Does Nonviolence Work?  
The US House and the Civil Rights Movement

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Peace vs. violence in today’s protest movements

Washington, DC, January 2017

Hong Kong SAR, November 2019
Protest in democracies in a median-voter model

How can the minority influence the median voter?
Peace vs. violence during the US Civil Rights Movement

Montgomery, AL, March 1965

New York, NY, August 1963
Research question and preview

Did peaceful or violent protests affect the US House more?

- Peaceful: shifted votes left on civil rights and welfare bills.
- Violent: no effect—possible harm on crime bills.
- Protests brought Republicans into Southern politics.

Two types of effects: local and cross-district effects.

Identification: local effects with district fixed effects.

- Assumption: no differential trends.
- Results robust to an array of controls for trends.
Specification and data

\[ Y_{\ell t} = \beta_1 P_{\ell t-1} + \beta_2 V_{\ell t-1} + X'_{\ell t} \gamma + \lambda_\ell + \theta_{\text{South}(\ell) \times t} + U_{\ell t} \]

- \% of conservative votes by legislator from district \( \ell \)
- protest histories: constructed from *The New York Times*
- riots and when protesters threw bricks, etc.
- controls
- anti-civil-rights and war protest histories and fixed effects
Results: peaceful protests worked, violence did not
Results: peaceful protests prompted Republican entry into South

Turnout
% Dem.
% Rep.

Turnout (South)
% Dem. (South)
% Rep. (South)

Had Rep. candidate (South)
Rep. candidate won (South)

Incumbent won (South)

Legend:
- blue: peaceful history
- red: violent history
Results: Republicans did not gain enough votes to win in the South
Results: and Democrats as a party did not lose enough to lose
Results: but incumbents were less likely to continue in office
### Counterfactuals: peaceful protests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>realized (% cons.)</th>
<th>realized (margin)</th>
<th>no peaceful protests (% cons.)</th>
<th>no peaceful protests (margin)</th>
<th>(1 - \frac{(4)}{(2)})</th>
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<tr>
<td>1964 Civil Rights Act</td>
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<td>26.7</td>
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## Counterfactuals: violent protests

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<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>real realized</th>
<th>no realized</th>
<th>difference</th>
<th>1 - (4)/(2)</th>
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Contributions

Protests made American institutions more inclusive.

- Nonviolence secured support of majority.
- Violence may have backfired.
- Counterfactuals show larger margins on major bills.

South had distinct effects:

- turnover of incumbents
- landscape for Southern realignment
Appendix
Identifying assumption: no differential trends

Key assumption: districts with protests were not on different trend than districts without.

To test this: absorb differential trends and see if effects remain.

\[
U_{lt} = Z_l \delta_t + \varepsilon_{lt}
\]

- district characteristic determined in 1960 or before
- e.g., black population share
- outcome differential at \( Z_l = 1 \) in period \( t \)
Effect of peaceful protests is robust (civil rights and welfare bills)

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Does Nonviolence Work? The US House and the Civil Rights Movement
Effect of violent protests is attributable to media markets (crime bills)

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