

The Role of Social Movements in the Macro Political System*

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*Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2010. Please do not cite without permission of the authors. This research was supported by grants to the third author from the National Science Foundation (SBR # 9709337, SBR # 9874000). We thank Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Susan Olzak for their role in collecting the data used in this paper.

The system of representation in a democracy stands on two cornerstones. The first, of course, is that elected representatives respond to public opinion by creating policy that reflects the public's preferences. This first cornerstone reflects majoritarian theories of representation. However, democratic theory scholars have long recognized that the mass public is uninformed about, and uninterested in, many issues. Thus, the second cornerstone of democratic representation is rooted in the pluralist school – policy is the result of conflictual participation between active and interested groups, with policy makers hearing competing arguments and making policy based on the more compelling claims (e.g. Dahl 2005).¹

Pluralism typically invokes interest groups and lobbying, but the “outside government” game is vitally important as well, as scholars have long claimed (e.g., McAdam and Su 2002; Soule and Olzak 2004; Soule and King 2006). American history is wrought with examples of seemingly voiceless groups organizing mass protests as the only avenue to deliver them the say-so they desired. Indeed, this option is sometimes held up as the great equalizer – if the voiceless and powerless can organize themselves, they can force the nation to take notice. This raises the question of whether or not an important part of this second cornerstone of democratic theory holds true. That is, to what degree do social movements influence public opinion and policy? And, in turn, to what degree are they affected by public opinion and policy?

Over the past decade, social movement scholars have moved from complaining about the lack of scholarship on the effects of social movements on policy (e.g., Giugni 1998), to uncovering the messy reality that the effects of social movements on policy are contingent on elements of the political opportunity structure (Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992; Amenta,

¹ For example, Robert Dahl (1956) confronts the problem of how the intensity of preferences should be represented in government. He finds no formal, “constitutional” solution, instead turning to “extra-constitutional” solutions that involve those with intense preferences performing political activities – which would seemingly include political protests.

Dunleavy, and Bernstein 1994; Amenta and Young 1999; Cress and Snow 2000; Burstein and Linton 2002; Soule and Olzak 2004). As well, we now know that the effects of movements depend on the stage of the policymaking process (King, Cornwall and Dahlin 2005; King, Bentele, and Soule 2007; Soule and King 2008), and the level of counter-movement activity (Soule 2004; Soule and Olzak 2004). Moreover, scholars have begun to note the dynamic and recursive nature of this relationship, arguing that social movements impact public opinion and policy *and* are also impacted by these (Soule et al. 1999; McAdam and Su 2002; Olzak and Soule 2009).

In addition to questions of how protest matters to policy-making, social movement theorists have also devoted much time and energy to the question of what explains the emergence of (and fluctuation in) levels of protest (e.g., Soule, McAdam, McCarthy, and Su 1999; Snow, Cress, and Soule 2005; Snow and Soule 2010). In fact, nearly 40 years ago, Wilson (1973: 33) noted: "Without doubt, the question most frequently asked about social movements is: Under which typical social conditions do social movements normally arise?" Nearly 25 years later, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996: 7) asserted that "Understanding the mix of factors that give rise to a movement is the oldest, and arguably the most important, question in the field." Scholarship on this question has indicated the importance of some basic level of movement resources and mobilizing structures, the importance of a facilitative political opportunity structure, and the importance of mobilizing grievances (see review in Snow and Soule 2010).

While we have certainly learned a lot about the linkages between fluctuations in social protest, policymaking, and public opinion, almost all of the research on both the emergence of protest and its effects on policy focuses on a single movement at a time, in a single period of

time (for an exception, see King, Bentele, and Soule 2007). Inspired by the concept of the *protest cycle* or *protest wave* (Tarrow 1994), in this paper we examine the entirety of social protest, in the United States, over a 35-year period. Our goal is to understand whether the waxing and waning of liberal social protest, writ large, is connected in any way to public opinion and policymaking.² We assume that groups are linked by common causes and roots, rising and falling together across time, and we test how well this assumption allows us to explain systematic variance in liberal protest movements and in public opinion. We find a powerful role for liberal social movements in affecting public opinion, indicating support for the second cornerstone of democratic theory.

How might protests rise and fall together across time, affecting public opinion? For an answer, the macro politics model of American politics is a useful place to start. This literature deals with national politics at the system level. In this literature public opinion is conceptualized and measured at a highly aggregated level (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002, Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson 1995, Stimson 1999) and focuses on how macro opinion influences and responds to other aspects of the American political system – partisanship, election outcomes, policy production, economic conditions, and so on (Durr 1993, Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson 2002, Kelly 2009, Kelly and Enns n.d., Page and Shapiro 1992, Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson 1995, Wlezien 1995). Collectively, this literature shows that public opinion both influences and is responsive to shifts in other aspects of the political system. Liberal shifts in public opinion generate Democratic electoral victories, liberal policy outputs, and less income inequality. But public opinion also responds over time to the dynamics of the political system. The public becomes more conservative as policies become more liberal than they prefer, acting as the

² We consider only liberal protest events here, and not conservative as well, because we find (thus far) only random variance in conservative protest. We explain further in the conclusion.

thermostat in the system of macro politics (Wlezien 1995). But social movements have not been integrated with studies of the American macro polity.

THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE MODEL OF PROTEST

We take the existing theory on why social movements arise as our starting point, and argue that policy mood matters for the emergence of, and fluctuation in, social protest. We test two possible models by which policy mood and liberal protests may matter for one another. The first model – the Political Opportunity Structure model of protest – argues that the changing nature of policy mood presents social movement organizers with political opportunities (McAdam 1996; Burstein and Linton 2001; Soule and Olzak 2004).

The concept of the POS is one element of the broader political process model (McAdam 1982), which has been used widely to explain the emergence of social movement activity. While it has been defined in various ways by various authors, we follow Tarrow's definition of the POS as the "consistent... dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1994: 85). Scholars working within the POS framework note that activists are attentive to variations in the openness of the political environment to their protests, and that activists respond to these variations in the environment by either protesting or not (Snow and Soule 2010).

The POS has been invoked to explain mobilization of social movements as diverse as the women's movement (Soule et al. 1999; Soule and Olzak 2004; Soule and King 2006), the environmental movement (Olzak and Soule 2009), student movements (Van Dyke 2004), and militia organizing (Van Dyke and Soule 2002). However, it is somewhat striking that those studies using quantitative methodology have revealed somewhat mixed support for the core hypotheses from the POS tradition. Despite the fact that empirical work on the POS has been

rather mixed, we still feel it is important to consider the effect of the POS on liberal protest activity. We wish to explore the notion that perhaps the whole (meaning, the impact of all of these protest movements) is greater than the sum of the parts (the impact of each movement considered in isolation).

Dynamic policy mood may present social movement organizers with changing opportunities; when policy mood is liberal, liberal social movements have a greater opportunity to be successful because the issues they care about are capable of receiving more support from the American people (Soule and Olzak 2004). This will, in turn, lead to greater policy success.

However, as Soule and Olzak (2004) imply, the activism of these rising social movements can lead to an ideological backlash, which in turn moves public mood in the opposite ideological direction. Scholars find that policy mood swings across time in liberal and conservative directions because eventually policy becomes “too” liberal or conservative, and public opinion moves in the other direction to bring the system to some balance (Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson 1995, Wlezien 1995). Given this first model, we hypothesize that the electorate is responding not just to the ideological tenor of policy, but to the activities of ideological social movements as well. Public opinion moves in the opposite direction, in part, because of the social movements, and in response to them.

The causal argument of this first perspective, then, has two components. As policy mood trends in a liberal direction, liberal social movements should become more active. Second, rising liberal social movements should produce public opinion movement in the opposite ideological direction, in an attempt to find a place of ideological equilibrium within the system. Stated explicitly, the first perspective leads to the following two hypotheses:

H1: Greater liberal policy mood leads to greater liberal protests.

H2: Greater liberal protests feedback and reduce liberal policy mood.

THE PROTEST AS COUNTER-CYCLE MODEL

The second model of the relationship between policy mood and liberal social movements leads to dramatically different expectations. What we label the protest as counter-cycle model suggests that liberal mood reduces the prevalence of liberal social movement activity and that liberal social movement activity generates liberal shifts in public opinion – precisely the opposite prediction of the POS model discussed in the previous section. This model begins with a different perspective on why social movements arise. Instead of social movements gaining traction when the political opportunity structure is favorable, this model presumes that social movements are generated by frustration with the status quo. A conservative political environment generates liberal disaffection with the status quo, which generates an organized reaction by liberal protestors. If this is the case, we would expect to see liberal protest activity rise when the political environment is more conservative. With regard to the impact of public opinion on social movements, then, this model suggests that liberal social movements gain momentum when public opinion is conservative.

For the countercyclical model of protest to make complete sense, protest activity must also have certain effects on the political system, including public opinion. Specifically, if protest arises to counter an unfavorable political environment, ideally this protest activity would help to make the political environment more favorable. This suggests a positive link between liberal protest activity and liberal public opinion.

John Zaller's (1992) Receive-Acceptance-Sample (RAS) theory of public opinion suggests a mechanism through which liberal protests might generate liberal opinion. Zaller argues that when people answer survey questions (and such responses *do* form the measure of

policy mood), they sample from relevant considerations. These relevant considerations come from messages that they have accepted in the past (beliefs they have chosen to endorse). These considerations were communicated to them, in some manner, by their environment. When they perceived the message, they “received” it, according to the model.

Beginning with the first stage of the RAS model, we expect rising liberal social movements to increase the number of liberal messages people are exposed to. We see this as a one-way information flow. As liberal social movements rise, people should receive more pro-liberal messages from all of the possible sources for such messages: the media, but also interest groups, campaigns, or other sources as well.³ Importantly, the most widespread and active movements may create their own message sources. For example, one common source has been churches: black churches play an important role in politicizing blacks (Calhoun-Brown 1996, Tate 1991), as well as evangelical whites (especially about abortion; e.g. Jelen and Wilcox 2003).

Turning to the acceptance stage of the RAS model, more pro-liberal messages will move public opinion through both priming and framing. Liberal protest movements will communicate more liberal considerations as they become more active. This will prime these considerations, which should make them more accessible to people in the third stage of the survey response (sampling). In addition, the frames of the liberal protest movements should be dominant, which may persuade some to hold opinions that are more liberal (e.g. Nelson and Oxley 1999).

For the third stage of the survey response, the increase in liberal considerations will lead people to sample from these increased considerations, increasing the probability of delivering a

³ Reporters follow the “norm of objectivity” by reporting both sides of an issue (Schiffer 2008). However, the media also reflect an unequal reality in which one message flow dominates another.

liberal response to an interviewer. The crux of the argument, of course, is that people will have increasing liberal opinions, which will reflect their information environments.

H3: Greater liberal protest leads to greater liberal policy mood.

H4: Greater liberal policy mood leads to reduced policy mood.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR LIBERAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

As discussed above, one theory that links social movements and policy mood sees public opinion as part of the Political Opportunity Structure (POS). POS scholars argue that political protest movements arise because aspects of the political environment allow them greater chances to be successful. Policy mood is only one part of that environment, though it is the aspect to which we are most attentive in this paper. In his synthesis of a number of scholarly treatments of this issue, McAdam (1996: 26-29) identified a “highly consensual list of (four) dimensions of political opportunity:” (1) system accessibility or the degree to which a political system is open or closed to challenge; (2) the relative stability of the pattern of political alignments within a system; (3) the presence or absence of influential allies; and (4) the repressive capacity of the state or relevant political entity. Other aspects of the POS beyond public opinion may provide similar incentives for liberal protest movement leaders – such as electing a Democratic president, or electing more Democrats to Congress. So we also pay attention to multiple other aspects of the POS in our effort to explain liberal protests – partisan control of the presidency, House, and Senate; divided government, the ideological tenor of public policy, and government repression. We discuss the expected impact of each of these factors below.

Scholars have also identified two other leading accounts for the emergence of protest: strain theory and resource mobilization theory. The basic postulate of strain theory is that dire social conditions (e.g., widespread poverty and unemployment) and/or rapidly changing

conditions (e.g., dramatic changes in population) have disruptive effects that can lead individuals who are affected by them to participate in social movement activity. Hence, the origins and emergence of protest are rooted in these underlying social conditions that impact some people more directly than others, thus making them somehow more susceptible to movement activity.

There are at least four different variants of strain theory. One is the mass society variant, which argues that it is the disintegration of social ties and general sense of anomie that leads people to join social movements (Kornhauser 1959). A second is the absolute deprivation variant, which instead focuses on poor life conditions, such as extreme poverty, which push people into social movement activity in an attempt to alleviate whatever dire social condition they are experiencing (Marx and Engels 1948; Piven and Cloward 1977; Van Dyke and Soule 2002). A third is the relative deprivation thesis, which emphasizes that there is often a perceived discrepancy between what people come to expect as normal and what they actually have or are able to attain (Gurr 1970; Seeman 1981). Finally, more recently scholars have proposed the “quotidian disruption” thesis, which points to suddenly imposed grievances and/or the disruption of everyday routines as the root cause of mobilization (Useem 1998; Walsh 1981).

As might be expected, strain theory (and all of its variants) has been subject to a great deal of criticism over the years (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly, Tilly and Tilly, 1975). However, as Snow and his colleagues note (2005), critics of strain theory are not always clear about which variant they are criticizing. Thus, while we recognize that strain theory has, over the past several decades, become a less popular theoretical explanation of mobilization, we nonetheless feel it is important to account for strain in our models. In particular, because we are interested in overall levels of liberal protest in the United States, we focus on the absolute deprivation variant of strain theory described above.

The resource mobilization perspective argues that the emergence of, and fluctuation in, protest is highly contingent on the availability of resources that can be used by activists and leaders to increase participation in protest and other types of social movement activity (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988; Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Soule and King 2008; Snow and Soule 2010). Over the years, scholarship has delineated different types of resources (e.g., Snow and Cress 2000; Edwards and McCarthy 2004), typically differentiating between material (or monetary) resources, human resources (or skills), legitimacy (or moral resources) and organizational resources, such as social networks (Snow and Soule 2010). In general, there is widespread empirical support for the basic argument that the availability, aggregation, and deployment of resources are the most important determinants of movement emergence and activity (see review in Edwards and McCarthy 2004).

DATA, MEASUREMENT, AND HYPOTHESES

Data Source: The Dynamics of Collective Action, 1960-1995

Our analysis of liberal protest events has at its foundation a dataset of *protest events*, defined as any type of activity that involves more than one person and is carried out with the explicit purpose of articulating a grievance against (or expressing support for) a target. Data on these events were drawn from daily editions of the *New York Times (NYT)* between 1960 and 1995 and come from the *Dynamics of Collective Action Project*, run by Sarah Soule, Susan Olzak, John McCarthy, and Doug McAdam.⁴ For more in-depth discussions of the data used here, see McAdam and Su (2002), Earl, Soule and McCarthy (2003), Van Dyke, Soule and Taylor (2004), Soule and Earl (2005), Earl and Soule (2006), King and Soule (2007), King, Bentele and Soule

⁴ <http://www.dynamicsofcollectiveaction.com>.

(2007), Soule and King (2008), Soule (2009), Larson and Soule (2009), Olzak and Soule (2009), and Soule and Davenport (2009).

For a particular protest event to be included in the dataset, it must have met three basic criteria. First, there must have been more than one participant at the event, since the interest is in collective action. Acts of protest carried out by individuals, such as uncoordinated hunger strikes or acts of self-immolation, are therefore not included. Second, participants at an event must have articulated some *claim*, whether this be a grievance against some target or an expression of support for some target. The events in the dataset are associated with *any* claim or issue area articulated by participants (in other words, these are not specific to a particular movement or set of movements).⁵ While claims can often be grouped into distinct “social movements” or “issue areas,” the coding team did not attempt to do this a priori. Because the coding rules required that protesters articulated some claim, collective events such as block parties, annual parades, and fund-raising campaigns were not coded.⁶ Also, the event must have happened in the *public sphere* or have been open to the public for the coding team to include it in their dataset. Thus, private or closed meetings by social movement actors are not included, but events within organizations (e.g., schools, churches, private organizations) are included *if* they were open to the public.⁷ Finally, coded events occurred all over the U.S.; that is, the researchers did not code events only in cities or only in certain areas.

⁵ The project coded events associated with both sides of each claim or issue area. For example, the researchers coded both pro-war and anti-war/peace events. In all, they coded over 160 different claims articulated over this period.

⁶ Note that if a block party turned into a demonstration in which participants articulated some claim, this would have been coded.

⁷ The data cannot speak to changes in protest that takes place outside of the public sphere, such as changes in movements that develop within corporations. As well, the dataset does not include

These data were collected in two distinct stages. First, researchers read each and every page of all daily issues of the *NYT* searching for any mention of protest events. By avoiding the use of an index to the *NYT*, they were able to find events that were embedded in articles on other (often related) topics. For example, protest events by poor people were found embedded in more general articles on the cost of living. It is likely that such events would *not* be indexed under headings such as, “protest” or “demonstration.” As a result, the project’s strategy nets a greater number of events than other strategies. The second stage of data collection involved the content coding of each event, noting that a single article can discuss multiple events, each of which was coded separately. Project personnel coded information on a variety of different topics, including the claim or issue area articulated at the event, event size and location, the participating group(s), targets of the event, organizational presence, tactical forms employed, and police presence and action taken by these actors at the event. Intercoder reliability estimates for most items on the codesheet were consistently at or above 90% agreement. In all, there are over 23,000 distinct protest events reported to have occurred in the U.S. between 1960 and 1995.⁸

Our analysis in this paper required some recoding of events. First, since we are interested in *liberal protest events*, it was necessary to determine if each event was associated with a liberal cause. To do this, we had 7 different coders assess each of the claims associated with these events and determine if the claim is associated with a liberal or left-leaning cause. For example, we asked coders to determine if a pro-peace event would be, in general, associated with a liberal

organized labor events (e.g., work stoppages and strikes) because the dynamics of labor events are likely different from the rest of the protest sector. Note that if an organized labor event morphed into a public protest event, it would be coded as a distinct event, however.

⁸ Note that in some of the statistical analysis presented in herein, there are somewhat fewer cases due to missing data on one or more variable. Also note that the full database from which these events were drawn covers well over 22,000 events but this is because it includes events using tactical forms that we exclude herein (see earlier footnote).

cause or a conservative cause. Or, we asked them to determine if an anti-abortion event was, in general, associated with a liberal or a conservative cause. Once each coder completed this task, we reconciled their decisions. If there was over 85% agreement (that is, if there was perfect agreement or if only 1 coder disagreed with the other 6), then we went with the code. In cases where there was less than 85% agreement, the authors of the paper discussed the claim and either made a decision or, in some cases, decided that we could not determine if a claim was, on balance, liberal or conservative. For example, there were a number of events that were in favor of retrieving prisoners of war or searching for military personnel missing in action. Or, there were victims' rights events, for example. In such ambiguous cases, we simply assigned an ambiguous code and have excluded them from the analysis.

Second, since we are interested in looking at yearly levels of liberal protest, we aggregate the events in the dataset to the yearly level. Below, we describe in more detail our dependent variable and how we constructed it.

Newspaper Data

Newspapers are one of the most widely used sources of data in the study of collective protest, in large part because they allow for the collection of large numbers of events, emphasizing the dynamic activities of social movements over the more static. McAdam and Su (2002: 704) note that the analysis of protest event data culled from newspapers is a “methodological staple” in social movement studies and that many of the “classical empirical works in the field” use newspaper data.

Because so many scholars use newspaper data, there have been many attempts to assess the potential biases associated with this source. There are two chief types of possible bias identified in several recent reviews on the subject (Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney

2000; Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz, Myers, Walls, and Diaz 2005; Davenport 2010): *description bias* and *selection bias*. Description bias refers to how well (or poorly) the newspaper reporter describes what actually happened at a given event. Most attempts to assess this source of bias conclude that the “hard facts” of the event are generally accurately covered by newspapers. Because we draw on “hard facts” of the events (as will be described in detail below, we use data on tactics used, goals, articulated, organizations present, and policing), and not on “soft facts” (such as opinions on the issue), we are confident that the accuracy of our data is acceptable for our purposes herein.

Selection bias refers to the fact that not all protest events will be covered by a given newspaper and the possibility that what *is* covered is likely not a random sample of all events that took place. The literature on selection bias points out that more intense events (e.g., larger, more violent, injurious), those with conflict, those with “significant actors” (e.g., celebrities, those defined as powerful and/or culturally legitimate), and proximity of the event to the newspaper are more likely to be selected for coverage (Ortiz et al. 2005; Davenport 2010). To deal with selection bias, unlike many prior studies using newspapers as a source of data on collective action events, the project team did *not* use an index of the *NYT* to identify events nor did they sample days of the newspaper. Instead, researchers reviewed *daily* editions of the newspaper and identified *all* collective action events that were reported, after which research assistants content-coded each event. While admittedly taking longer, this strategy helped to reduce the selection bias that may be introduced by indexing methodology and day-of-the-week rhythms in coverage (Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005). Moreover, the adopted approach allowed researchers to find a great many less intense and smaller events that were embedded in articles on larger, more intense events. For example, it was not uncommon to find mention of a

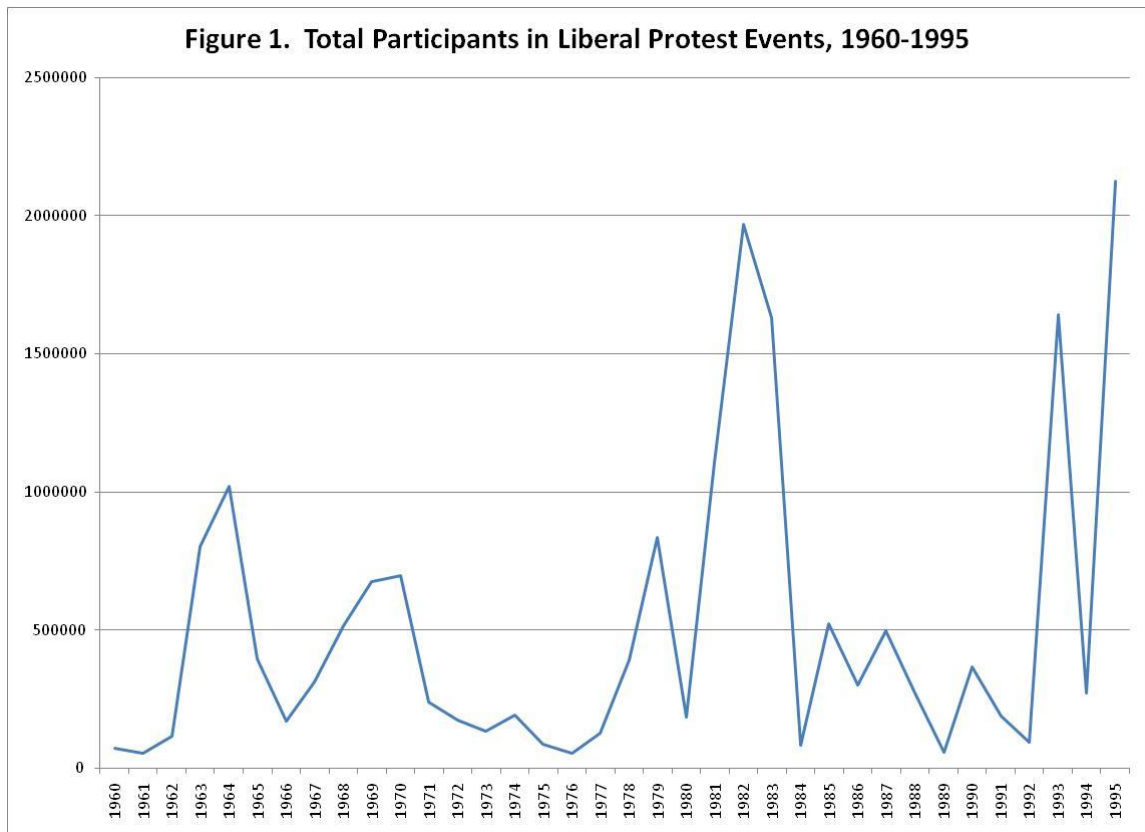
small, related event in a locale far from the New York described in an article on an event that took place in or around New York.

Dependent Variables

Based on our earlier theoretical discussion, it should be clear that the primary variables of interest in our analysis are public mood liberalism and liberal protest. Both of these variables will be treated, at times, as dependent variables. Our measure of liberal protest is rooted in the protest event data described above. Given our interest in the over-time movement of liberal protest and how protest responds to and influences public opinion, we must shift our focus from analyzing individual protest events to analyzing protest cross-temporally. To do this, we aggregate the protest event data by year in order to create an annual measure of protest events. In this paper we are focused on liberal protest events, so the annual count includes only protest events that were coded liberal, using the coding rules described above. We also take an additional step and weight the protests by participation. For each protest event, information regarding the number of people participating was recorded. Our weighting scheme simply multiplies each event by the number (in thousands) participating in the event before aggregating the events into an annual measure of liberal protest participation. In each year, then, our *liberal protest participation* variable provides the number of people, in thousands, participating in liberal protest events.⁹ This variable is particularly useful for our purposes because it tracks not only the existence of protest, but also

⁹ Scholars have studied political protest for years. Two conceptualizations of mass protest arise. The first focuses on the number of people who actually participate. The second focuses on the number of events held. Given that we are interested in the impact of protest on public mood (and vice versa), we favor the former conceptualization of mass protest because we expect the numbers of people involved will have a greater impact on public mood. While the number of protest events should also share a relationship with public mood, mood and policy both result from the behavior of the mass polity, and our conceptualization of protest should also reflect the actions of the masses. We see an event-related definition of protest to be more related to elite considerations, and less to the passions and interests of the mass public.

the degree of participation in these protests. Clearly, a protest involving ten participants sends a much weaker signal to elected officials and the mass public than a protest involving tens of thousands. Our annual measure of liberal protest participation is available from 1960-1995. We display the resulting time series in Figure 1.



Our second primary variable of interest is public mood liberalism. This measure, originally created by Stimson (1991), aggregates thousands of surveys and survey responses to tap the general ideological preferences of the mass public. Stimson discovered that the opinions of the mass public in a variety of policy domains generally move together over time. When sentiment in one domain moves in a conservative direction, sentiment in other domains move in a conservative direction as well. Public mood summarizes the ideological preferences of the American public in a single measure. And, while Stimson explores the possibility of multiple dimensions of public opinion, he finds that the primary dimension corresponds to the right-left

ideological continuum. The annual version of the 1st dimension mood measure we utilize here has been updated through 2009 (the most recent update of the measure is available at <http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson>), though we only analyze the period 1960-1995, with higher values corresponding to more liberal public opinion.

Explanatory Variables and Hypotheses

We discussed above our core hypotheses related to the potential linkages between public mood liberalism and liberal protest participation. We test each of these core hypotheses using time series data from 1960-1995.

In addition to public mood liberalism, we examine several variables related to political opportunity structure and the macro politics model. Specifically, we include measures of presidential partisanship, the partisan composition of the House and the Senate, divided government, policy liberalism, and repression. The presidential partisanship variable is simply a dummy variable coded 1 for Democratic presidents and 0 for Republicans. The partisan composition measures report the number of Democrats in the House and Senate, respectively. Policy liberalism is a measure of the ideological content of policy output which is based on coding each of Mayhew's (2005) important laws for ideological direction (liberal +1, conservative -1, neutral 0), summarizing the ideological content by year, and then cumulating the annual measure over time to generate an indicator of cumulative policy liberalism (see Kelly (2009) for a more detailed discussion of the policy liberalism measure).

Traditional POS theory leads to the hypothesis that Democratic strength in government and liberal policy production increases liberal protest activity. However, a somewhat more pluralistic perspective would suggest that liberal protest is more likely to occur when the opposition is in power and objectionable policies are being enacted. Under this scenario, liberals

will feel more alienated and seek redress through protest activity when Republicans are more prevalent in national policymaking institutions and more conservative policies are created. For these partisan and ideological variables, just as we do for public mood, we have competing hypotheses rooted in divergent theoretical perspectives. Divided government is an indicator variable coded 1 if the House majority, Senate majority, and president are not of the same party and 0 if they are of the same party. POS theory leads to the hypothesis that divided government leads to a more open political system, which should lead to increased liberal protest to take advantage of the greater opportunity. Finally, the repression measure is based on the percentage of liberal and conservative protest events at which police were present. To calculate repression, we subtract the percentage of conservative protest events at which police were present from the percentage of liberal protest events at which police were present to generate a measure of net liberal protest repression. POS theory leads to the hypothesis that repression of liberal events will reduce liberal protest participation.

We also test hypotheses regarding a variety of other variables related to different strands of the social movement literature. We use five different variables to tap aspects of strain theory – the percent of families living in poverty as reported by the Census Bureau, the percent unemployment reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of nonfarm employees in manufacturing (in thousands), the number of illegal immigrants, and the number of battle deaths incurred by U.S. forces. Strain theory suggests that higher rates of poverty, unemployment, immigration, and battle deaths should produce higher levels of liberal protest. The size of the manufacturing sector, however, should be inversely related to liberal protest participation based on the insights of strain theory. We examine three variables related to the resource mobilization thesis. Higher GDP is expected to produce greater liberal protest participation. The business

failure rate is hypothesized to decrease liberal social movement participation, while real median income should increase liberal social movement participation. Finally, we include the size of the U.S. population as a general control since the number of people participating in protests is likely to rise over time simply because the overall population exhibits steady growth.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We begin our analysis by estimating four simple models with liberal protest participation as the dependent variable. Since we are analyzing annual data from 1960-1995, we must be attentive to the various problems that can arise when utilizing time series data. In the four models shown in Table 1, most of the problems that often accompany time-series models are simply not present. First and foremost, our dependent variable is stationary. This means that we can estimate a model using the unaltered score on the dependent variable without concern about a spurious regression of one unit-root variable on another. Tests for autocorrelation in each model also show this not to be an issue. So, we go forward with OLS estimation of four static time-series models. We call these static models because they do not allow for the possibility that the causal process modeled is one that is distributed over time. This means that the effect of each explanatory variable is restricted to a single period. Essentially, we are assuming in these models that the current value of liberal protest participation is affected by the value of an explanatory variable at a single past or present point in time. Later in the analysis we add some additional complexities, but these simple models are useful as a starting point.

The first three models separately examine variables associated with three theoretical approaches to explaining social movement activity. Strain theory is the focus of Model 1, Model 2 examines the effect of three variables associated with the resource mobilization thesis, and Model 3 focuses on POS variables. The U.S. population is included in all of the models. These

three models show some degree of support for each of the main theoretical perspectives on social movement activity. Increasing levels of poverty are associated with higher levels of liberal protest activity. This is consistent with the idea that social and economic distress serve as mobilizing factors for social movement activity. Consistent with resource mobilization theory, the business failure rate is negatively correlated with liberal protest participation. When businesses are failing more often and therefore fewer mobilizing resources are available, less social movement activity occurs. We also see, however, that rising real median income, an indicator of greater resources for mobilization, is associated with lower levels of protest activity. This is inconsistent with the resource mobilization hypothesis, but can likely be discounted due to the fact that median income could also be viewed as an indicator connected with societal strain. It is quite difficult to identify measures over such an extended period of time that

Table 1. Multivariate Analysis of Liberal Social Movement Protest Participation

| Independent Variables | Liberal Social Movement Participation _t | | | |
|---|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| <i>Strain Theory</i> | | | | |
| Poverty _{t-1} | 145.8** (68.7) | | | -73.3 (102.1) |
| Unemployment _{t-1} | 55.2 (85.2) | | | |
| Manufacturing _{t-1} | 0.29 (0.19) | | | |
| Immigration _{t-1} | -0.00 (0.00) | | | |
| Battle Deaths _t | 0.03 (0.04) | | | |
| <i>Resource Mobilization</i> | | | | |
| GDP _{t-1} | | -0.55 (0.46) | | |
| Business Failure Rate _{t-1} | | -10.9** (5.13) | | -8.58* (4.96) |
| Real Median Income _{t-1} | | -0.13*** (0.04) | | -0.20** (0.10) |
| <i>Political Opportunity Structure</i> | | | | |
| Democratic President _t | | | 506.1 (361.1) | |
| Senate Democrats _t | | | 81.8 (56.5) | |
| House Democrats _t | | | -19.6*** (6.43) | -15.3*** (4.27) |
| Divided Government _t | | | 638.7 (438.8) | |
| Public Mood Liberalism _t | | | -70.6** (28.0) | -41.9* (24.3) |
| Policy Liberalism _t | | | -10.9 (9.8) | |
| Repression _t | | | 1019.3 (766.6) | |
| U.S. Population (millions) _t | 15.5* (8.44) | 87.24** (39.5) | 9.21 (6.68) | 49.9** (19.6) |
| Constant | -10288** (4509) | -8913 (5460) | 2461 (3696) | 7245 (3253) |
| Adj. R ² | 0.08 | 0.19 | 0.32 | 0.43 |

| | | | | |
|---------|------|------|------|------|
| LM Test | 0.68 | 0.94 | 0.98 | 0.23 |
| T | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 |

Note: Table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Significance levels: * < .10, ** < .05, *** < .01 (two-tailed tests)

explicitly examine resource mobilization independent of economic strain. In model 3, 2 POS variables attain statistical significance – the number of House Democrats and public mood liberalism both produce a decline in liberal social movement activity.

In the final column of the table we estimate a more fully specified model of liberal protest activity that includes measures from each of the main theories of social movement activity, including the statistically significant variables from each of the first three separately estimated models. Once median income is included in this final model, the poverty rate is no longer statistically significant, nor is the estimate in the hypothesized direction. The business failure rate, lagged one year, continues to have a negative impact on liberal protest activity. Higher median income also drives down liberal protest activity. The business failure rate result has two possible interpretations. The first is that businesses provide general resources that encourage social movement activity (even liberal activity), and when businesses are floundering, such resources dry up. The alternative interpretation is that liberal social movements are often anti-business and are not as motivated to protest when businesses are not succeeding. The result for median income is more straightforward, though more consistent with strain theory than resource mobilization. When times are good, there is less motivation to protest, and when times are bad, people are frustrated and are more eager to participate in protest activity in order to let their frustration be heard.

The results for the POS variables are quite interesting. Recall that we suggested two alternative hypotheses related to POS. The first was rooted in the traditional POS model which argues that liberal protests will increase when the political environment is more open to the

preferences of the left. The second is rooted in what we call a counter-cyclical protest model, in which liberals are less likely to protest when policymakers aligned with their preferences are in office and the public has a more positive attitude toward liberal policies. Our results strongly suggest the latter. When either the number of Democrats in the House or public mood liberalism is high, liberal protest participation tends to be lower as well.

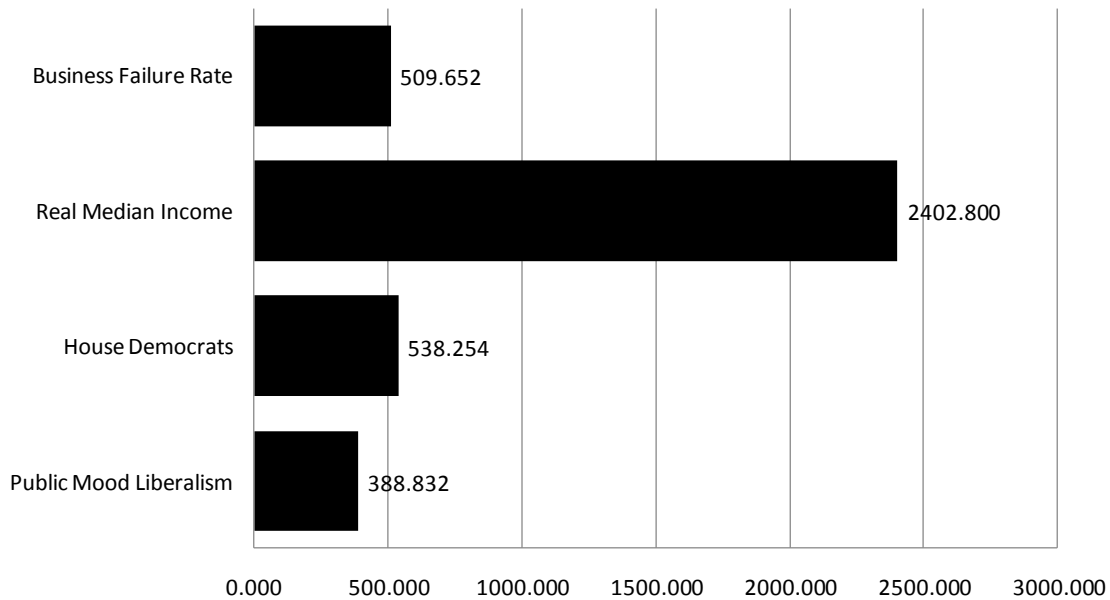


Figure 2. Reduction in Liberal Protest Participation of Shift from 1 S.D. Below to 1 S.D. Above Mean

In Figure 2 we attempt to provide a sense of the substantive and comparative impact of the statistically significant variables from Model 4 by charting the predicted change in liberal protest participation when each variable moves from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above its mean, holding the other variables constant. This figure shows that the substantive impact of each of the variables is substantial. Given that the dependent variable here is scaled such that a single point corresponds to one thousand individuals participating in a liberal protest, we can see that the variable with even the smallest impact, public mood

liberalism, decreases the number of people participating in liberal protests by more than 388 thousand when mood moves from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above its mean. A similar change in real median income reduces participation in liberal protests by more than 2.4 million. In terms of the relative impact of each variable, median income, which is probably best interpreted as connected with strain theory, has the largest effect. This is followed by the number of House Democrats, a POS variable, the business failure rate which is connected to resource mobilization, and a second POS variable, public mood.

To this point, the analysis has set aside the important question of causal direction. Earlier in the paper we laid out the argument that POS variables could influence social movement participation but that social movements could also generate either backlash against or sympathy for their goals in the macro political system. In this portion of the analysis, we focus explicitly on whether the two POS variables that we found to be significant predictors of social movement participation are indeed causes of protest activity or are actually caused by protest activity. We accomplish this by estimated a reduced form vector-autoregression followed by a Granger causality test. We essentially face a chicken and egg problem here, with the question being whether political factors move protest, or whether protest moves political factors. The Granger causality test starts with the intuition that most time series are in some part predicted by their own past values. In this case the intuition is that protest activity in one year may have something to do with protest activity in previous years. If lagged levels of predictor variables (here public mood liberalism and Democratic House seats) predict protest activity even while controlling for lagged values of protest activity, Granger causality is said to exist.

The results of this analysis are in Table 2. Here we conduct three separate Granger tests by regressing the variable in the column on three lags of itself and three lags of the other two

Table 2. Granger Causality Test of POS Factors and Liberal Social Movement Participation

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| | Liberal Social Movement Participation | House Democrats | Public Mood Liberalism |
| Liberal Social Movement Participation | - | 0.02** | 0.04** |
| House Democrats | 0.03** | - | 0.18 |
| Public Mood Liberalism | 0.74 | 0.25 | - |

Note: Cells report the significance level of the χ^2 value produced from a Granger causality test based on a reduced-form vector autoregression including the three variables listed in the table. The null hypothesis is that the variable listed in the row does not Granger-cause the variable listed in the column.

variables listed in the rows of the table. The table reports the joint significance of the three lags of the variable in the row, with a significant test result indicating the presence of Granger causation. The analysis shows that the number of House Democrats causes liberal protest participation, but at the same time the number of House Democrats is caused by liberal protest participation. With regard to public mood liberalism, we see that the results discussed above are somewhat misleading. In fact, public mood liberalism is caused by liberal protest activity but does not cause protest activity. Essentially, there is clear evidence here that liberal protest activity is exogenous to public mood liberalism. The Granger causality test says nothing about the direction of the impact of the variables analyzed. We saw in the earlier analysis that Democratic House seats produce less liberal social movement activity, but we have no evidence yet about the impact of protest activity on the political variables.

In Table 3 we present three models that accomplish two goals. First, each of these models is *dynamic*. That is, these models provide for the possibility that the effect of explanatory variables is distributed over time. Unlike the earlier models of protest activity, we do not assume here that the impact of the independent variables is restricted to a single point in time. Second,

the final two models provide an estimate of the feedback effects of protest activity on the political system.

Model 1 estimates an error correction model of the impact of Democratic House seats on liberal protest activity.¹⁰ Note that there are two coefficient estimates for Democratic House seats. One is the coefficient for the change in Democratic House seats from one year to the next. The second is the lagged value of Democratic House seats. Each of these coefficients provides different information about the impact of Democratic House seats. The coefficient for the first-difference provides an estimate of the short-term, immediate impact of a change in House composition. The coefficient indicates that when the Democrats gain an additional seat in the House, liberal social movement participation decreases immediately by nearly 15 thousand individuals. This is an amazingly strong impact. The coefficient for the lagged level of Democratic House seats can only be interpreted in concert with the error correction rate which is the estimate for the lagged level of the dependent variable. In this model, the error correction rate is 0.67, meaning that 67 percent of the total long-run impact of Democratic House seats occurs in each year, beginning the year after the initial change in House composition. The total long-run impact is calculated by dividing -11.78 by the error correction rate, 0.67, to produce an effect of -17.58. Given that the immediate impact of a one-seat increase of Democrats in the House is reduction of 14.83 in liberal protest participation, it is clear that most of the impact of changes in House composition occur quickly ($14.83/17.58 = 0.84$). This model does show, however, that the impact of House composition is somewhat distributed over time, such that an increase in

¹⁰ Error correction models are often used when dealing with a nonstationary dependent variable when cointegration is present. However, cointegration is not a necessary condition required for the appropriate estimation of an error correction model. In fact, De Boef and Keele (2008) demonstrate that ECMs are quite flexible time series models that can be estimated appropriately in a wide variety of contexts.

Democratic seat share produces changes in liberal protest movement not only immediately, but also for several years into the future. The total long-run impact of just a single additional Democratic seat in the House is a reduction in protest participation of over 17.5 thousand people.

Table 3. Dynamic Models of Liberal Social Movement Participation, House Partisanship, and Public Mood Liberalism

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Δ Liberal Social Movement Participation _t | Δ House Democrats _t | Public Mood Liberalism _t |
| Lagged Dependent Variable | -0.67*** (0.19) | -0.47*** (0.15) | 0.93*** (0.07) |
| Δ Liberal Social Movement Participation _t | - | -0.01** (0.00) | - |
| Liberal Social Movement Participation _{t-1} | - | -0.00 (0.00) | 0.00 (0.00) |
| Liberal Social Movement Participation _{t-2} | | | 0.002** (0.001) |
| Δ % House Democrat _t | -14.83** (5.95) | - | - |
| % House Democrat _{t-1} | -11.78* (5.98) | - | - |
| Δ Public Mood Liberalism _t | - | - | - |
| Public Mood Liberalism _{t-1} | - | - | - |
| Adj. R ² | 0.38 | 0.33 | 0.86 |
| T | 35 | 35 | 34 |

Note: Table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The first two models represent error correction models and the third column is a lagged dependent variable model. Significance levels: * < .10, ** < .05, *** < .01 (two-tailed tests)

Column 2 changes the dependent variable to House composition and the independent variable to liberal protest participation, again estimating an error correction model. In this model the full effect of protest movement happens in the short-term. When liberal protest activity increases, Democratic strength in the House declines. This effect is consistent with the backlash hypothesis which suggests that ideologically directed protest activity undermines the ability of

the social movement to see their goals reached through the mechanisms of government. But how strong is this effect? The coefficient estimate is just -0.01, but the standard deviation of liberal protest activity is more than 555. This means that a standard deviation change in liberal protest activity produces a 12 seat reduction in the size of the Democratic House caucus. This indicates that the impact is substantively significant and does operate to undermine the ability of liberal protest groups to successfully enact their preferred policies.

Finally, in Column 3 we estimate a model of public mood liberalism, including two lags of liberal protest participation as well as a lagged dependent variable. This model specification is not unlike an error correction model, but we found when estimating an initial ECM that such a model assumed too complicated a dynamic structure. The LDV model is essentially a reduced form of an ECM that assumes a simpler dynamic structure. Here we see that liberal social movement participation increases the liberalism of public mood, with a two year lag. Since previous studies have documented a linkage between changes in public opinion and changes in policymaking (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002), the fact that liberal protests eventually lead to more liberal public opinion suggests that liberal protests have some potential to affect the political system in the intended manner. Here, as well, the substantive impact is impressive. The total long-run impact¹¹ of a unit-change in liberal protest activity is 0.03. Recalling that the standard deviation of liberal protest participation is about 555, a standard deviation change in protest produces more than a 16 point increase in liberal public mood. This is a large effect given that the standard deviation of public mood during the period under analysis is about 4.6. A one standard deviation increase in liberal protests produces approximately a 3.5 standard deviation

¹¹ In an LDV model, the total long-run impact of an explanatory variable must account for the fact that a change in the dependent variable continues to feed forward into future values of the dependent variable. In this case, the coefficient estimate of .002 must be divided by $1 - 0.93$, to calculate the total effect of .029.

increase in public mood liberalism.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

First, liberal social movements matter for public opinion. The effect is of a large magnitude. While past scholars traditionally find that social movements have little effect on public opinion, we find a strong effect. Our divergent findings may be for two reasons. First, we study protest events in their aggregated form, while others study one protest movement at a time. Scholars have established that the entire macro political system (including public opinion, as well as the outputs of the House of Representatives, Senate, President, and Supreme Court) move in left-right directions across time (e.g. Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002). We produce evidence here that protest events strongly move the public opinion component of the political system. However, when protest movements are parsed out and considered separately, the strength of the overall ideological signal may be considerably weakened.

The second reason for our divergent findings may have to do with our operationalization of protest movements. Social movement scholars traditionally measure protest movement strength by counting the number of events a movement holds. We take a different tact, measuring protest movement strength as the number of people who participate in protest events in a given year. While we expect that both should be related to the ideological turns of the macro system, we believe that greater numbers of participants send a stronger ideological signal than greater numbers of events do because of the greater multiplier effect that protest events can have when more people attend. In the future, we will examine the empirical implications of the two measurement strategies.

How do social movements matter for public opinion? As liberal social movements rise, public mood becomes more liberal (but also leading Democrats to hold fewer seats in the House

of Representatives). We find that liberal protest events are exogenous to public opinion, although the economy does affect the size of liberal protest event movements. If protest movements are exogenous from public opinion, then that leaves a lot of room for SMOs to have influence. The economy-only model fit with our liberal protest event measure is not very strong, which suggests that the movement of the series is not highly determined by the economy. This leaves a lot of room for political actors to make their mark by organizing the grass roots.

In this paper we focus on the liberal protest events (or participation therein), but we don't report any results for conservative protest events. Originally we conceptualized of our liberal protest measure as a measure of net liberal protest --- the degree to which more liberal protestors than conservative ones took to the streets. However, our models of conservative protest reported R-squared statistics of zero, indicating a complete lack of systematic movement across time. As such, creating a net liberal protest variable only introduced error, because the conservative protest model appears to be pure error. We will further explore these results, and their implications, in the future.

We conclude with caveats to our results. The greatest caveat is one that comes at the beginning of any new research agenda – this is our first cut at this topic, and we have much to learn. We will further explore the relationship between liberal protests and mood. We will expand the models to include policy, parsing out the dynamic relationships between liberal protest, policy mood, and public policy.

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