

Introduction

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Over 800 universities in the United States have fraternities (Hechinger 2017). Many have documented benefits of membership which include higher future income (Mara, Davis, and Schmidt 2018) and significantly more hours spent participating in community service and volunteering (Hayek et al. 2002; Asel, Seifert, and Pascarella 2009). Moreover, according to a Gallup survey in 2021, over 80 percent of fraternity alumni agreed that they would join their fraternity if they were to redo their college experience.

Despite these benefits, membership has been associated with risky behaviors. In particular, at least one hazing-related death has occurred each year in the US between the years 2000 and 2019¹ and studies have found that fraternity members binge drink and party more frequently than their non-member peers (DeSimone 2007; Routon and Walker 2014). While universities have regularly banned specific misbehaving fraternities from their campuses, the past decade popularized a new policy tool called moratoriums—campus-wide halts on fraternity social events with alcohol—as a way to change member behavior.

This paper is the first to estimate the causal effects of moratoriums on campus-wide police reports of alcohol offenses and sexual assaults. Since 2010, over 50 moratoriums have been enacted across university campuses, thus becoming a common policy used by school administrators. However, no prior research has investigated this topic; moratorium dates are difficult to find/confirm and there does not exist a centralized data source for university-specific crime with fine enough detail for casual inference. Despite this lack of research, administrators continue to use moratoriums as a disciplinary action on their fraternities.

Nonetheless, how these moratoriums affect student behavior, and thus on-campus crime, is theoretically unclear. On one hand, prohibiting alcohol from fraternity social events may reduce incidences of crime. Fraternities are a source of alcohol for underage drinking, as fraternities are typically a mix of lower and upperclassmen (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006). The inclusion of legal-age drinkers and large social events allows for easy access to alcohol for underage students. Given that the literature has documented that alcohol causes higher prevalence of crimes such as assaults and alcohol offenses (Carpenter and Dobkin 2015), road accidents and arrests (Francesconi and James 2019), and reports of rape (Zimmerman and Benson 2007; Lindo, Siminski, and Swensen 2018), prohibiting such events could reduce the incidence of on-campus crime. On the other hand, moratoriums may have the opposite effect. Without alcohol-fueled fraternity parties, students may substitute away from consuming alcohol at fraternity houses to potentially riskier places off-campus where behavior is less regulated. As a result, the net effect of moratoriums is ambiguous.

In this paper, I estimate the causal effect of 44 fraternity moratoriums across 37 universities over a six-year period (2014-2019) on university police reports of alcohol and sexual assault offenses. I use a difference-in-differences identification strategy, leveraging the variation in timing of moratoriums. Intuitively, I compare academic-calendar days (e.g., excluding summer and winter breaks) with a moratorium to academic-calendar days without a moratorium while accounting for expected differences across days of the week and different times of the year. I construct a novel data set, merging together two particularly unique data sources: university-specific Daily Crime Logs, which contain the universe of all reported incidences of crime to the university police at the incident-level, and moratorium start and end dates obtained through school newspapers and public records requests.

¹This is based on the online repository of hazing deaths from journalist Hank Nuwer. See here: <https://www.hanknuwer.com/hazing-destroying-young-lives/>

Using these data, I find that moratoriums significantly decrease alcohol offenses campus-wide by 26%. This effect is driven by weekends (Fridays-Sundays) when college partying is most frequent and is robust across various specifications, estimation methods, and sensitivity tests. Furthermore, I find suggestive evidence that reports of sexual assaults decrease by 29% on the weekends. Both of these decreases are concentrated only when a moratorium is in place suggesting that there are no persistent effects once a moratorium is lifted. In particular, the immediate and subsequent weeks following a moratorium show no evidence of alcohol offenses or sexual assaults below their expected levels when compared to both a 14-day period before a moratorium occurred and all days without a moratorium.

A key distinction of this work is that I am able to closely link this university policy to changes in student behavior due to the specificity of the university crime reports and the novelty of moratorium guidelines. While other work such as [Lindo, Siminski, and Swensen \(2018\)](#) find that college partying increases daily reports of rape and alcohol offenses using college football game variation, moratoriums represent an understudied policy lever that university officials can use to reduce campus-wide partying. Hence, this study provides further evidence that stronger sanctions on alcohol decrease alcohol-related incidents in college-aged individuals similar to [Liang and Huang \(2008\)](#) who study zero-tolerance drunk driving laws. However, moratoriums are unique in that university officials have the power to enact them immediately and indefinitely unlike state or federal laws. This makes moratoriums an appealing policy tool as university officials can implement them at times when they see fit.

More broadly, this paper adds to the literature in two areas. First, this paper contributes to a small body of economic work relating to fraternity policy. [De Donato and Thomas \(2017\)](#) and [Even and Smith \(2020\)](#) each study the effects of deferring fraternity recruitment from freshman to sophomore year. However, these works focus on academic benefits rather than university crime. As of this writing, only one related work has focused on fraternities and crime ([Raghav and Diette 2021](#)), although this study focuses on the effect of fraternity population on campus crime rather than fraternity policy. Second, this paper adds to the literature relating to the effects of alcohol on college-aged individuals which include increases in mortality ([Carpenter and Dobkin 2009](#)), emergency room visits ([Francesconi and James 2019](#)), and crime ([Carpenter and Dobkin 2015](#)), in addition to hindering academic performance ([Carrell, Hoekstra, and West 2011](#); [Ha and Smith 2019](#)). Unlike these works, this study is able to show the effects of *decreasing* alcohol prevalence rather than *increasing* it. As shown in [Cunningham and Shah \(2018\)](#) who study the effects of decriminalizing and criminalizing prostitution on rape, there is reason to anticipate asymmetries between each of these changes.

This paper proceeds as follows: Section ?? discusses the background on fraternities and moratoriums. Section ?? describes the construction of the data. Section ?? describes the empirical strategy used to estimate causal effects. Section ?? presents the results. Section ?? explores the differences in effectiveness between different types of moratoriums. Section ?? analyzes possible mechanisms and implications. Section ?? concludes.

Fraternities in the US

Fraternity Demographics and Oversight

On average, fraternities consist of students from families of higher-than-average educational attainment and income; they are predominantly white, and prior research has linked fraternity membership to positive outcomes such as increases in graduation rates ([Routon and Walker 2014](#)), future income ([Mara, Davis, and Schmidt 2018](#)), and social capital formation ([Mara, Davis, and Schmidt 2018](#)). On the other hand, membership has been found to decrease GPA ([De Donato and Thomas 2017](#); [Even and Smith 2020](#)) and fraternity members spend approximately two more hours per-week partying than nonmembers ([Routon and Walker 2014](#)) and binge drink on approximately two additional days per-month ([DeSimone 2007](#)). Additionally, [Even and Smith \(2020\)](#) find that membership causes students to select into easier courses and complete less course credits. While not causal, there is also survey evidence that fraternity members are more accepting of sexual violence than nonmembers ([Seabrook 2019](#)) and that sorority women, whom frequently interact with fraternity men, are four times more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than nonmembers ([Minow and Einolf 2009](#)).

This paper focuses on the Interfraternity Council (IFC) fraternities which are a type of social fraternity. These fraternities are the most common at universities and differ from professional, academic, or service fraternities. IFC fraternities participate in philanthropy and professional development and according to their creed, they “exist to promote the shared interests and values of our member fraternities: leadership, service, brotherhood and scholarship” (Hechinger 2017). Importantly, it is the IFC fraternities that are restricted by a moratorium in the sample.

Each IFC fraternity chapter² has three sources of oversight: the chapter national headquarters, the parent university, and the parent university’s own IFC council—a group of student representatives from each recognized IFC fraternity chapter whom regularly meet with university staff to discuss rules/boundaries. Failure to abide by the rules outlined by these overseers’ policies can result in a fraternity being unrecognized by the university which is costly—a fraternity relies on the university for new students to recruit.

Moratoriums

A moratorium is defined as a temporary ban on social events with alcohol for IFC fraternities.³ This can include the cancellation of new member recruitment, philanthropy activities, tailgates, or third party vendor events, although the breadth of restrictions differ by university. For example, some universities may allow philanthropy events provided no alcohol is present. Importantly, moratoriums differ from individual chapter suspensions. While universities may temporarily suspend individual fraternity chapters each year, moratoriums apply to all IFC fraternities. Moreover, the timing and length of a moratorium varies substantially. Figure ?? shows the start and end dates of each moratorium over time. Moratoriums in the sample can last as few as six calendar-days, or as long as 848 calendar-days.⁴ Additionally, moratoriums are the generally implemented because of a triggering event (see Figure ??). This event can be a prominent sexual assault allegation, a fraternity-related death (usually due to alcohol poisoning), or an extreme behavior violation.⁵ Figure ?? shows the distribution of the triggering events: 19 are triggered by behavior violations, 10 by sexual assaults, nine by a fraternity-related death, and six are unspecified. As alluded to in the introduction, moratoriums are enacted across the US. Figure ?? shows the locations of the 37 universities in the sample (see Section ?? for further details on sample construction). While most universities are located in the mid-west and south, there are several universities from both the west and east coast.

Moratoriums can be implemented by two sources of jurisdiction: the university or the IFC council.⁶ When a moratorium is implemented by the university, the university sets the guidelines that fraternities must abide by during the moratorium. On the other hand, an IFC-implemented moratorium is student-enforced. This means that the IFC council is responsible for producing both the guidelines and oversight of the moratorium. Figure ?? shows that IFC-implemented moratoriums are less frequent (17) than university-implemented moratoriums (27) and Section ?? examines the heterogeneous effects involving this difference in oversight.

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²A chapter, or otherwise known as a “house” is a unique fraternity. A fraternity can have many chapters across the US, with usually one per-school.

³This is the minimum requirement for a moratorium in this paper. Some universities ban alcohol at social events for all IFC fraternities in addition to the rest of their Fraternity and Sorority Life. However, IFC fraternities are generally the main focus.

⁴Note the distinction between calendar-days and academic-calendar days. A calendar day represents the entire calendar, whereas an academic-calendar represents only the fall/spring semesters of the university school year.

⁵A behavior violation is a catchall term for hazing, rule violations, offensive behavior, and other disorderly conduct that results in a moratorium.

⁶Note that the fraternity’s chapter headquarters cannot impose a moratorium. Since chapter headquarters are unique to a fraternity chapter, they only have jurisdiction over one specific fraternity.

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