

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

(Hilary 2024)

Dr Michael Biggs

7. Social movements

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/PoliticalSociology.shtml>

Introduction

1. Conceptualizing social movements and protest
2. Generalizable characteristics: volatility; class
3. Political consequences

I. What is a social movement

Analytical

1. goal is to transform (or rarely preserve) social/political systems
 - sex between men illegal in England since 16C
 - reform to revolution, e.g. against monogamy
2. by mobilizing people who lack institutionalized access to power
 - gay men and lesbian women
3. over lengthy campaigns, extending across a polity (and beyond)
 - Wolfenden Report 1959 ... same-sex marriage 2013
4. sustained by formal organizations
 - Homosexual Law Reform Society (1958); Gay Liberation Front (1970); Stonewall (1989)

- ‘the actor makes some explicit claim that the *means* of action can be recognized as legitimate *and* the *ends* of action can become binding for the wider community’ (Offe 1985)
 - contrast IRA or Islamic terrorism
 - contrast mindfulness

Genealogical

- Originates in late 18th / early 19thC Western Europe / North America (Tilly 1995)
 - e.g. British Anti-Slavery (1788–)
- Enlightenment ideals: equality and liberty; popular sovereignty
 - “Movement” (counterposed to “Conservative”) means teleology (e.g. J.S. Mill in 1838)
- Activists cross movements; e.g. U.S. Feminist Movement
 - after Civil War (1st wave): from Anti-Slavery
 - after 1960s (2nd wave): from Civil Rights and Anti-War
- Conservative counter-movements borrow the same form
 - e.g. U.S. Pro-Life Movement

- Some movements become embedded in the political system—paradox
 - e.g. labour movement; gay rights / LGBT



Follow

UK Parliament ✓

@UKParliament

We're made up of [@HouseofCommons](#) and [@UKHouseofLords](#). Follow to find out how we scrutinise the government and discuss issues important to you.

📍 Westminster, London 🔗 [parliament.uk](#) 📅 Joined May 2007

107 Following 1.5M Followers

Protest events

- Protest: ‘action expresses a grievance, a conviction of wrong or injustice; the protestors are unable to correct the condition directly by their own efforts; the action is intended to draw attention to the grievances; the action is further meant to provoke ameliorative steps by some target group; and the protesters depend upon some combination of sympathy and fear to move the target group in their behalf. Protest ranges from relatively persuasive to relatively coercive combinations ..., but always includes both’ (Turner 1969)



National Union of Mineworkers' strike, 1984



Outrage's "wink-in" at Piccadilly Circus, 1991

What social movements do

1. Political

- change law/policy
- institutionalize access to power (paradoxically diminishing)

2. Social

- connect people in networks—strong ties; weak ties extending over long distances
- create autonomous social spaces (e.g. meetings, assemblies)

3. Cultural

- create and strengthen collective identity; ‘the personal is the political’ (1969)
- cultivate ideas—strategy, utopian

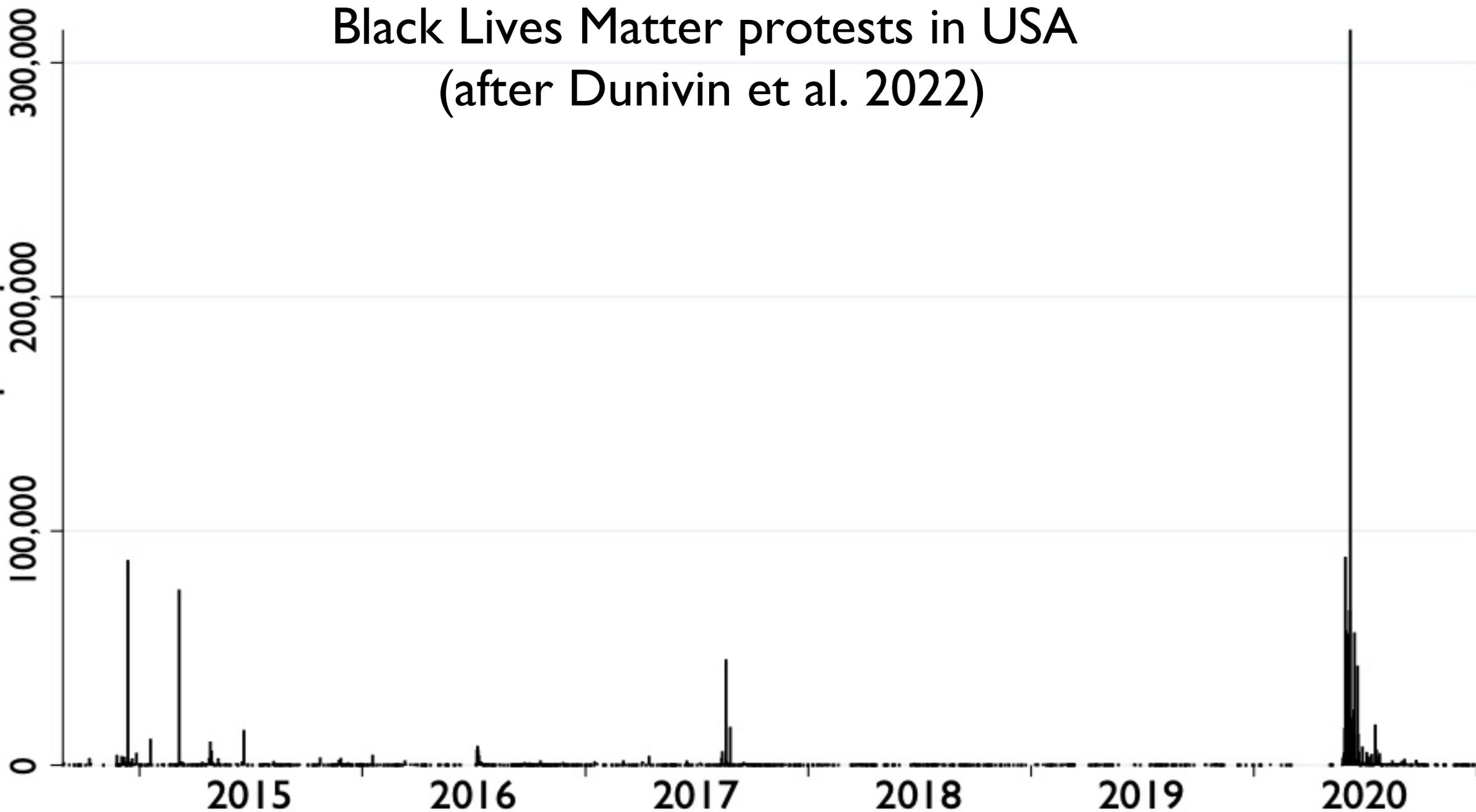
2. Generalizable characteristics

2.1 Volatility

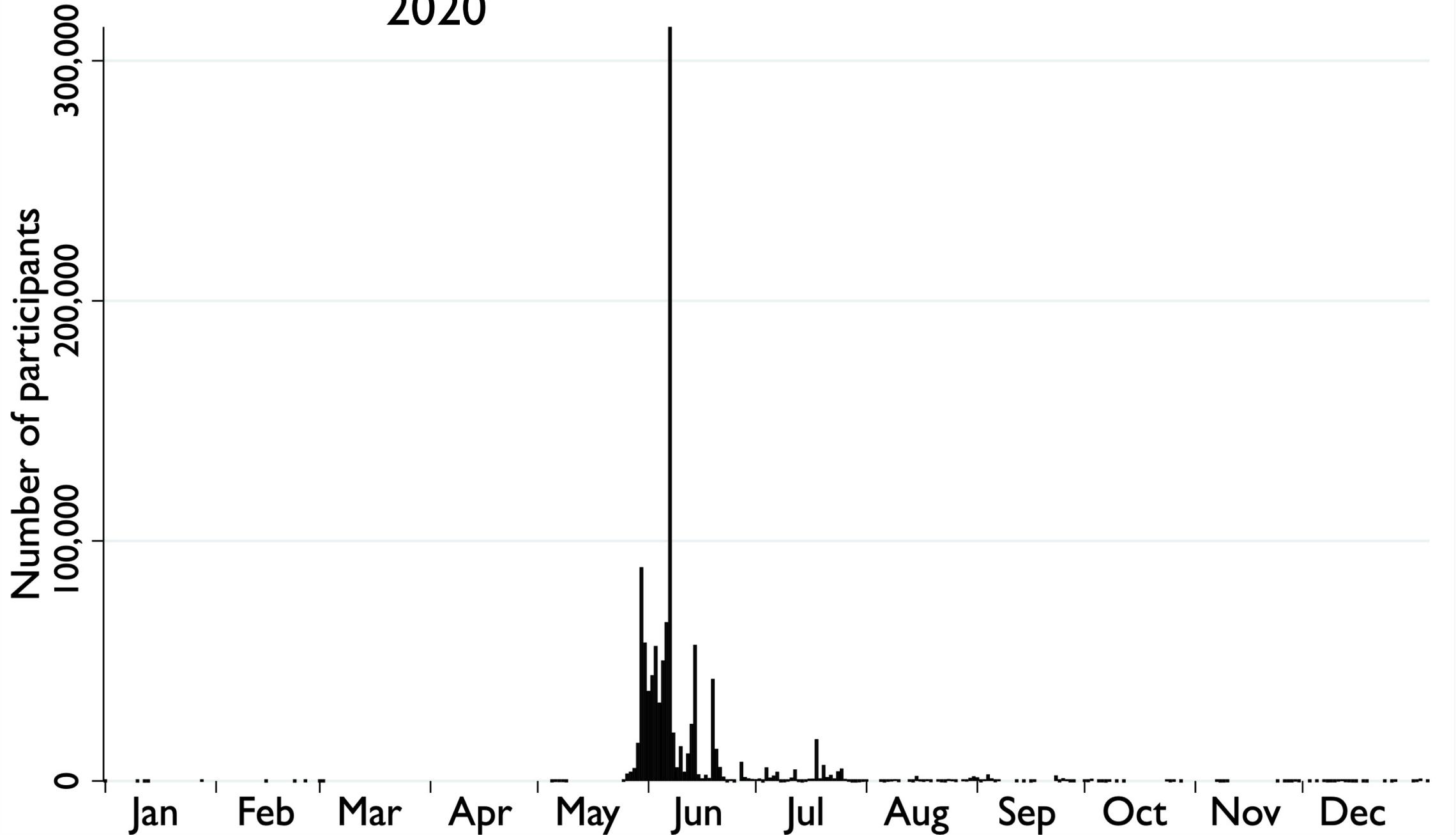
- Waves of protest can erupt suddenly:
 - 1989 collapse of communism
 - 2011 Occupy and Arab Spring
 - 2020 BLM ...

Black Lives Matter protests in USA (after Dunivin et al. 2022)

Number of participants



2020



- Most protest events are small and few are large, *but* most protesters participate in large events (Biggs 2018)
- Most events are concentrated in brief intervals of time ...

Strike-days in UK, 1900–2011 (Biggs 2018)

Strike days / population

3
2
1

Gini coefficient .46

73% of strike-days in 27% of years

1900

1950

2000

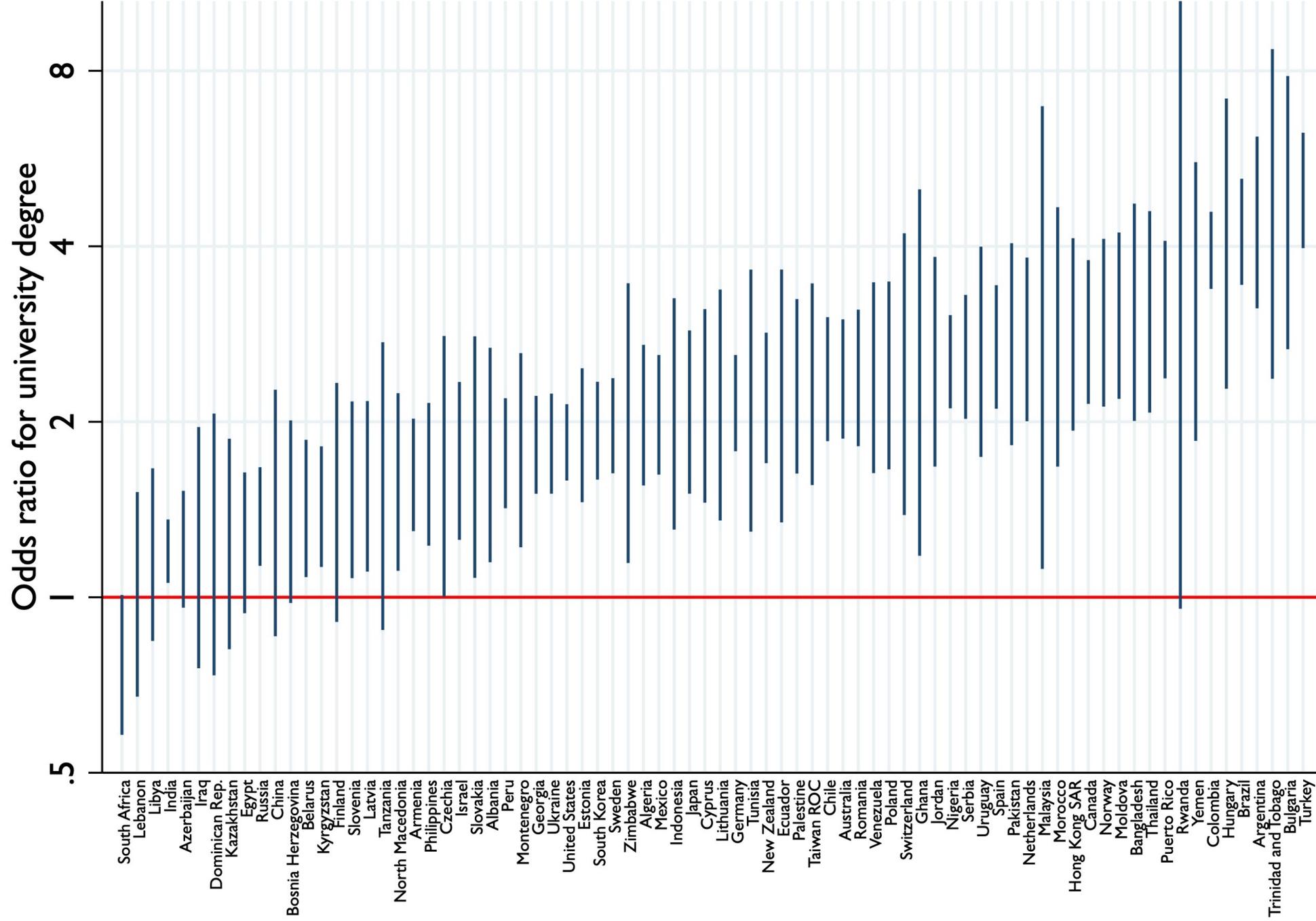


- Even participants in the large waves are surprised—metaphors of ‘forest fire’, ‘contagion’, ‘avalanche’

2.2 Class basis

- Recent political sociologists claim
 - protest is increasing—“social movement society”
 - protest is associated with university education
- Such claims forget the labour movement (Biggs 2015)!
- Hobsbawm, ‘Economic Fluctuations and Some Social Movements since 1800’ (1952)
- American social movement organizations in *New York Times* in 20C (Amenta et al. 2012):
 - 36% labour
 - 10% civil rights

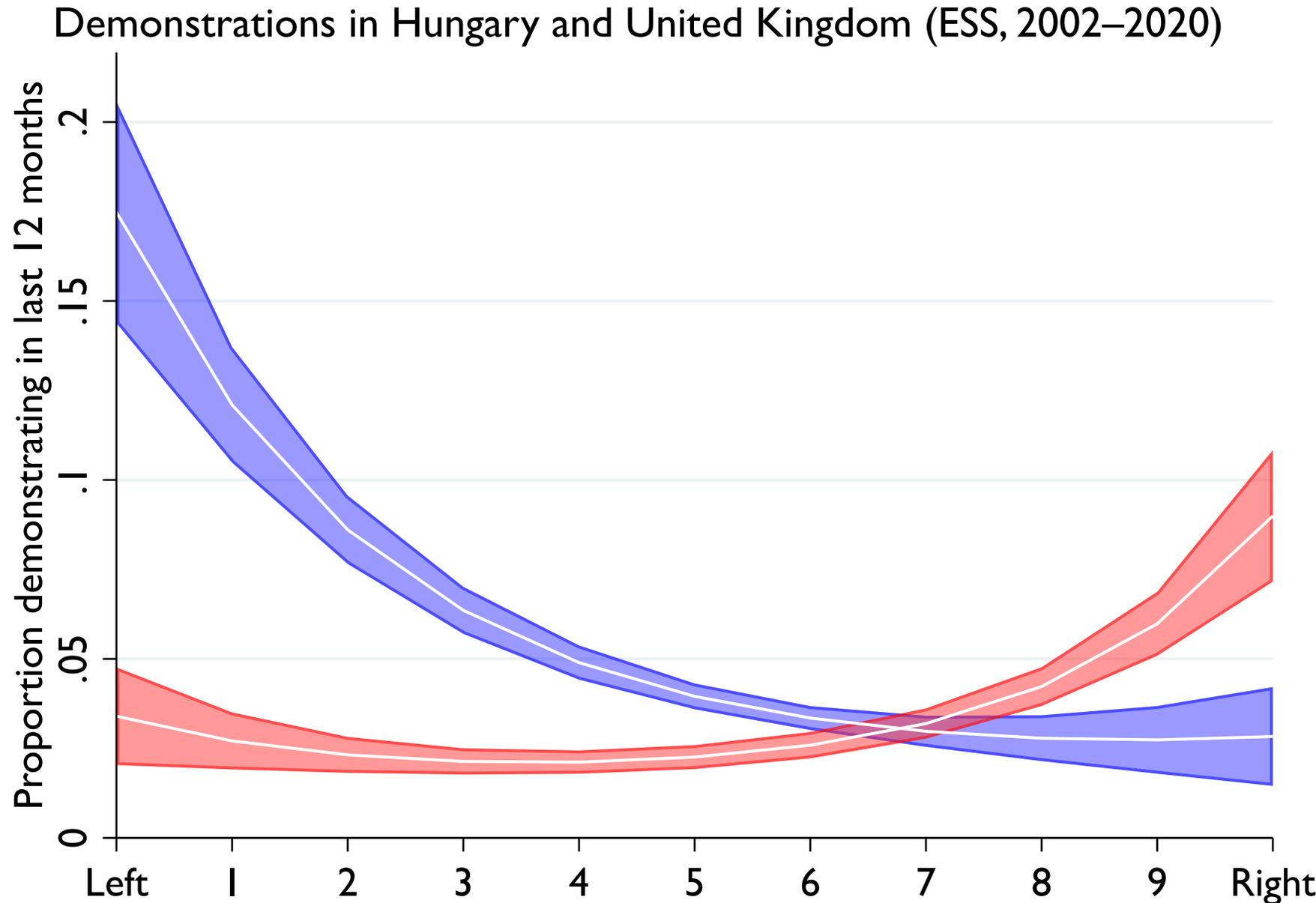
Effect of degree on
 ever having
 protested
 —demonstration,
 boycott,
 unofficial strike—
 adjusting for sex
 and age (WVS,
 1981–2022)



- Is the association between protest and university degree due to selection or exposure?
- US cohort born c.1949; college 1967–71, demonstrations to 1973:
 - matching effect (for treated): +18%age points (Kam & Palmer 2008)
 - matching effect (for control): +6%age points (Mayer 2011)
 - don't include parental liberalism in match!
- UK cohort born 1970; university 1988–92, demonstrations in 2004:
 - matching effect (for treated): n.s. (Persson 2014)

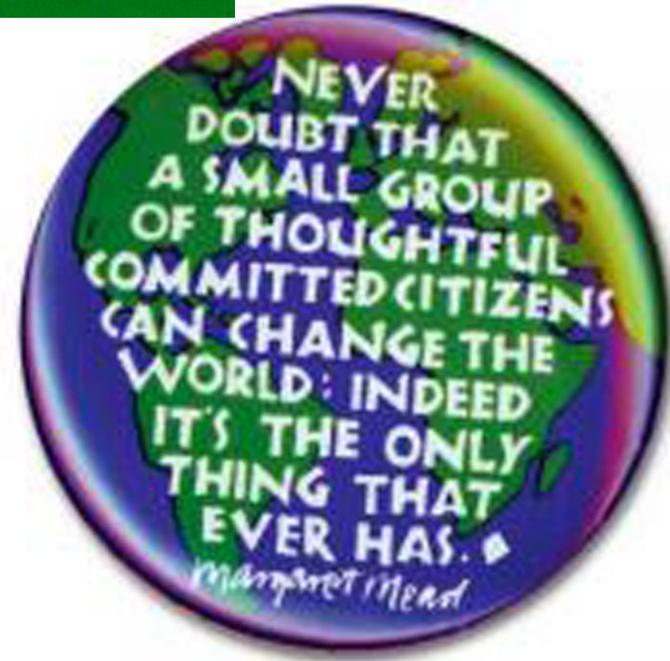
2.3 Left-wing?

- In Western Europe and North America, protest is left-wing
- But not universal: in Eastern Europe, protest is *right-wing*
 - democracy established by the right, not the left
 - cultural liberalism associated with right (Kostelka & Rovny 2019)

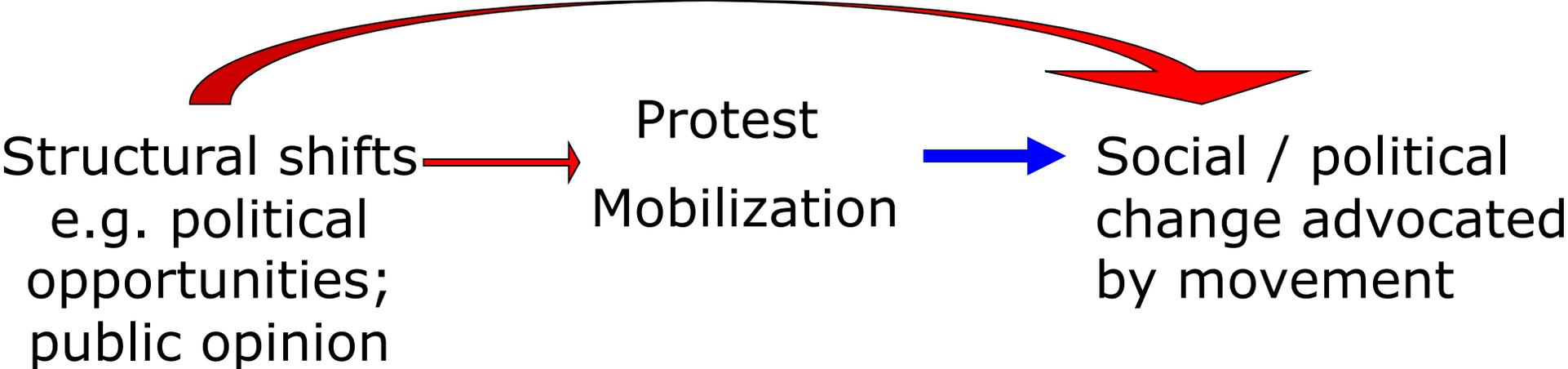


3. Political consequences

**NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP
OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD - Margaret
Mead**
Peace Resource Project (888) 822-7075 www.peaceproject.com (#S196)

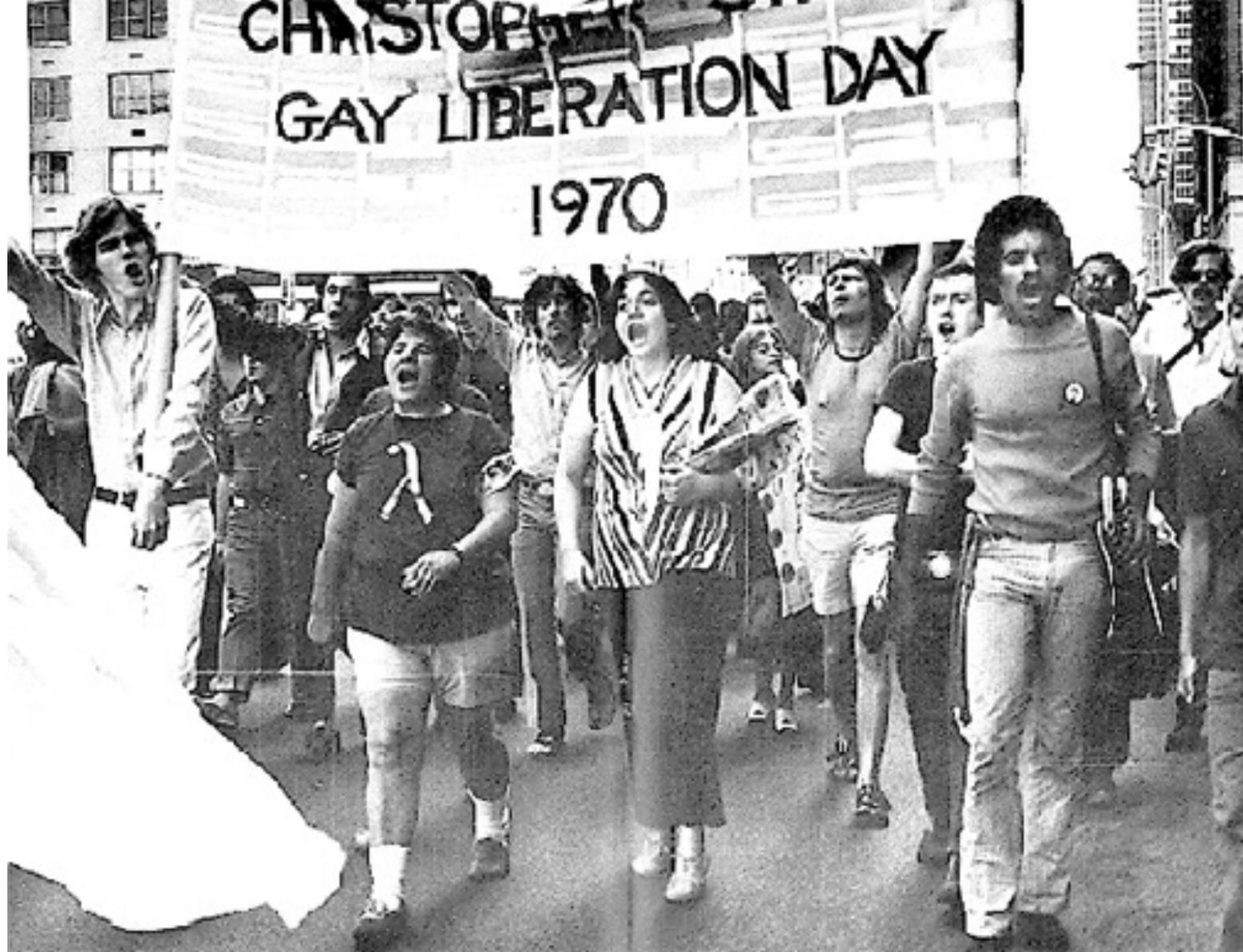


Methodological problem



Example:
decriminalization
of homosexuality

‘the ongoing individualization
of world models of society in
the post–World War II period
generated wholesale
redefinitions of sex, which in
turn facilitated a worldwide
wave of sex-law reforms’
(Frank, Camp, & Boutcher
2010)



Empirical analysis, U.S.

Aggregate time series

- Number of protest events in one year/month => Political changes in next year/month, controlling for other factors
- Protest has **no** positive effect (Giugni 2007; McAdam & Su 2002; Olzak & Ryo 2007; Olzak & Soule 2009)
- Problems: event count; fixed lag; small N

Geographical disaggregation

- Walmart stores, early 21st C: protest impedes stores opening (Ingram, Yue, & Rao 2010)
- Sit-ins, 1960: occurrence of sit-in protest in city or nearby cities makes desegregation more likely (Biggs & Andrews 2015)
- Protest by African Americans, 1960s: nonviolent protest in county—matching counties—increased Democratic Presidential vote in 1972; whereas riot decreased (Wasow 2020)
- Tea Party, 2009: rally attendance—fine weather as instrument—increases Republican vote, makes Republican Reps more conservative, speeds retirement of Democratic Reps (Madestam et al. 2013)
- BLM protest, 2010s: reduces killings by police, but increases homicides—difference in difference, matched places (Campbell 2023)

Individual

- Demonstrations against restrictive legislation in 2016: Latinos more supportive of rights for undocumented immigrants immediately afterwards—interrupted survey (Branton et al. 2015)
- Volunteers who went to Freedom Summer in 1964 versus no shows: two decades later, more left-wing and more likely to be in lower-paid jobs (McAdam 1988)

Negative effects

- Disruptive protest in Egypt *reduces* support for democracy (Ketchley & El-Rayyes 2021)



Winter of discontent,
1978–9

Conclusion

- Characteristics of social movements:
 - fluctuate over time, taking us by surprise
 - since decline of labour movement, overrepresentation of university graduates
- Social movements can bring about change
 - methodological challenge: confounding with political opportunities, public opinion
 - comparison across space and within survey provides persuasive evidence for effect

- Andrews, Kenneth T., and Michael Biggs. 2006. "The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins." *American Sociological Review* 71:752–77.
- Biggs, Michael. 2015. "Has Protest Increased since the 1970s? How a Survey Question Can Construct a Spurious Trend." *British Journal of Sociology* 66(1):141–62. doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.12099.
- Biggs, Michael. 2018. "Size Matters: Quantifying Protest by Counting Participants." *Sociological Methods & Research* 47(3):351–83. doi: 10.1177/0049124116629166.
- Branton, Regina, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Tony E. Carey Jr, and Tetsuya Matsubayashi. 2015. "Social Protest and Policy Attitudes: The Case of the 2006 Immigrant Rallies." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(2):390–402.
- Campbell, Travis. 2023. "Black Lives Matter's Effect on Police Lethal Use-of-Force." *Journal of Urban Economics*. doi: 10.1016/j.jue.2023.103587.
- Dunivin, Zackary Okun, Harry Yaojun Yan, Jelani Ince, and Fabio Rojas. 2022. "Black Lives Matter Protests Shift Public Discourse." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(10):e2117320119. doi: 10.1073/pnas.2117320119.
- Frank, David John, Bayliss J. Camp, and Steven A. Boutcher. 2010. "World-Wide Trends in the Criminal Regulation of Sex, 1945 to 2005." *American Sociological Review*.
- Giugni, Marco. 2007. "Useless Protest? A Time-Series Analysis of the Policy Outcomes of Ecology, Antinuclear, and Peace Movements in the United States, 1977-1995." *Mobilization* 12.
- Ingram, Paul, Lori Qingyuan Yue, and Hayagreeva Rao. 2010. "Trouble in Store: Probes, Protests, and Store Openings by Wal-Mart, 1998–2007." *American Journal of Sociology*.
- Kam, Cindy D., and Carl L. Palmer. 2008. "Reconsidering the Effects of Education on Political Participation." *Journal of Politics* 70:612–31.
- Ketchley, Neil, and Thoraya El-Rayyes. 2021. "Unpopular Protest: Mass Mobilization and Attitudes to Democracy in Post-Mubarak Egypt." *Journal of Politics*.
- Kostelka, Filip, and Jan Rovny. 2019. "It's Not the Left: Ideology and Protest Participation in Old and New Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 52(11):1677–1712. doi: 10.1177/0010414019830717.
- Madestam, Andreas, Daniel Shoag, Stan Veuger, and David Yanagizawa-Drott. 2013. "Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Mayer, Alexander K. 2011. "Does Education Increase Political Participation?" *Journal of Politics* 73:633–45.
- McAdam, Doug. 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McAdam, Doug, and Yang Su. 2002. "The War at Home: The Impact of Anti-War Protests, 1965-1973." *American Sociological Review* 67:696–721.
- Offe, Claus. 1985. "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." *Social Research* 52:817–68.
- Olzak, Susan, and Emily Ryo. 2007. "Organizational Diversity, Vitality and Outcomes in the Civil Rights Movement." *Social Forces*.
- Olzak, Susan, and Sarah A. Soule. 2009. "Cross-Cutting Influences of Environmental Protest and Legislation." *Social Forces* 88(1):201–25.
- Persson, Mikael. 2014. "Testing the Relationship Between Education and Political Participation Using the 1970 British Cohort Study." *Political Behavior* 36:877–97.
- Tilly, Charles. 1995. *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*.
- Turner, Ralph H. 1969. "The Theme of Contemporary Social Movements." *The British Journal of Sociology* 20(4):390. doi: 10.2307/588924.
- Wasow, Omar. 2020. "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting." *American Political Science Review* 114(3):638–59. doi: 10.1017/S000305542000009X.