salience of immigration-related protest events is not surprising considering President Trump' anti-immigration campaigns, rhetoric and actions, which culminated in the Muslim travel ban executive order in early 2017.

Figure 3. The Rate of Protest Events Across American States (Per 1000 Individuals), 2017-2019

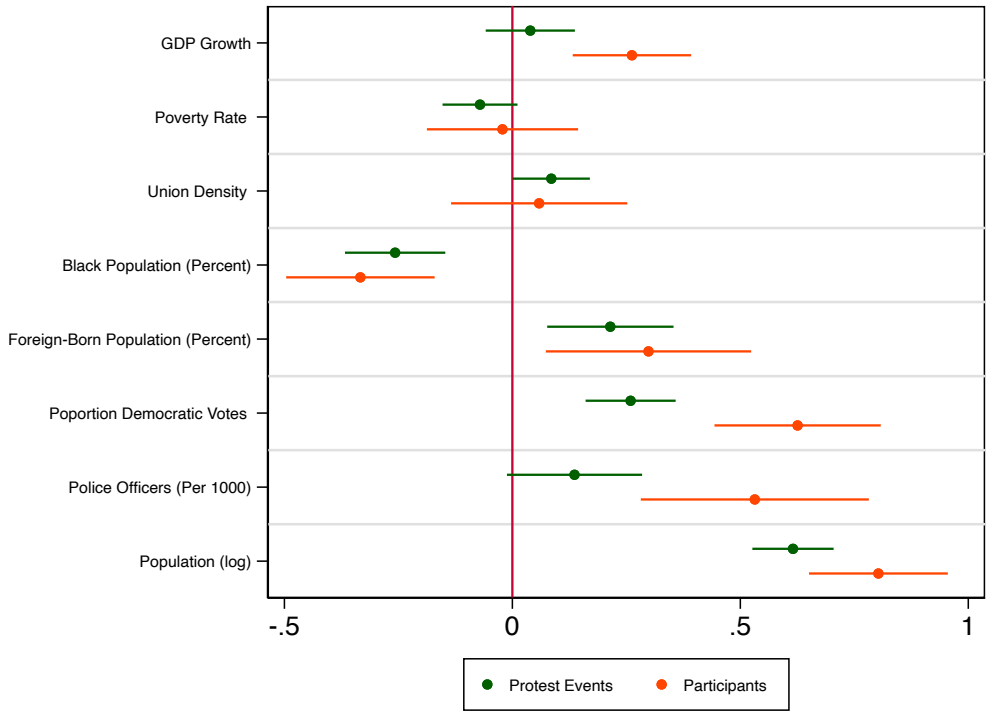


REGRESSION RESULTS

The negative binomial regression coefficients (with confidence intervals at 95 percent) are displayed below in Figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 displays the results for the aggregate models with the outcome variables as the total number of protest participants as well as the total number of protest events. In the model predicting the number of protest events shown in Figure 5, union density, percentage of foreign-born population, and proportion of democratic votes are positively associated with the number of protest events. The percentage of African American population is the only independent variable that negatively predicts the number of protest events. This suggests that protest events are more likely in areas with larger foreign-born populations, strong unions, and democratic politics. In the model predicting the number of protest participants in Figure 5, GDP growth rate, percentage of foreign born population, proportion of democratic vote, and the

rate of police officers per 1000 individuals are positively associated with the number of participants. Just as the model with protest events as an outcome variable, the percentage of African Americans population is negatively associated with the number of protest participants. Thus, states with larger African American populations (mostly the southern states) have witnessed fewer number protest events and participants. This is not surprising given that the southern states have a higher percentage of African American population and are dominated by the Republicans.

Figure 5. Aggregate Model for the Total Number of Protest Events and Participants



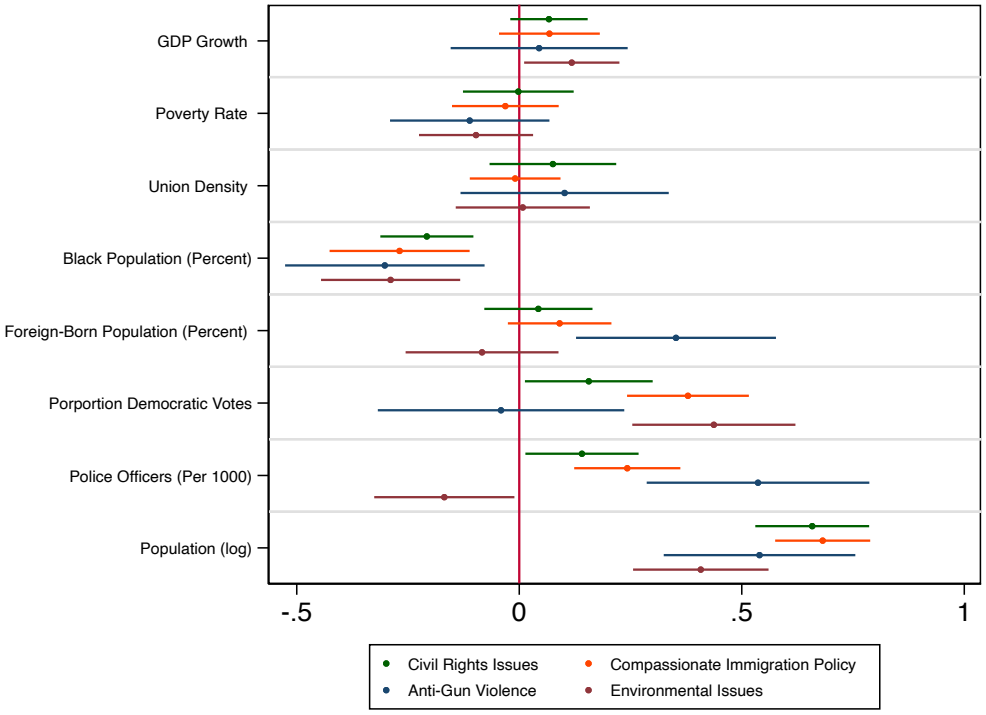
Coefficients with confidence intervals at 95% for aggregate models, with N=152 state-year observations from 2017-2019. The total number of protest events and participants are 7865 and 8918022 respectively.

Figure 6 below demonstrates the results for the issue-specific models. The outcome variables in these models are the total number of protest events related to four underlying issues: civil rights, compassionate immigration policies, anti-gun violence, and the environment. For the

number of protests related to compassionate immigration policies, democratic political partisanship, police presence, and total population are positive and significant predictors. As expected, the percent of the population that is foreign born is also positively associated with protests that pertain to compassionate immigration policies, though its significance is only marginal. Just as in the aggregate models, the size African American population is negatively related to compassionate immigration protest events. The results for protest events related to civil rights issues follow a similar pattern; the percent of African American population is negatively related to civil rights protests while the percentage of democratic votes in 2016 presidential election, police capacity, and the state population are positively related to the number of civil rights protest events.

For protest events related to anti-gun violence, the percent of the state population that is foreign born and police capacity are positive predictors while the percent African American is negatively related to the number of anti-dun protests. Interestingly, the democratic political partisanship positively predicts all issue-specific events except anti-gun violence. This perhaps suggests that frustration with gun violence may no longer be a partisan issue.

Figure 6. Models for the Total Number of Protest Events for Specific Causes



Coefficients with confidence intervals at 95% for issue-specific (i.e., immigration, anti-gun violence, etc.) models, N=546 with state-year observations for 2017-2019.

The results for protest events connected to the environment and climate change are particularly informative. Unlike the results for other issue-specific protests, where no statistical association was found between the economic growth and protest events, states with high economic growth tend to have more protests related to the environment and climate change. But just as protest events related to civil rights and compassionate immigration policies, the proportion of democratic votes positively predicts the environmentally concerned collective action across U.S. states.

Importantly, states that are endowed with more resources and wherewithal to contain protests events, as measured by police officers per 1000 residents, witnessed more protest events

related to civil rights, compassionate immigration policies, and anti-gun violence. The only time that the state's repressive capacity reduced protest events is for events related to the environmental issues.

The results of the negative binomial regression for the number of *participants* for issue-specific protest events as the outcome variables are demonstrated in Appendix (A).[4] The results are more or less consistent with the models predicting the number of protest events. High growth states in terms of economic performance tend to have more protest participants related to civil rights, compassionate immigration policies, and environmental issues. The proportion of democratic votes is positively associated with the number of protest participants in civil rights issues, compassionate immigration policy, and environmental issues. The percent of African American population is negatively associated to the number of participations for protest events related to civil rights and compassionate immigration policies. Taken together, these results suggest that poorer states with a higher percentage of African American tend to have fewer protest participants for all issue-specific protest participants.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Collective action and activism are the twin engines that challenge social domination, exclusion, and inequality. In this study, we identified the regional determinants of collective action across the United States. We believe that it is crucial for both the general public and activists/organizers to have an understanding of the regional determinants of collective action and protest participants. In other words, understanding how social-structural factors influence

[4] Due to limitation of space, we present the regression results for the number of participants as an outcome variable in issue-specific events only in Appendix (A).

collective action can help organizers focus on social groups and social contexts that are less politically active in order to increase civic engagement and movement participation.

Drawing on a novel dataset on protest events, the findings of this research demonstrate that states with higher union density, larger foreign-born populations, and democratic political partisanship witnessed more protest events, whereas those with a greater proportion of African Americans among the population witnessed fewer protest events. It is worth noting that in both the aggregate models and the issue-specific models predicting civil rights and compassionate immigration protest events, we find that states with greater African American population are less likely to have protest events and participants. This is largely due to the higher percentages of African American population in the southern states that are dominated by Republicans. Given that we consistently reproduce this finding in our analysis, activists who seek to organize collective action for equality and justice should therefore try mobilizing people of color in the South who feel marginalized and racialized.

The aggregate model predicting protest participants reveals similar findings, though economic performance and the rate of police officers both positively predict the number of protests participants. The positive association between economic performance and more participants may be explained by the fact that where people have higher standards of living, they may have more resources (i.e., educational attainment, political consciousness, time, etc.) to be politically engaged. States that have greater organizational capacity to contain and defuse collective action, measured by police repressive capacity, tend to have more protest participants.

We also find strong support for the proposition that greater immigrant populations in the demographic configuration of the state induces more collective action. This is most clearly

demonstrated in the positive association between the proportion of foreign-born population and both the number of protest events and protest participants. The literature on the role of threat in collective action posits that minority groups are likely to resist perceived or real threats by embarking on collective action. President Trump's victory provides us with an opportunity to systematically test this hypothesis. Given Trump's hostile rhetoric on lenient and open immigration policies, it is reasonable to expect states with higher percentage of foreign-born population witness more protest events related to compassionate immigration policies. Our results bear this out. The positive association between the percentage of foreign-born population and the number of protest events suggests that areas with relatively large foreign-born populations respond to Trump-era threats on immigration by voicing grievances through collective action. *Vulnerability*, therefore, induces more collective action.

Additionally, there has been a growing body of research geared toward understanding why gun control advocacy often fails to persuade the American public to support stricter gun laws. A recent study shows that pro-gun control arguments are ineffective at increasing support for stricter laws (Kantack and Paschall 2019). In this study, we examined what the state characteristics are associated with anti-gun violence protest events. We find that states with larger foreign-born populations and greater organizational capacity in law enforcement tend to have more protest events related to gun violence. Surprisingly, in the model for anti-gun violence events, unlike other issue-specific events, we find democratic partisanship to be statistically insignificant, which suggests that frustration with gun violence may be a bipartisan issue, at least in terms of collection action.

Our results for protest events related to the environmental issues are particularly informative. The level of economic growth measured by GDP is positively associated with

environmental activism. In an in important study, the sociologist Ronald Inglehart observed an intriguing pattern in public support for environmental activism cross-nationally (1995). Drawing on a public opinion survey conducted across 43 nations, people that supported strong environmental policies shared two characteristics: they were struggling with serious environmental challenges, and they were wealthy (Inglehart 1995; Gross 2018). We tested a similar relationship at the aggregate level within the U.S. context, and our results are congruent with the broader cross-national literature on environmental activism (Inglehart 1995). However, the question that remains is why do wealthier states tend to witness more protest events? It is likely that in the more affluent states—where economic growth is more opportune—people tend to have higher income, which itself is a function of higher educational attainment. We anticipate that because affluent states tend to have a more highly educated adult population, there is greater awareness of environmental hazards and more collective will, time, and resources to do something about them. The upshot is, perhaps, more protest events related to the environmental issues.

To sum, affluent states tend to have more protest participants net of population, and the driving force that motivates collective action at the state level, regardless of the underlying causes and issues, are party-based democratic partisanship, the proportion of foreign-born population, and the state's organizational capacity to contain and defuse protest events. The proportion of votes casted for the democratic candidate in the 2016 presidential election is consistently and positively associated with both number of protest events and participants across nearly all model specifications, with gun control being the notable exception.

By identifying the structural variables, including economic performance, political partisanship, and the demographic composition of states, that lead to collective action, this study confirms that regional political and economic factors explain variation in the number of protest

events and participants across the U.S. following the rise of right-wing populism in 2016. Our dataset allowed us to examine not just the total number of protest events and participants, but also those that pertain to specific causes, such as civil rights, compassionate immigration policies, anti-gun violence and environment, teasing out important differences in the drivers of collection action across contemporary political issues. The results drawn from this research enrich our understanding of the dynamics of collective action during the Trump presidency and motivate future research on the conditions under which protest activities may ensue in the post-Trump era for a variety of contentious issues.

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Figure (A1). Models for the Total Number of Protest Participants for Specific Causes (2017-2019).