PROJECT PROPOSAL

POLICE BRUTALITY AND PROTEST:
EVIDENCE FROM THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

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Great question that can lead to some interesting adventures!

Research Questions

What is the association between deaths caused by police and BLM protests? Do police-caused deaths spatially predict protest activity?

Introduction

Solid background on the issue at hand.

From 2015 to mid-2016 almost half of the victims of police shootings in the US are white, but then, white people make up 62% of the American population. Black people, on the other hand, make up only 13% of the US population and yet 24% of all the people killed by the police are black (Wesley 2016). Of these black victims, 32% were unarmed when they were killed. That's twice the number of unarmed white people to die at the hands of the police. After adjusting for population percentage, black Americans are two and a half times more likely than white Americans to be shot and killed by police officers (Tedeneke 2016).

I didn't know this!

The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) was born in 2013, after the man who shot and killed an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, was cleared of his murder. A Californian activist, Alicia Garza, responded to the jury's decision on Facebook with a post that ended: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." The hashtag was born, and continued to grow in prominence with each new incident and protest (Tedeneke 2016). **Any thoughts on potentially including Social Media data?**

The formal organization that sprung from the protests started with the goal of highlighting the disproportionate number of incidences in which a police officer killed a member of the black community, but it soon gained international recognition, after the death of Michael Brown in Missouri a year later. BLM now describes itself as a "chapter-based national organization working for the validity of black life" (Black Lives Matter 2018). While it grew from protest against police killings of black people in the United States, this new wave of activism has spurred scholars to highlight a failure in social science to fully explore the consequences of state repression in the US.

Related Work

Political and social discontent only occasionally results in public protest, in part because mass protest faces a substantial collective action problem. There is a substantial amount of research in the social sciences that seeks to identify the contexts in which larger,

more frequent, and more organized protests occur. In examining the potential relationship between police violence and BLM protests, we also account for the economic, social, and political context of protests. We plan to discuss this robust literature and how we apply it to our analysis as it would relate to the particular grievance of the BLM movement, which is the the disproportionate number of incidences in which a police officer killed a member of the black community.

Previous studies showed that BLM protests are more common in locations where police have previously killed more Black people per capita (Williamson 2018). This finding is consistent with predictions drawn from an older school of social movement analysis that suggested that the level of protest behavior observed in a community would respond to the level of grievance a community was facing, confirming that the frequency of BLM protests is predicted by variables specified in well-established theories of protest emergence such as both resource mobilization theory and political opportunity theory (Williamson, Trump, and Einstein 2018). Our study utilizes updated data collection and the technologically intensive and reliable data methods of the Cline center to ascertain if these findings hold and if the geo-spatial analysis can provide any interesting patterns in the dispersion and frequency of protests.

Given this work, our predictions are that localities can respond to the most extreme aspects of the carceral state with increased political engagement. One might expect that communities that have experienced more frequent deaths at the hands of police might be especially unlikely to take the risk of public protest. Instead, we believe that we will find evidence of heightened mobilization since the salience of police brutality locally may serve to galvanize individuals. We also expect to find a number of solidarity protests across the country where the police brutality locally is not high, but a BLM protest still results because of other variables such as high number of black residents or high educational attainment of residents.

What about the areas political leanings?

Research Design

To examine the contexts in which Black Lives Matter protests occurred, we will utilize two datasets with indicators of BLM protests, including their size and location, police brutality statistics and demographic profiles of residents. The first dataset is compiled by the Cline Center for advanced Social research and collects all reports of BLM protests from major American outlets. The second contains the data collected by The Washington Post of every fatal shooting in the United States by a police officer in the line

Three data sets need to be merged.

I wonder if the underlying social structures are stronger. e.g. small town mantra of "everybody knows everybody"

of duty in 2015 to present day. Finally, Census data will calculated at the tract level from the 2015 5-year American Community Survey.

Methods will include statistical analysis of event data and spatial analysis. We include demographic and regional indicators, in part to confirm whether patterns of BLM protests are successfully predicted by such variables, and in part to improve interpretation of any relationship that we find between police killings and protest activity. Since these data are observational, there are several limitations to our approach, even with these controls in place. We are unable to establish causality, and the locality-level nature of our measurements also rules out an exploration of detailed individual-level mechanisms that may explain patterns of behavior that we may uncover.

This is okay. We're not aiming for paper publication.

We have to also consider distortion of the data, for various reasons. Firstly, some data is collected through the voluntary collaboration of police departments with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Also, police departments don't always identify a shooting if an officer has been involved. Additionally, police-involved shootings that are under investigation are only counted once the investigation has concluded, so many recent incidents are not being counted. In our study, we will use the data collected by Washington Post to inform our key independent variable of police killings in an area, the Cline Center data will be used for the dependent variable and geo-spatial analysis, and the American Community Survey will provide indicators that will be part of the controls.

How do you plan on working with the data in R? What packages have you looked at? What is the overall "flow" of functions?

Feasibility

ATQ: Who is doing what and when?

Our expectation is that we will complete this project by the end of the course. The project will consist of statistical analysis, geo-spatial analysis, and visualization of the data. These duties have been distributed among the group's members, while the research, writing, and editing will be distributed among the members as needed.

Consider creating a gantt chart or work overview

Conclusion

While better understanding the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement is in and of itself important given the movement's political and social salience, our study will also help point towards a broader understanding of when protest activity might emerge in the context of state repression. The political correlates and consequences of state repression in the United States remains undertheorized. We hope to shed light on how the state's coercive power affects our democracy.

References

Ewk! Screenshot'd text.

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MIA R packages

MIA Data read into R