

INTEREST GROUPS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Comparative Politics

Guillermo Toral

IE University

What we'll cover today

- Research design

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- Civil society and contentious politics

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- Social movements vs interest groups

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- Conceptualizing and measuring success of civil society

Research design

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 - No presentation, just answering a few questions to make sure what you submitted is team work and not AI-assisted or AI-generated

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- **I'm here to help:** email me or come talk to me if you have any questions

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 - What can be done to improve the theory? And the empirics?

Civil society

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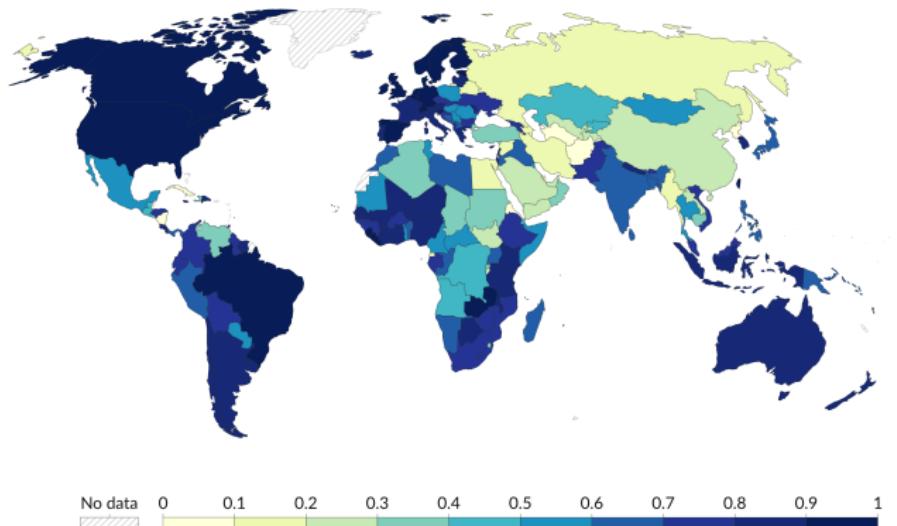
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- International observers have recently warned of **shrinking civic space** globally

V-Dem's civil society index across countries

Civil society participation index, 2023

Our World
in Data

Based on the expert estimates and index by V-Dem¹. It combines information on the extent to which citizens are active in diverse organizations which choose and influence policy-makers. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most active).



Data source: V-Dem (2024)

OurWorldInData.org/democracy | CC BY

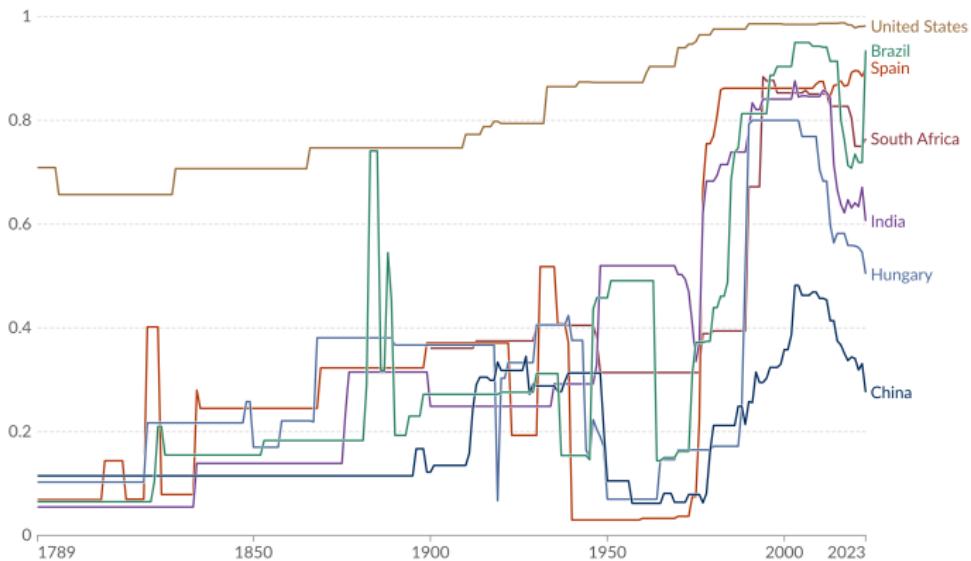
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V-Dem's civil society index across history

Civil society participation index, 1789 to 2023

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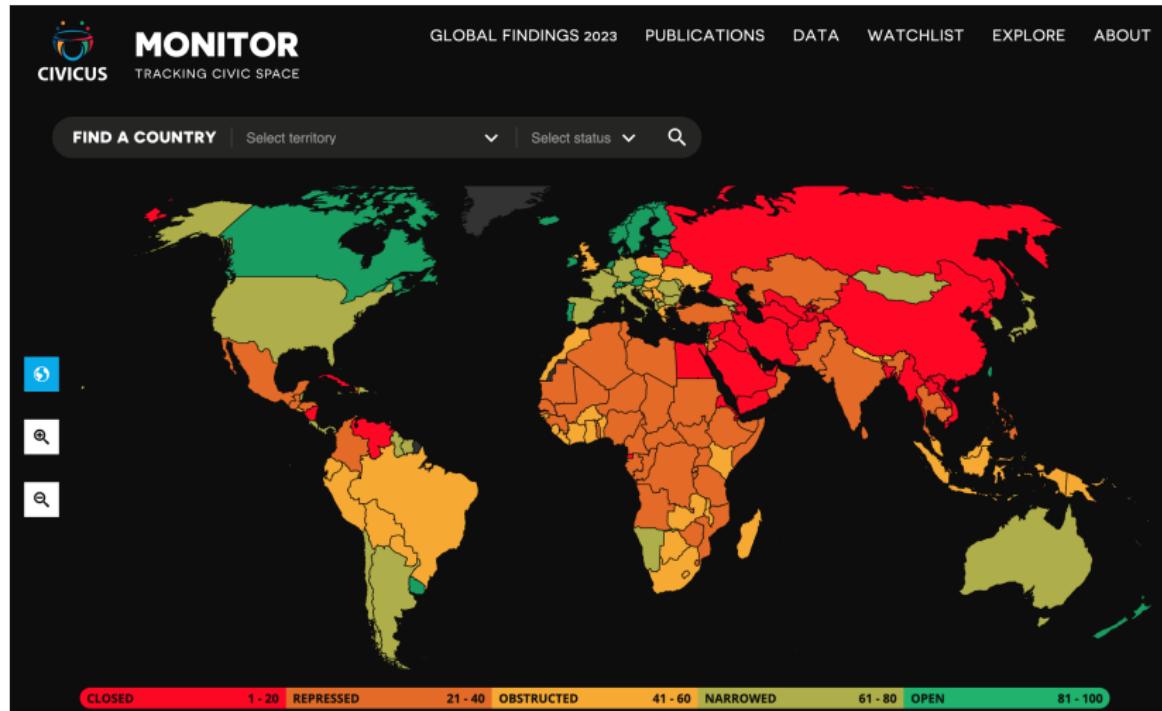


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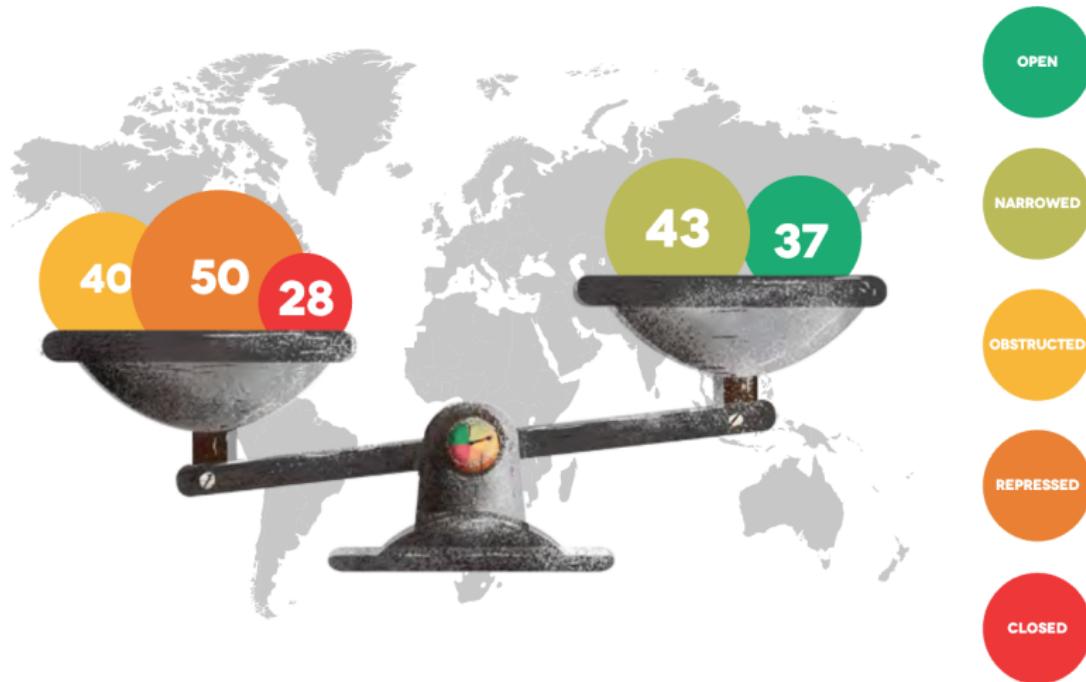
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Civicus' civic space monitor

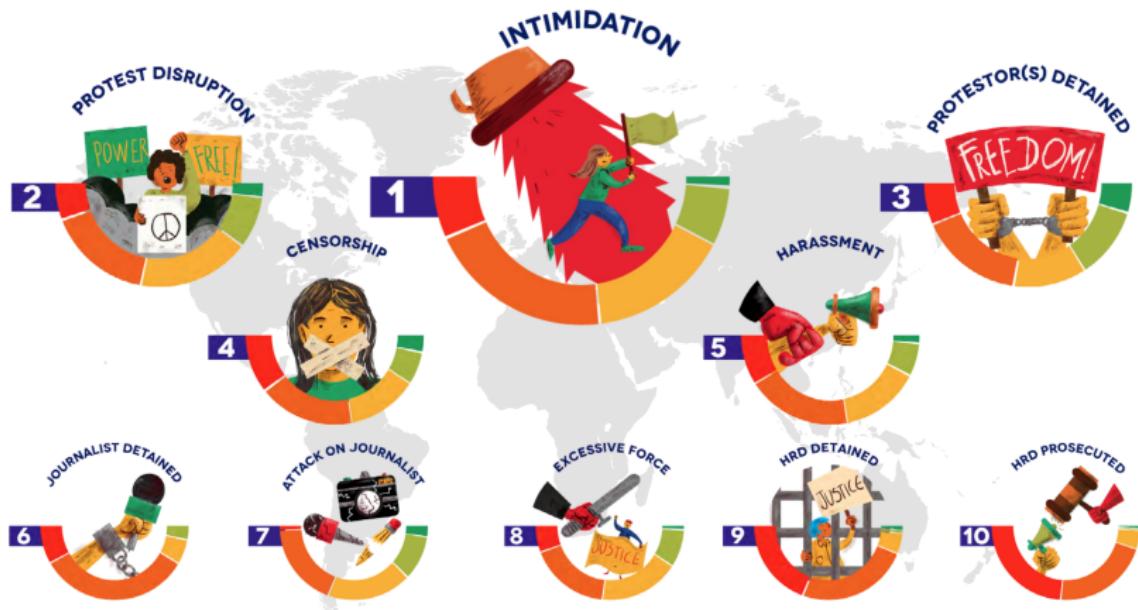


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TOP TEN VIOLATIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



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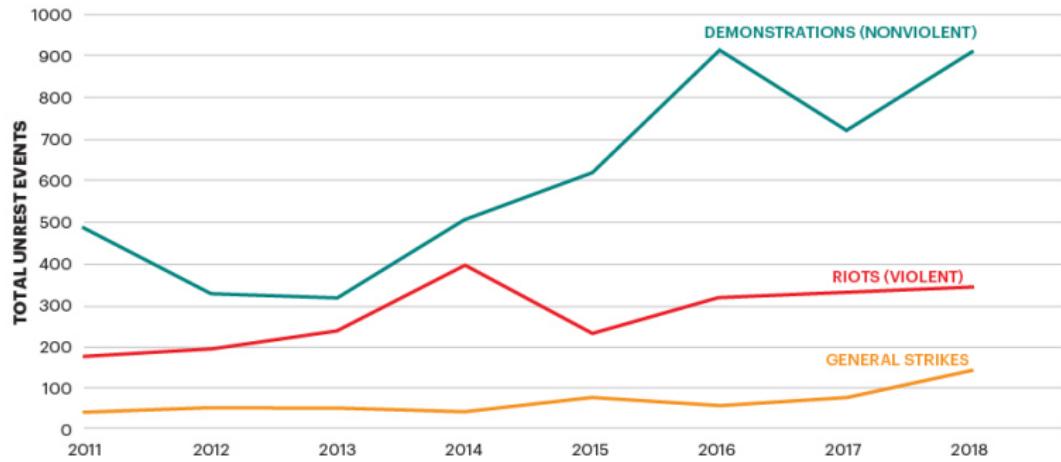
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Contentious politics on the rise

Global trends in civil unrest, 2011–2018



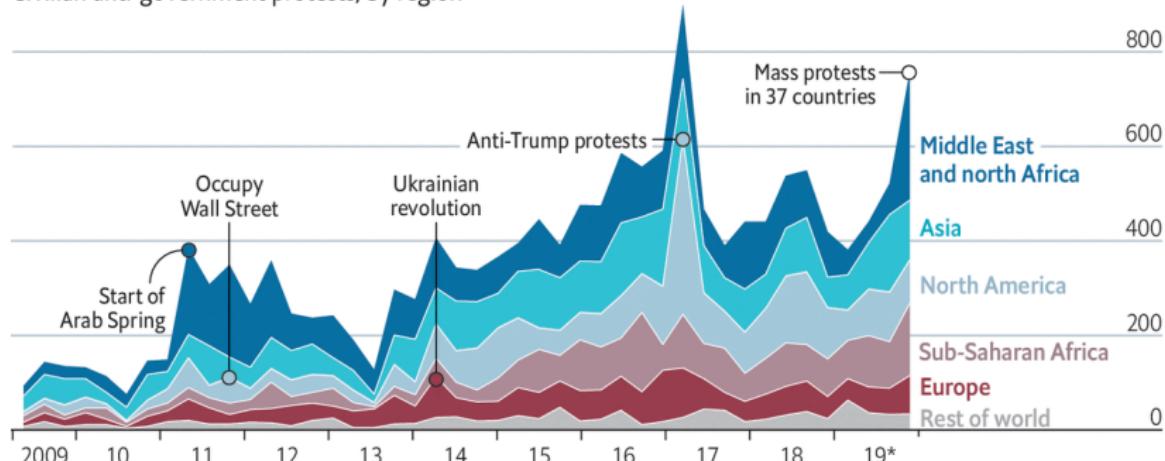
Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS), IEP calculations



Contentious politics on the rise

Street politics

Civilian anti-government protests, by region



Source: "The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend", by S.J. Brannen, C.S. Haig and K. Schmidt, 2020

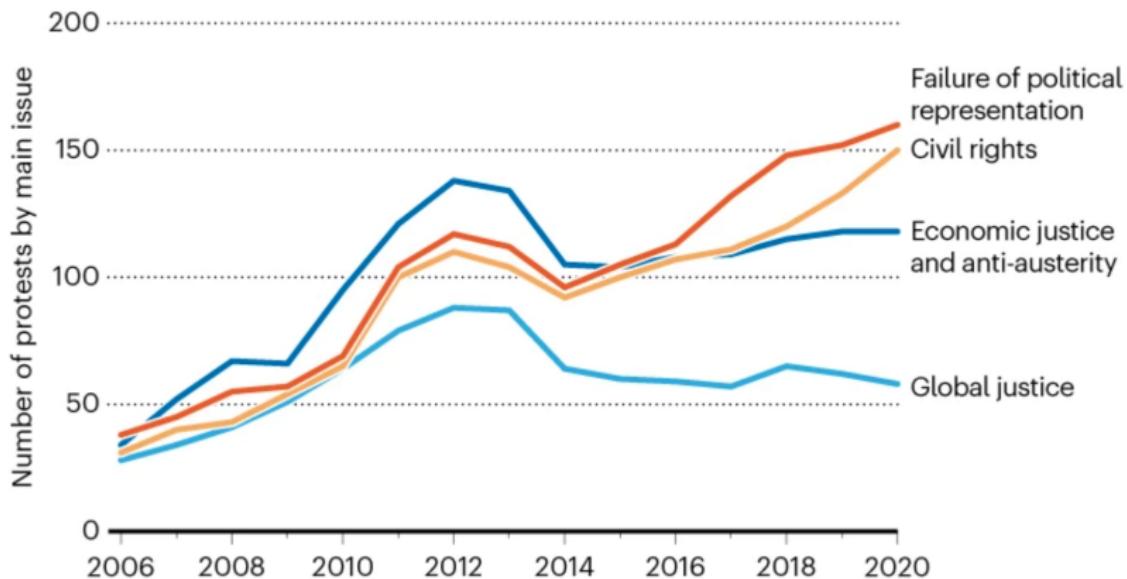
*Q4 estimate

The Economist

Contentious politics on the rise

PROTESTS ON THE RISE

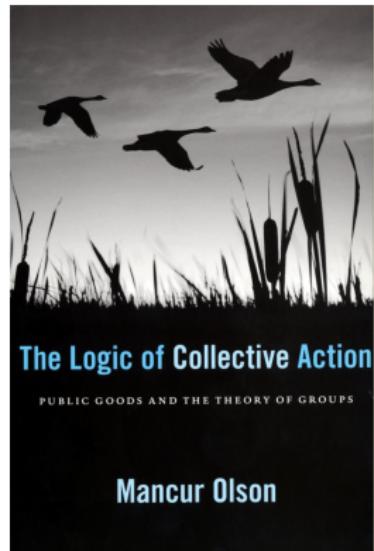
The number of protests around the globe has been climbing over the past two decades, according to a study of actions in more than 100 countries. Before 2015, economic concerns drove the largest number of protests. Since then, more protests have focused on political representation and civil rights.



@nature

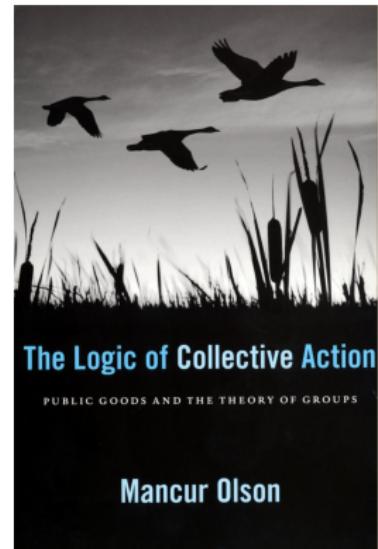
Back to Olson's theory of collective action problems

- Self-interested individuals would find it rational to not engage in costly behavior to contribute to the production of a public good, in the hope that others will do



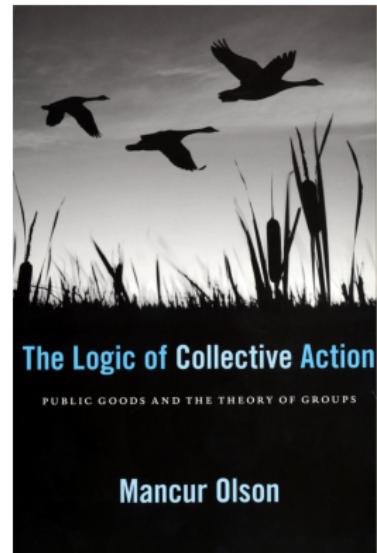
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- The existence of a common interest among a set of people (one that could be advanced through collective action) does not lead to voluntary collective action to advance the interest.
- Olson highlighted how rational individuals would therefore fail to contribute to the production of public goods, and groups will therefore not produce optimal results



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 - The distinction between social movements and interest groups, and within those categories, is key

Social movements versus interest groups

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- Social movements vary in their scale, range, organization, and ideology

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- They often focus on influencing the outputs of the formal political process

Parties vs interest groups vs social movements

	Social movements	Interest groups	Political parties
Structure	Informal, networked	Formal, institutional	Formal, government institutions
Tactics	Protest, disruption, framing	Lobbying, campaign finance	Campaign, legislative and executive action
Legitimacy	Moral/identity-based	Legal/economic-based	Legal and government-based
Outcome	Cultural and political change	Policy influence	Policy action

Typology of repertoires of action

		Necessity of collective action	
		Low	High
Autonomy from the political system	High	Private interest government <i>Global firms</i> <i>Business associations</i> Political exchanges <i>Global firms</i> <i>Business associations</i>	Private interest government <i>Employer associations and trade unions</i> Political exchanges <i>Trade unions</i> Contentious politics <i>Trade unions</i>
	Low	 Direct lobbying <i>Global firms</i> <i>Business associations</i>	Contentious politics <i>New social movements</i> Direct lobbying <i>Non-business interest associations</i>

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Effectiveness of social movements and interest groups

What makes social movements and interest groups successful?

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- Focus on how the political context enables or restricts social movements

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- **Resource mobilization theories**

- Focus on endowments (money, time, activists, expertise)
- Mobilization of those endowments by movement entrepreneurs

- **Political opportunity structure theories**

- Focus on how the political context enables or restricts social movements
- Key features include openness to challengers, cohesiveness of political elites, party system crisis, and capacity and willingness to repress movements

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- Constructivists emphasize how identity is the main currency of movements, and efforts to redefine it are therefore central

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 4. Their main strategy in terms of resource mobilization, political opportunity, framing, or identity

Conceptualizing and measuring success of civil society

Defining success

Three main dimensions of success for civil society actors

- Mobilization success: building and sustaining participation
- Agenda success: gaining attention and recognition
- Policy success: influencing law or regulation

For interest groups: Access, influence, or policy change

For social movements: Shifts in public opinion, discourse, or institutional reform.

Assessing effectiveness from different theoretical frameworks

Dimension	Example variables	Example indicators or measures
Mobilization	Resources, networks	Size, duration
Opportunity	Institutions, allies	Access, openings, meetings
Framing	Cultural resonance	Media coverage, sentiment
Outcome	Policy or norm change	Legislation, opinion shifts

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- **Causal inference problem**
 - what would have happened without mobilization?
 - correlation is not causation

How to make credible inferences

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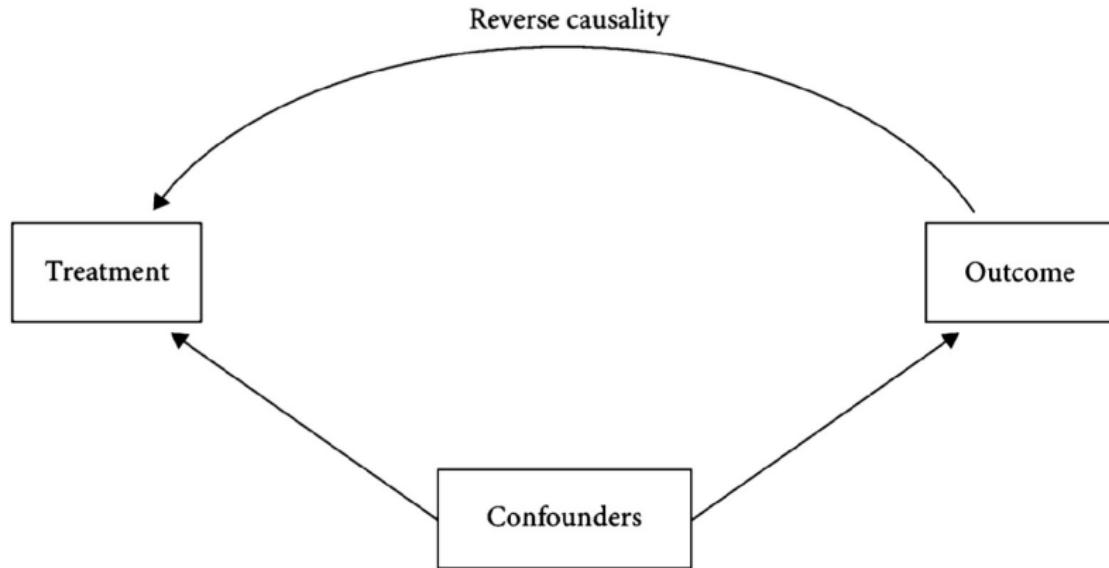
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- We typically want to argue that a relationship between X and Y holds **ceteris paribus**, i.e. " or “all other things being equal”. How can we say that credibly?

The main threats to credible causal claims



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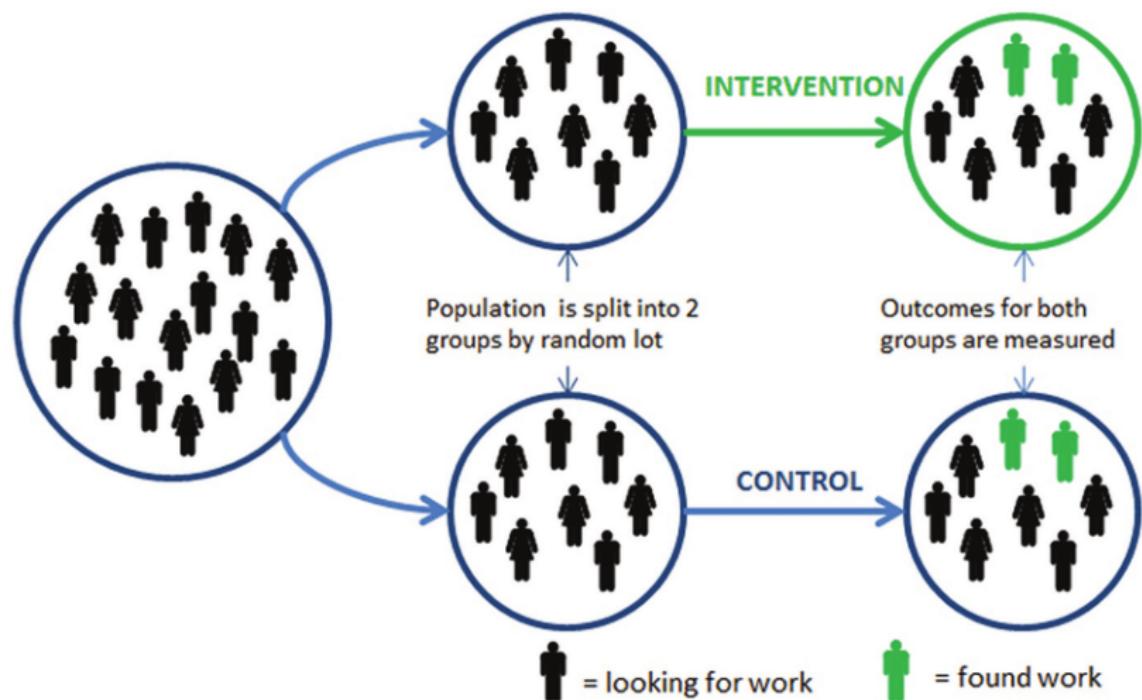
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- Experiments therefore ensure there are **no confounders and no reverse causality**

Experiments: The gold standard to make causal inference



An experimental study of interest groups effectiveness

A **study** by Kalla & Broockman (2016, AJPS) on how campaign contributions buy interest groups access to legislators, using an experimental design

Theory: Campaign contributions get interest groups direct access to policy makers

Hypothesis: When an interest group signals their campaign contribution in the US, it gets more and more high-level access to Congresspeople

Design: Experiment randomizing whether an interest group signaled having contributed to a campaign when requesting a meeting

Data: Whether the office of the federal Congressperson responds to the request for a meeting

The e-mail sent to 191 Congresspeople

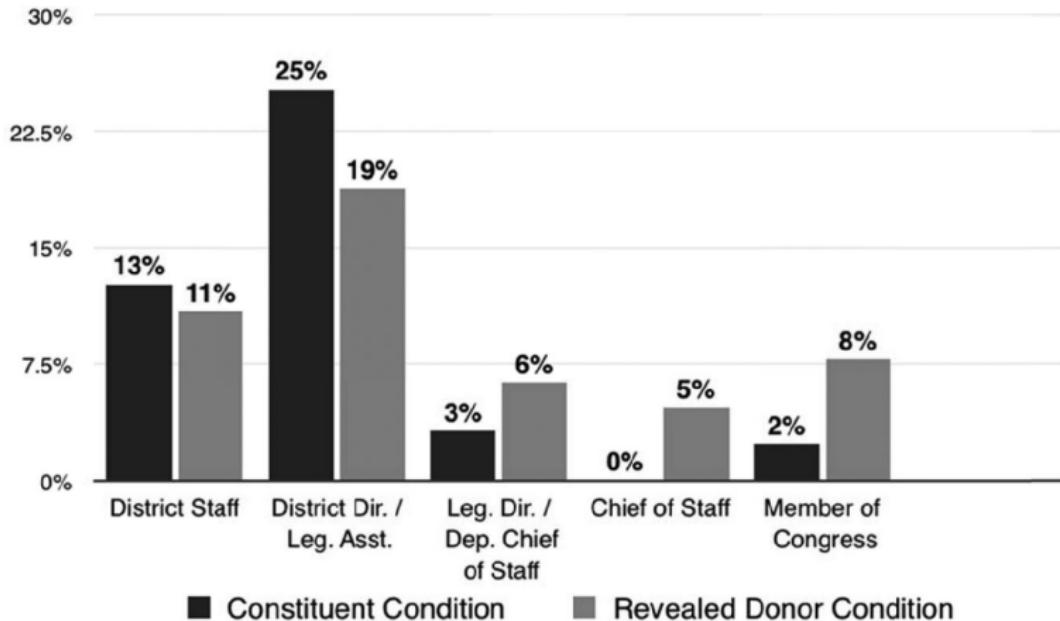
My name is [EMPLOYEE] and I am an Organizer with CREDO Action. Around a dozen of our members near [DISTRICT CITY] who are **[active political donors/concerned constituents]** have expressed interest in meeting with the Congressman, in person or by phone from the [CITY] office.

These **[donors/members]** are extremely concerned by [DETAILS ON BILL] and would like to tell the Congressman why his base would like him to cosponsor H.R. [BILL DETAILS]. This legislation would [DETAILS ON BILL]. They very much hope that the Congressman will cosponsor the bill. If the Congressman is not available, they'd like to arrange a meeting with the chief of staff, LA, or local district director, in person or by phone from your office.

Could we arrange such a call on [DATES]? Our members are looking for just 30 minutes to have their concerns and ideas heard. Looking forward to hearing from you on what time might work well and who our members can expect to meet with.

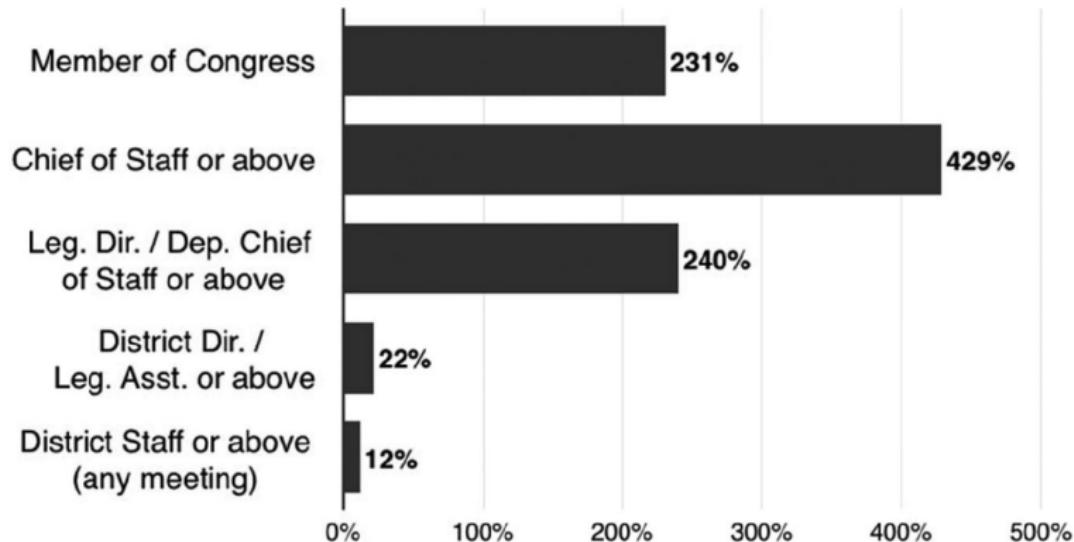
The results of the experiment

FIGURE 1 Access Gained to Congressional Staffers, by Experimental Condition



The results of the experiment

FIGURE 2 Percentage Increase in Access Revealed Donors Gained, at or above Each Level.



Note: Each bar shows the percent increase in the share of meetings that occurred at or above each level in the Revealed Donor condition relative to the Constituent condition. These can be obtained by comparing the fourth column of 1 to the third column.

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A quasi-experimental study of social movement success

A **study** by Wasow (2020, APSR) on how the nature of protests (violent vs non-violent) influences agenda setting and framing and thus moves elites and masses

Theory: By using disruption, social movements can capture media attention and move public opinion – effects will differ depending on whether tactics are violent or not

Hypothesis: Violent civil rights protests in the 60s in the US led to backlash

Design: Instrumental variable design using rainfall to get quasi-random variation on the incidence of violent protests following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Data: Data on protests and voting by locality

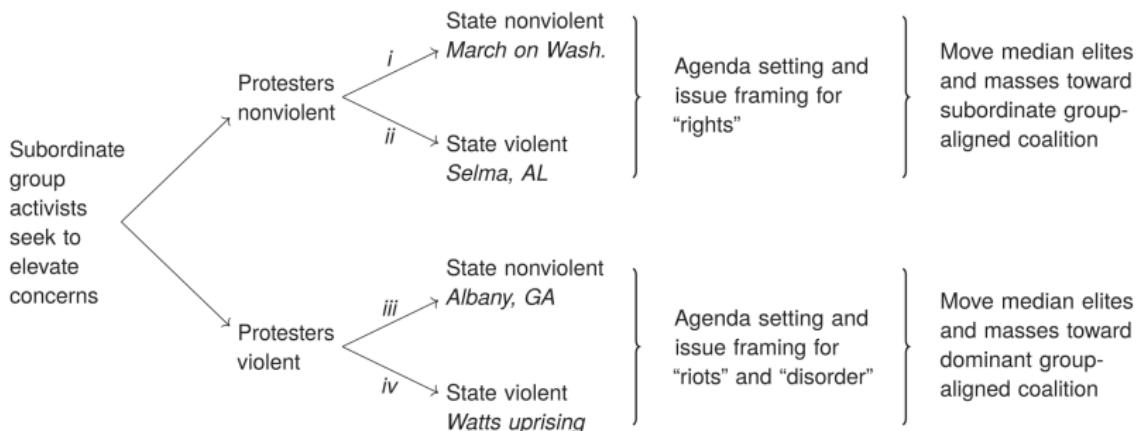
The quasi-experiment's theory

1. Subordinate group:
agenda seeding

2. State:
counter-action

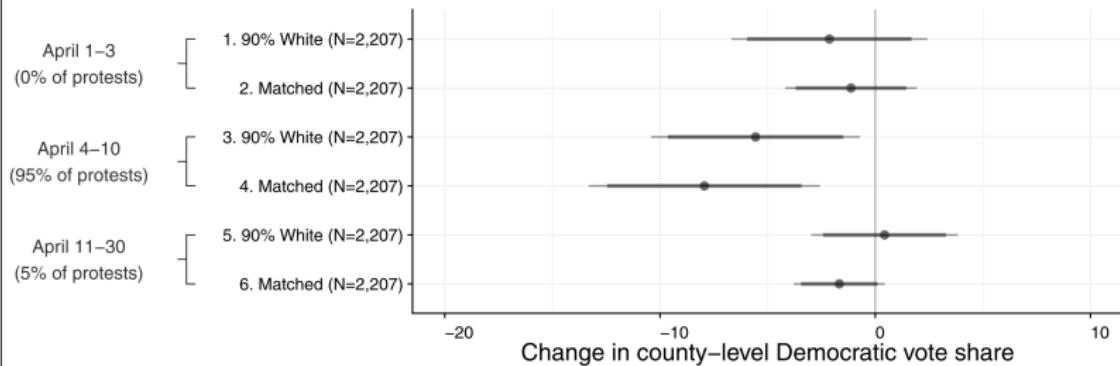
3. Media:
agenda setting,
issue framing

4. Elites & masses:
elite discourse,
public opinion, voting



The instrumental variable findings (and placebo tests)

FIGURE 4. IV Models of Effect of Violent Protests in April 1968 on White Vote Share



Note: Coefficient plot of estimated effects of violent protest in April 1968 on change in county-level Democratic vote share in presidential election in November 1968. Models 1, 2, 5, and 6 are placebo tests that use rainfall during period with few or no protests. Models 2, 4, and 6 use CBPS weights to match. Protests data source: Carter (1986). No analysis of nonviolent protests is included as the DCA data record few nonviolent or violent protests in April 1968.

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- Success is not just policy change — sometimes *agenda-setting* is the real win

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