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U.S.

Protests Spread Beyond Big Cities, From Raleigh to Santa Rosa

People have taken to the streets in many small and midsize communities that have seldom, if ever, seen large protests over police brutality

By [Elizabeth Findell](#) and [Valerie Bauerlein](#)

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In conservative West Texas. In Omaha, Neb. Across the quiet suburbs of California. The rage and despair sparked by the death of George Floyd in police custody has spread far beyond Minneapolis, to communities of all sizes.

People took to the streets over the weekend—peacefully and violently—in many small and midsize cities that have seldom, if ever, seen large protests over police brutality.

“The nation has erupted,” said Kami Chavis, director of the criminal justice program at Wake Forest University School of Law, who called the outcry more intense than past protests. “What feels different to me about this time is that there’s so much solidarity across communities.”

Bethany Cannon, a 25-year-old student and bartender, organized protests that drew hundreds both Saturday and Sunday in Lubbock, Texas, a conservative city of 258,000 that is majority white and just 8% black. Ms. Cannon and others couldn’t recall another Lubbock protest with such crowds, but she called Mr. Floyd’s death a breaking point of too many police killings and too little change.

Photos and Voices of the George Floyd Protests: 'We Deserve to Be Heard'

As protests and vigils spread across the country, protesters voice their motivations for getting involved.

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It was important to Ms. Cannon that the protest stay peaceful, which it did, she said, with friendly cooperation from police. On Saturday, a man carrying a rifle arrived on the scene, causing protesters to first run away, and then rush to the aid of a policeman injured in a scuffle with the gunman. The Lubbock Police Department late Monday posted photographs on Twitter showing officers walking with community leaders and citizens “to condemn the actions of those involved in George Floyd’s murder.”

The protesters gained support from many cars that honked as they passed, and at least one self-described right-wing Christian was inspired to join, Ms. Cannon said.

“It’s monumental for a town like Lubbock, and it’s monumental what’s going on in the country,” she said.

Such protests have been facilitated to a great extent by social media, making people in smaller towns and cities no longer feel separated from what happens on a bigger stage, said Johnny Zokovitch, executive director of Pax Christi USA, a Catholic peace group based in Washington, D.C.

Photos: Scenes From Across the U.S.

Several days of protests and riots broke out in cities nationwide



Washington, D.C., Tuesday night. MICHAEL M. PHILLIPS/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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“They know that they’re part of a movement that is hundreds of thousands or millions strong,” Mr. Zokovitch said.

Other small cities saw violent eruptions that they don’t normally experience. The San Francisco suburbs of Walnut Creek and Santa Rosa, with 70,000 and 180,000 people respectively, were hit with protests that devolved into vandalism and looting Sunday. Police reported numerous arrests and are investigating a shooting that took place near one of the looted stores in Walnut Creek. In Santa Rosa, officers from across the North Bay area responded to assist local police in breaking up crowds throwing bottles, rocks and fireworks at police, the police said.

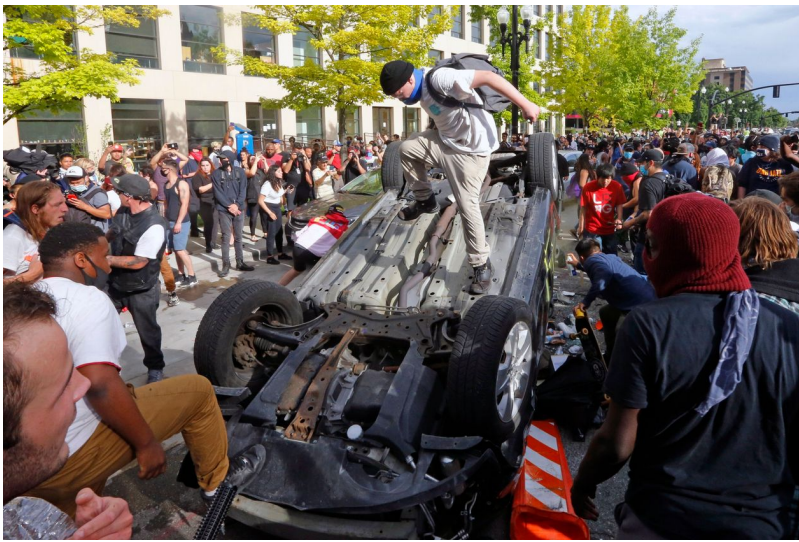
SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Why do you think protests are hitting smaller cities now? Join the conversation below.

Omaha hasn't seen unrest like that of recent days in half a century, said Thomas Warren, CEO of the Urban League of Nebraska and former Omaha police chief. On Saturday night, a local bar owner shot and killed a 22-year-old black man who was protesting, and the Douglas County attorney said the shooting was in self-defense and no charges would be filed.

Carina Glover, a 30-year-old tech company owner in Omaha, said cases such as Mr. Floyd's make her and other black people feel like sitting ducks.

"If they burn this city to the ground, I would understand why," she said. "Before we even have the opportunity to mourn the loss and to demand justice of one executed black person, whether that is locally or nationally, then there's another one and then there's another one."



A protester jumps on a flipped vehicle in Salt Lake City on Saturday.

PHOTO: RICK BOWMER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

In recent months, a series of news reports and graphic videos brought national attention to the deaths of African-Americans: Ahmaud Arbery outside Brunswick, Ga., Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ky., and then Mr. Floyd in Minneapolis.

Steven Webster, a political scientist at Indiana University and author of the forthcoming book "American Rage: How Anger Shapes our Politics" said Americans have always been spurred to action by anger going back to the American Revolution, but the current moment is particularly ripe for fury. Social media allows people to share things in real time—and consume information that aligns only with their pre-existing political views. The Covid-19 pandemic has added stress, he said.

"We've had Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, we're in the midst of this pandemic and there are inequalities in how coronavirus has affected black Americans," Mr. Webster said. "We're angry

for so many reasons. If you were trying to make a cocktail of anger, this would be the perfect set of ingredients.”

In downtown Raleigh, N.C., windows in restaurants and shops throughout downtown were broken in a melee following Saturday’s protest. The courthouse and other county buildings were closed because of damage. An 8 p.m. curfew was in place Monday.

Jessica Peacock, a 27-year-old math teacher in Raleigh, said she came out to protest because the issues raised in Minneapolis are universal. And now, amid the pandemic, the usual distractions such as sports, church and social gatherings are gone. She was hit with tear gas, but said she wanted to “start change that would impact the kids in my classroom.”



A protester stands to face police during a protest in Raleigh, N.C., on Sunday.

PHOTO: JONATHAN DRAKE/REUTERS

In El Paso, a Texas border city of 681,000 that is 81% Hispanic and less than 4% black, hundreds of people marched from a local park to police headquarters Sunday. Malik Dado, an Army reservist and activist of Asian and Hispanic descent, said that though El Paso is a long way from Minneapolis, the community understands racial injustice; a gunman accused of targeting Mexican-Americans killed 23 people in a Walmart there last year.

“It’s all of our fights, not as black or white or blue, but for the American people,” Mr. Dado said.

At one point, there was a standoff between police in riot gear and protesters chanting loudly, some of them with antipolice obscenities, Mr. Dado said. But then, he heard a military veteran tell the police he felt unsafe on the streets of America, and the officers suddenly knelt with the protesters, Mr. Dado said. Protesters cheered.

The officers knelt only under pressure from the group, said Sgt. Enrique Carrillo, a department spokesman. Later in the night, police turned to force to break up a crowd that had begun throwing

things, he said. Mr. Dado was among those who fled tear gas and beanbag rounds.

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—*Eliza Collins and Jim Carlton contributed to this article.*

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