

External perceptions in an era of resurgence:
Views of Black and Indigenous movements in early 21st century America

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Abstract

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In 2016, when the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe called for people to join them in their to stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline, it led to the largest gathering of tribes in over a century, thousands of people joining the water protectors on the plains of North Dakota, and support from people around the world. In 2020, when the Black Lives Matter movement surged around the United States in response to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, it was arguably the largest movement in history. In addition to the size of these movements, they represented a new era of progressive Black and Indigenous-led social movements that built from past organizing but tested new leadership structures, strategies, and ideas. This dissertation focuses on three significant mobilizations in this era to answer the question: How did progressive Black and Indigenous-led movements in the past 15 years shape perceptions of outside groups –

how did innovative movement successes come about, and how did some actions spark backlash? These papers capture the dynamics of how #NoDAPL, Black Lives Matter, and the movement to stop Line 3 shaped perceptions of the media, public, and opponents, respectively. Drawing upon media analysis, a survey, and interviews, this dissertation offers insights for progressive movements in the present and future, and the scholars who seek to understand them.

University of Washington

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Introduction

In 2016 when the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe called for people to join them in their to stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline, it led to the largest gathering of tribes in over a century (Center for Constitutional Rights, Feb 21, 2018), thousands of people coming to join the water protectors on the plains of North Dakota, and support from people around the world. In 2020, when the Black Lives Matter movement surged around the United States in response to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, it was arguably the largest movement in history (Buchanan, Bui & Patel, July 3, 2020). In addition to the size of these movements, they represented a new era of progressive Black and Indigenous-led social movements that built from past organizing but tested new leadership structures, strategies, and ideas (Taylor 2016, Jackson, 2016). While these movements were in many ways continuations of much older struggles, their new approaches were enough of a departure from the past to cause tension with leaders from earlier movements—and inject new vitality into progressive organizing. (Jackson, 2016; Taylor, 2016).

Characteristics of movements in this period: new ideas, strategies and structures

One of the most notable things about the Black and Indigenous-led movements of this period is that these were intersectional, multifaceted movements started by people who themselves were intersectionally marginalized: Black Lives Matter has not only been about state violence and the killing of Black people by police. Alicia Garza, who founded the movement with Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, has said the movement is about “affirm[ing] the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black

lives along the gender spectrum” (Jackson, 2016). The #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock was led by women and two spirit people who connected “the protection of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous treaty rights to the protection of the earth and our other-than-human relatives,” transcending the binary of Indigenous and environmental leadership often presented by the news media (TallBear, 2019, p. 16). Both of these movements, and others from this period, were also fights for economic justice, combining critiques of white supremacy and settler colonialism with critiques of capitalism. Black Lives Matter has included a focus on economic justice (Isaac & Rose, 2024) and Standing Rock did as well: at Standing Rock water protectors stood against a corporate project to extract oil, which was financed by major financial institutions, and the movement leveraged strategies including bank divestment (Cook, 2019).

The movements of this period were also interlinked and learning from each other. Black Lives Matter activists put out statements of support and showed up to Standing Rock to support the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and Indigenous activists likewise put out statements of support and showed up for Black Lives Matter demonstrations (Belfi, 2020). Indigenous scholars have also drawn comparisons of the work to conceptualize and caretake movements carried out by both Black and Indigenous women in each of these respective movements, as well as other movements like Idle No More (TallBear, 2016). More broadly, as Yankton Sioux elder Faith Spotted Eagle said, there was a “progressive healing and learning,” that occurred, with a building of lessons and networks that supported future mobilizations (Jaffe, Sept 28, 2016).

In addition to being intersectional and interwoven, another key characteristic of this era of organizing was innovative leadership structures. While major 20th century movements often had a couple of visible (and, typically, male) leaders, movements of this period challenged traditional leadership and organizational structures. From Occupy Wall Street and Idle No More to Black

Lives Matter and #NoDAPL, movements built more decentralized structures, which they sometimes called “leaderful.” Idle No More’s organization was described by Cree scholar and activist Alex Wilson as being like the weegess plant: “The root grows laterally, in a non-hierarchical way. When you break off one piece, new tendrils grow, and so it is continually regenerating” (Kidd 2020, p. 229). #NoDAPL and subsequent anti-pipeline struggles have been described, in a slightly more menacing way, as a hydra: an expanding network of resistance spreading beyond a single social struggle that is “near impossible to slay, when one of her many heads was severed, new ones would grow in its place” (Mazer et al, 2019, p. 356). April Tometti, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, noted that the leaderful structure of Black Lives Matter aimed to avoid repeating the past, when the assassination of one or two visible movement leaders destabilized a movement (Jones, Sept 24, 2020).

Finally, a fourth notable feature of movements during this period was innovative uses of media, including social media. These movements came about during a period when social media was being used to mobilize people and share information in movements around the world, such as the Arab Spring. Movements like Black Lives Matter and #NoDAPL have often been identified by the hashtags that were utilized on platforms like Twitter to spread information without relying on mainstream media. Photos and videos shared on Twitter and Facebook allowed people near and far to witness what was happening on the ground, sharing largescale demonstrations and documenting police violence. Mainstream media coverage remained important, as I will discuss in the first paper of this dissertation, but the creative uses of social media were a key feature of this period of movement resurgence. Notably, while platforms like Facebook were owned by billionaires at that time, there was optimism among activists then that

social media could be a progressive, democratizing force. Twitter in particular was a vital platform, before it was purchased by Elon Musk and reshaped to fit his politics.

Achievements, lessons learned

For all of these reasons, this period, starting in the early 2010s after Occupy Wallstreet and including the early days of Black Lives Matter in 2013 was a period of movement growth that many saw as a new era for Black and Indigenous-led social movements. There were certainly some opportunity structures that contributed to this growth—the Covid19 crisis in 2020 and an unusual number of people available to protest because they were at home coincided with the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, which substantially contributed to the scale of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests—but even this was also the result of years of movement work building resources and training organizers (Rohlinger & Meyer, 2022). This dissertation captures advancements movements made, through a combination of gradual learning and acting at opportune moments, especially advancements in how they were perceived by different groups. For example, during that time, news coverage of Indigenous movements was becoming more positive as journalists talked to Indigenous people on the ground, people were building from past resistance like Line 3 water protectors learning from #NoDAPL water protectors, and there was, at times, high support for Black Lives Matter even when there were reports of violence.

While these papers document moments when support—and arguably, hope—was high for these movements, these were not easy times for them. In addition to the violence and oppression that these movements sought to challenge in the first place, Black and Indigenous movements themselves also faced significant state violence in this period. The papers of this dissertation each relate to this state violence against movements, and how that shaped and was

shaped by perceptions of Black and Indigenous movement actors as violent (Boyle, 2022; Baylor, 1996). #NoDAPL water protectors were attacked by dogs and water cannons, Black Lives Matter protestors speaking out against police violence experienced more police violence for doing so, and anti-Line 3 water protectors were surveilled and confronted by police who were reimbursed by a special fund from the pipeline company Enbridge. Additionally, there were seeds of backlash growing in response to the successes movements had, as the third paper in this dissertation captures with Line 3 supporters.

As we live among the impacts of that backlash in 2026, it is illustrative to look back to those social movements—and how various parties perceived them—to better understand how we arrived at the present political moment. While movements succeeded with building support and sustaining it in the short term, even in the face of state violence, what proved more challenging for the movements was sustaining that support over the long term and turning that into policy wins, while avoiding backlash.

This dissertation's contribution

These three papers focus on significant mobilizations in the 2010s to help to answer the question: How did progressive Black and Indigenous-led movements in the past 15 years shape perceptions of outside groups –how did innovative movement successes come about, and how did some actions spark backlash? The backlash we have seen has both diminished the material achievements and momentum of the movements under study, and taught lessons to new mobilizations that offer hope to progressive social movements of the present and future.

This dissertation contributes to this work by examining how different actors perceived three BIPOC-led movements: Black Lives Matter, #NoDAPL, and the movement to stop Line 3.

While not all movements and actions aim to win over external groups and those in the broader population—and indeed different wings of the same movement may disagree on whether or not this is their objective—doing so is often a strategic goal of movements in their quest for social change. Therefore, examining the dynamic interplay between Black and Indigenous-led movements and external audiences can illuminate important characteristics of movements in this period.

As I further detail below, the first paper examines how the news media framed the #NoDAPL water protectors—and how that framing changed over time. The second paper examines what factors shaped continued support for Black Lives Matter, even when the media reported incidents of violence. The third paper examines how the resistance to Line 3 was discussed by local opposition: Minnesotans who spoke out in *support of* Line 3. These papers capture the dynamics of how these movements shaped perceptions of the media, public, and opponents, respectively. They offer insights for progressive movements in the present and future, and the scholars who seek to understand them.

Framing the Water Protectors: Lessons from the Water Protectors at Standing Rock

In the first paper, I zoom in on the media coverage of the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock. When people started gathering at Standing Rock in 2015 to protect the water from the Dakota Access Pipeline, they were learning from the Idle No More movement led by Indigenous women in Canada, which had shown the power of leveraging social media and direct action, but there had not been a recent Indigenous-led mobilization of that scale in the United States. The resistance to the pipeline combined both a long legacy of Sioux resistance (Estes, 2019)—including years of resistance to this pipeline—and ever-evolving social media

innovations that helped the water protectors show the world what was happening in rural North Dakota. For example, Facebook had recently launched their “Facebook live” feature, and was pushing any live videos to the top of feeds; water protectors used to this feature to allow the world to directly witness what was going on at Standing Rock despite its rural location.

This confluence of old and new knowledge was important, but the movement was still receiving little attention from traditional news media at first. Media coverage continues to be important for movements as the news media shapes whether movements are visible, and how the public and elites perceive those movements (Andrews & Caren, 2010). However, historically social movements led by people of color have been ignored and presented more negatively by the news media. For example, news coverage has been more critical of Black protesters, often characterizing them as violent and prioritizing white counter-protesters’ perspectives of anti-racist protests (Boyle, 2022). The news media has also historically portrayed Indigenous movements as violent (Baylor, 1996). Therefore, the water protectors’ success in reframing the media coverage, and ensuring the voices of Indigenous water protectors were heard at Standing Rock is a noteworthy achievement for the movement. This paper furthermore highlights that while news coverage of Indigenous movements may be negative at times, it is not an immovable obstacle for organizers. Instead, coverage is dynamic, responding to shifting context and strategies of movement actors.

Solidarity with Racialized Protest Movements: Lessons from an experiment measuring support for Black protesters after reports of violence

In the second paper, my coauthors and I focus on the Black Lives Matter movement, and measure support for protesters after reported violence. Support for Black Lives Matter remained

high for a period around the protest surge in 2020, even among white Americans. In June 2020, 67% of the American public supported the protests, including 60% of white adults (Parker et al, 2020). While this support did decline over time, the majority of Americans continued to support Black Lives Matter. This was true even after the media reported violence occurring at some of these protests. This challenges past wisdom that violence is always detrimental to a protest movement. To address this puzzle, this paper utilizes a factorial survey experiment to examine how different factors impact support for the movement after reported violence, such as the target of the reported violence.

While it might be expected that violence against people would lead to more negative impressions of protesters, this study finds that violence against private property led people to view protesters more negatively than violence against people. The study also examines factors that characterized this period of movement organizing, such as different leadership structures, and assessed the extent to which they impacted support for the movement.

Pipelines as Protection? Lessons from local discourses of support for the Line 3 Pipeline

In the final paper of this dissertation, instead of looking at a Black or Indigenous mobilization, I examine the opposition to one: the local individuals who actively *supported* the Line 3 Pipeline extension in Minnesota. While Anishinaabeg people in this area led the resistance to the pipeline since 2014, many local people—who were predominately white—supported the pipeline. Despite the resistance to the pipeline and direct action from water protectors—and national attention to them—the pipeline was completed in the fall of 2021 and is operational today. While the pipeline company Enbridge drove this project forward, the support of individual Minnesotans who spoke out for the project was important for its approval. Much of

this support can be understood as backlash to the Indigenous-led resistance, and to other Black and Indigenous-led movements of the period.

This case demonstrates that local backlash matters for the success of movements, and the discourses used in this backlash are more complicated than is often reported. Through interviews with local Line 3 supporters, I found that, while the media portrayed Line 3 as a contest between jobs and the environment, local supporters spoke about much more than jobs. Instead, they spoke about Line 3 resistance as a threat to their entire way of life. Movements led by Indigenous and Black people that challenge settler colonialism and white supremacy have faced significant backlash from those who benefit from these systems. This paper demonstrates the depth, nuance, and—often—the local specificity of the backlash. The paper also highlights the tensions and instabilities that are revealed in the narratives circulated among pipeline supporters.

Conclusion

The period from the 2010s – the mid 2020s was a time of movement resurgence, even as it was also a time that included the painful events that sparked major mobilizations. Organizers tested new tools, leadership structures, and strategies and mobilized historic numbers of people into city streets and rural landscapes alike. They were, at times, able to achieve success where preceding movements had struggled, such as with achieving sympathetic media coverage or maintaining support even when there was violence reported at protests, challenging conventional wisdom. Yet many of these movements struggled to convert their short-term successes into durable change, and in 2026 the movement landscape has shifted. Studying the Black and Indigenous led movements that surged in the early 21st Century can help us understand the

possibilities and challenges for progressive organizing today. This dissertation aims to humbly contribute to that effort.

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The #NoDAPL movement was powerful, factual, and Indigenous-led. Lawsuit lies can't change that. (2018, February 21). *Center for Constitutional Rights*. <https://ccrjustice.org/node/7133>

Framing the water protectors:

Settler colonialism and dynamic framing in news coverage of the #NoDAPL movement

Abstract: When thousands of water protectors gathered at Standing Rock to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, the mainstream news media ignored the movement and then framed it negatively. But was media framing uniformly hostile to the movement across time? And if not, when were #NoDAPL Indigenous voices included, and under what conditions did the news media use more sympathetic framing of the movement? This paper analyzes how the contemporary U.S. news media depicted an Indigenous movement at different points in time and argues that coverage was dynamic, with later coverage including more sympathetic framing of the movement. While journalists typically have few relationships with Indigenous sources in settler colonial societies, shaping negative early coverage of movements, coverage is not static. As movement actions continue and are deemed newsworthy, journalists interact with Indigenous activists more and coverage becomes more sympathetic to the movement.

In 2016 citizens of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their allies set up water protector camps to demonstrate against the Dakota Access Pipeline. As the camps grew to the hundreds and then thousands, law enforcement (and private security) clashed violently with the water protectors. The news media took notice and sent reporters to cover the events, which was a major turning point in the movement as it greatly increased the movement's visibility to the public (Reclaiming Native Truth, July 2018). Traditional media continue to have a strong agenda-setting effect on public opinion (Coleman & McCombs, 2007; Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017) and social movements continue to view the mass media as important to their work (Zepeda-Millán, 2017). News coverage of these events was a rare instance of the media bringing Indigenous issues to the attention of the non-Indigenous public.

But it is not only important for the news media to cover events affecting tribal nations; the ways in which the news media cover these events matters. News coverage of events in Indigenous communities affects the frames through which non-Indigenous people understand Indigenous issues, the policy outcomes and services for tribal nations, Indigenous mental health and futures, and the actions of non-Indigenous people (Curley, 2019; Ellis, 2019; McCallum et al, 2012; Waller et al, 2015; Fryberg & Eason, 2017). Scholars have pointed to the ways in which race and racism impact news coverage (Gilens, 1999; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995; van Dijk, 1996; Campbell, 1995), but to understand coverage of Indigenous movements, we need to better understand how settler colonialism operates in U.S. media coverage. This article speaks to this and suggests that media coverage is not static: Indigenous people work to disrupt settler colonial media dynamics and news media adjust their impressions through interaction with Indigenous movement actors. This can lead to coverage that is less hostile to Indigenous movements and less reliant on stereotypes.

One way to analyze news coverage is to study whose perspectives journalists include in articles. Journalists inevitably make decisions about which sources to quote and how to frame stories. Many people, including Indigenous media and activists as well as academics, criticized the media coverage of the #NoDAPL movement and suggested that news media did not listen to or cite Indigenous people (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Brown & Harlow, 2019; Tuiskula, 2016, November 29; Ahtone, 2016, December 14; Reclaiming Native Truth, June 2018). While some criticism is warranted, the quality and tilt of coverage varied greatly. This paper analyzes the dynamism of coverage to better understand the ways in which the news media and Indigenous activists interact in the contemporary period. When were #NoDAPL Indigenous voices excluded and when were they included and amplified? Under what conditions did the news media use frames hostile to the movement and when did they use frames that were sympathetic?

This paper speaks to the dynamic ways in which the U.S. news media, which is primarily owned by and made up of white people in a settler colonial society (Grieco, 2018, November 2; Ryan 1991), depicts Indigenous people and activism at different points in a movement. It also draws attention to moments when Indigenous peoples' perspectives are included and amplified, though to a limited extent, which signal a disruption of settler colonial projects. Furthermore, while scholarship has suggested journalists do not listen to Indigenous people, more empirical analysis is needed on this topic, particularly in the U.S. context (see Brown & Harlow, 2019; Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Dreher et al, 2016 for related work). This paper contributes to this body of work by using empirical evidence to clarify when American journalists include or ignore Indigenous voices and how they frame Indigenous social movements in their coverage.

To answer the research questions of this paper, I analyzed news stories about the #NoDAPL movement from 69 news outlets between September and November 2016. I show

that coverage changed over time; while early mainstream media coverage included more press releases or unnamed tribal sources and hostile framing, later coverage cited more Indigenous water protectors and used more sympathetic framing. I argue that media outlets typically privilege familiar sources and widely resonant narratives shaped by settler colonialism, but continued “newsworthy” activism and Indigenous activists’ media strategies can lead journalists to engage directly with Indigenous people, which challenges the stereotypes and dominant narratives the news media otherwise relies on and changes coverage.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: I begin by discussing settler colonialism, which provides a lens to understand the context that Indigenous movements and the news media exist within in the United States. I then discuss media and social movement scholarship on sources, framing, and shifting coverage to situate my argument and I highlight the areas where I extend this work. After that I detail my argument and hypotheses. I test this theory in a particular case: the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. I study this case using content analysis of news coverage of clashes during that movement with a focus on sources and framing. I finally present and discuss the results of this study and conclude by outlining directions for future work in this area.

Settler Colonialism

News reporting on Indigenous movements in the United States can be better understood through the lens of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is an ongoing system of power and domination that facilitates the “dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determining authority” through discursive and nondiscursive means (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). In this distinct form of colonialism “the colonizer comes to stay” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). State

actors have historically enacted violence against Indigenous peoples; they have also used discourse to dehumanize them and to legitimate state violence (Roscingo et al, 2015). Yet the violence against Indigenous people is not over, but “reasserted each day of occupation” (Tuck and Yang, p. 5).

The settler colonial character of the United States has also shaped both news coverage and perceptions of the majority-white public. The news media have rarely listened to Indigenous people; more often they have rendered them invisible, privileged settler histories, and used stereotypes when discussing Indigenous communities and issues (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Eason et al, 2018; Leavitt et al, 2017; Whyte, 2017; Wallace, 2019). The media furthermore has a long tradition of justifying colonialism and its violence against Indigenous people (Byfield, 2014; Wallace, 2019; Harding, 2006). The settler colonial context is still present in contemporary times, though it has taken on new forms (Wolfe, 2006).

Applying a settler colonial lens to news media coverage of Indigenous movements draws attention to the unique form of domination that Indigenous peoples continue to face in settler societies such as the United States, and the ways in which the media can help perpetuate this domination. Settler colonialism is related to, but distinct from, other forms of oppression and thus cannot simply be subsumed under analyses of other oppressions (Glenn, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Brayboy, 2005). Thus, specific attention to settler colonialism is necessary. While much contemporary media reifies settler colonialism as it continues the project of erasing Indigenous people and undermining their resistance, Indigenous social movements and media contact with them challenge this dynamic, sometimes leading to more sympathetic coverage. This paper analyzes when media outlets favor each of these forms of coverage.

Moreover, Indigenous people have a long history of resistance to settler colonial projects. This paper looks at how mainstream U.S. media discuss Indigenous movements, but also draws attention to moments when Indigenous voices are included, and their narratives are amplified, though to a limited extent. Though this occurs on the terms of the mainstream news media, it is important to study what conditions foster greater inclusion of Indigenous people's perspectives, as these moments signal a shift and disruption of settler colonial narratives. There is a long history that supports the erasure and negative framing of Indigenous nations and upending that is remarkable; it also may offer an opening for further shifts.

Media Behavior: Sources, Framing, and Shifts Over Time

Media and social movement literatures provide a starting point for addressing questions about when the news media listens to Indigenous people and how they frame stories. Literatures on media behavior and sources, framing, and media shifts over time provide foundational knowledge about how the media and social movements interact, which informs my theory of media coverage of Indigenous social movements. However, there has been limited work on contemporary Indigenous social movements' interactions with the media, as well as when these interactions change, particularly in the United States. This paper contributes to these areas.

Media behavior and sources cited in news stories

Journalists inevitably make choices about which sources to include in their articles. Media scholarship has found that the media privilege sources who are institutional insiders due to journalistic routines, access, and power dynamics (Gans, 1979; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Smith et al, 2001; Ryan, 1991; Chermak, 1997; Rohlinger, 2002; van Dijk, 1996); they select

sources they see as “responsible and important” (Ferree, 2003, p. 311; see also van Dijk, 1996). Scholars and journalists have also drawn attention to journalists’ reluctance to challenge what these sources, such as police officials, say (Chermak, 1997; Ryan, 1991; Farhi & Izadi, 2020, June 30; Mystal, 2020, September 15). Building on this, I investigate whether that continues to be the case at different points during movements, and particularly focus on when journalists may reject this norm and produce stories that contradict police narratives. One possible source of change is journalistic standards that prioritize objectivity and “truth”. If journalists witness events firsthand, they are unlikely to present a version of events they know to be false. This may cause news narratives to shift as journalists report from the ground.

Past research also suggests that access shapes what social movement sources the media cites or leaves out when covering movements. Reporters are less likely to contact a source if they do not have easy access to them or familiarity with them, or if the source is not likely to provide quotes “consistent with expected frames” (Chermak, 1997, p. 701; see also Ross, 2006). Social movement literature has noted this as well, pointing out that lawyers affiliated with social movements are cited on behalf of those movements because reporters routinely cover courthouse stories; this regular news coverage has been a benefit of pursuing, and even incentive for movements to pursue, legal mobilization strategies (McCann, 2006; Leachman, 2014). Lawyers and court records are also likely to provide simple, accessible movement stories to reporters compared to more multifaceted, unpredictable stories from protesters (Leachman, 2014).

I connect this to Indigenous social movements to analyze what sources are cited in news coverage of these movements. Scholarship focused on Indigenous people suggests that media behaviors in settler colonial societies have led journalists to lack access to and familiarity with Indigenous sources; these behaviors include rarely covering Indigenous communities and failing

to establish Indigenous contacts (Leavitt et al, 2015; Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Lalonde, 2019), as well as privileging colonial knowledge systems that delegitimize Indigenous discourses (Smith, 1999). However, research has found that there are some journalists who have built cultural competence and are more likely to amplify Indigenous voices (McCallum et al, 2012). With this in mind, I analyze when journalists do cite Indigenous movement actors.

Framing

Social movement and media literatures have also highlighted that events are made coherent and meaningful through how they are organized, interpreted, and presented (Snow et al, 1986; Benford & Snow, 2000; Goffman, 1974). The ways in which the media frame stories shape how the public understands them, what issues the public is concerned with, and whether they support protests (Binder, 1993; Beckett, 1994; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Social movements actors also attempt to frame events to convey the meaning of issues, articulate why people should care, and influence how people act in response (Benford & Snow, 2000; McCammon et al, 2007). However, framing is most persuasive when frames have cultural resonance from shared cultural understandings that feel familiar and true (Benford & Snow, 2000; Binder, 1993; McCammon et al 2007, Bloemraad et al, 2016), and media actors try to present things in ways that are “culturally acceptable” (Avraham et al, 2000).

I relate this to Indigenous issues to analyze what it means for Indigenous communities, and particularly Indigenous social movements. As scholars have documented, the media is largely made up of white people writing for white audiences (Campbell, 1995; van Dijk, 1996; Avraham et al, 2000). Scholarship focused on Indigenous communities has found that, accordingly, most media coverage repeats dominant narratives that embody settler colonialism

and stereotypes, and that erase Indigenous experiences (Baylor, 1996; Curley, 2019; Ellis, 2019; Nairn et al, 2017; Robyn, 2002). This has proven harms for Indigenous children, decreasing their self-esteem and sense of community value (Fryberg et al, 2008), and positive impacts for white people by increasing their self-esteem and racial group ties (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Eason et al, 2018). I also analyze citations and framing alongside each other. Framing and the citations in news stories are closely linked as there is a strong norm of objectivity in news journalism. Therefore, news stories do not include journalists' opinions in them directly. However, journalists decide what sources to deem credible and which quotes from those sources to include (Ryan, 1991; van Dijk, 1996). These quotations play a considerable role in framing issues.

While media behavior and the value placed on cultural resonance often leads to Indigenous erasure or hostile coverage, I also draw attention to the circumstances in which this can change. Media coverage is not a completely foreclosed arena. Social movements interact with journalistic routines and can use strategies to increase coverage and create openings for change (Barker-Plummer, 1995; Ryan, 1991); this leads to a dynamic model of media coverage.

Shifts in Coverage

Scholars have analyzed changes in news coverage and shown that journalists do not cover every story similarly at all points in time, and they cover major events differently than routine stories (Chermak, 1997). News organizations follow major stories over time and senior officials are more likely to be quoted in articles about major events, as officials see these events as opportunities to have influence (Chermak, 1997). Scholars have also noted that news organizations cover protests differently throughout the course of protest waves. Research has suggested that news organizations tend to focus on conflicts rather than issues—following the

protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999)—more as protest numbers grow, clashes between protesters and the state increase, and violence occurs (Gottlieb, 2015; Smith et al, 2001). Yet questions remain about whose perspectives dominate coverage of the conflicts, which side is framed more negatively in conflict coverage, and whether this changes over time.

There have, however, been studies that demonstrate how activists try to combat negative framing. Scholarship on the 2006 immigrant rights marches has shown that many organizers framed their efforts as patriotic and peaceful by using visuals and symbols such as the American flag, which encouraged the media to portray the marches positively (Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, & Jones-Correa, 2014). Indigenous people also have used strategies—from producing their own media to Indigenous organizations using mainstream media logic to promote their own messages—to draw attention to campaigns and get positive media attention (McCallum et al, 2012). This demonstrates that movements may anticipate they will be negatively portrayed and work to present an alternative narrative, particularly if they are led by a community that has historically been negatively portrayed in the media. It is therefore important to further study how journalists interacting with Indigenous activists shifts coverage; this paper does that.

Theoretical Framework & Hypotheses

In this paper I theorize how the U.S. news media depicts Indigenous people and movements at different points in a movement. Past scholarship suggests that journalists are not likely to cite Indigenous people in their stories, and analysis of news coverage has found that Indigenous people are rarely cited (Dreher et al, 2016). Therefore, when Indigenous activism becomes a major story, I expect early stories to cite more state sources—particularly law enforcement—since journalists have established relationships with those sources and they are deemed reputable

(Chermak, 1997; Ryan, 1991; Rohlinger, 2002). However, over time as the movement continues and is seen as more “newsworthy” due to other media coverage or conflict (Ryan, 1991; McCallum et al, 2012), media outlets will provide extended coverage (Chermak, 1997). As a result of this extended coverage, I expect they will cite more anti-pipeline sources. Therefore, my first hypothesis is that, **as the Standing Rock activism progressed over time and journalists travelled there to provide coverage on the ground, more anti-pipeline sources were cited.**

When journalists do cite Indigenous sources in early coverage, since not many have Indigenous contacts, they look for the most accessible sources to cite, often from afar (Ryan, 1991; Avraham et al, 2000). These may include tribal press releases, court documents, or even tribal officials and lawyers who are visible, considered reputable, and whose contact information is readily available (Ryan, 1991; Leachman, 2014). However, when an Indigenous movement becomes a major story for an extended period of time, I argue greater news coverage from the ground, alongside activists using media strategies to gain coverage (McCallum et al, 2012; Steinman, 2019), will lead journalists to talk directly to Indigenous activists. Accordingly, I also hypothesize that **more named water protectors, including more named Indigenous water protectors, were cited as time went on. Early on, anti-pipeline citations will primarily come from press releases, lawyers, and legal documents.**

Furthermore, while there is literature that finds that conflict shifts framing away from messages activists want to send to instead focus on the conflict itself, and suggests this is a negative turn for activists, I predict a positive shift for Indigenous activists over time. In early coverage, news outlets rely on familiar and resonant understandings of the world. Due to settler colonial power dynamics, these privilege settler understandings of the world as well as police narratives and other familiar sources (Whyte, 2017; Smith, 1999; Chermak, 1997). Depictions of

Indigenous activists are shaped by journalists' limited knowledge of Indigenous communities and stereotypes that fill gaps in knowledge (Fryberg & Eason, 2017). Any claims from Indigenous activists that do not conform to dominant understandings of issues are seen as illegitimate (Smith, 1999; Rohlinger, 2002).

When journalists talk to Indigenous activists, what the activists say challenges dominant narratives of Indigenous communities and their interactions with the state, including clashes. While coverage may focus on the conflicts, Indigenous activists are likely to offer alternative framings of events, which include those rooted in Indigenous cultures and histories (Steinman, 2019). Journalists who witness clashes play out in conjunction with listening to Indigenous activists are more likely to see things that challenge police narratives of events and increase the perceived legitimacy of Indigenous activists' narratives, at least rendering them plausible enough to journalists for them to include in news articles (McCallum, 2012; Jackson, 2020, June 3). Based on this, I hypothesize that **framing shifted to be more sympathetic toward Indigenous-led water protectors and their movement over time.**

Research Design & Case Selection

In order to study when the news media listened to Indigenous people and when they used frames sympathetic to an Indigenous movement, I studied a case of media coverage of an Indigenous movement: three periods of the news coverage of the 2016 #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock.

Case Selection

The Standing Rock-led resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline is an ideal case to study media coverage of Indigenous movements in the United States because it was one of the largest

and most widely covered Indigenous movements in the U.S. the contemporary era. It was called the largest gathering of Native people in U.S. history (Jackson, 2018, March 9) with hundreds of tribes represented at the Standing Rock camps. Quotes from Indigenous sources in news coverage reflect the historical significance of the #NoDAPL movement for Indigenous people:

“‘There's never been a coming together of tribes like this,’ [Judith LeBlanc, a citizen of the Caddo Nation in Oklahoma and director of the Native Organizers Alliance] said of Friday's gathering of Native Americans. People came from as far as New York and Alaska, some bringing their families and children, and hundreds of tribal flags dotted the camp.”

- *MacPherson, AP via Charleston Gazette, September 10, 2016*

There was also extensive coverage in the mainstream news media and people worldwide paid attention to the case, so if the news media were going to include Indigenous voices in any story about Indigenous activism, this would be a most likely case. Therefore, media outlets' failure to do so in early coverage of the Standing Rock camps suggests Indigenous voices are usually absent from early coverage of Indigenous activism.

This paper more specifically focuses on news coverage of three clashes between #NoDAPL water protectors and law enforcement or pipeline private security. These three clashes were heavily covered in the mainstream media. They have also been cited in the literature as the three most significant instances of violence at the Standing Rock camps (Report of the Special UN Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, via Cook, 2019). Furthermore, scholars have noted that the news media is usually only interested in Indigenous issues when they include conflict—which makes something “newsworthy” according to news values—so the three clashes are a likely case for maximum media attention (McCallum et al, 2012).

Case Background

While the #NoDAPL camps at Standing Rock started in early 2016, the Indigenous-led fight against the pipeline began at least two years before that. Energy Transfer Partners announced plans for the pipeline in June 2014, and in September 2014 the tribe expressed their objections to the company and asked the Army Corps of Engineers to consult with them on the matter (Whyte, 2017; “Memorandum”). Estes (2019) argues that the fight against the DAPL began when the Oglala Sioux tribal chairman denounced the Keystone XL pipeline in March 2014, with support from numerous other tribes. Even earlier, in 2012 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe passed a resolution against future pipelines running through their lands (Whyte, 2017). But conflict between Indigenous people and the state over land and water is far older, tracing back centuries (Estes, 2019; Donnella, 2016, November 22).

Initially, the mainstream media did not report on the #NoDAPL movement. The water protector camps first set up in April 2016 and became more active in August, but news outlets published few stories covering them. Some news outlets were starting to take an interest at the end of August, and then on September 3, 2016, Democracy Now journalist Amy Goodman filmed a violent clash between water protectors and Dakota Access Pipeline private security, where the security guards used dogs against the water protectors. This, combined with a monologue from MSNBC anchor Lawrence O’Donnell a few days earlier, brought much greater mainstream media attention to the #NoDAPL struggle (Reclaiming Native Truth, 2018).

After the September 3 clash, there were several other clashes that took place between water protectors and law enforcement. I cover two of the most significant (Report of the Special UN Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, via Cook, 2019). The second clash I

analyze, which occurred on October 27, 2016, involved law enforcement clearing one of the #NoDAPL camps. Police arrested more people on this day than any other during the activism at the camps, and the longest prison sentence for a #NoDAPL water protector occurred as a result of an arrest during this conflict (Brown, Parrish, & Speri, 2017, October 27). The third clash I study occurred on November 20, 2016, and occurred at the site of a blocked bridge, Backwater Bridge. Water protectors tried to clear the bridge, and militarized police sprayed water cannons at water protectors in below-freezing temperatures. Arguably the most extreme water protector injuries occurred during this conflict; a Diné woman lost sight in one eye and a young white water protector nearly lost her arm, among other severe injuries (Tolan, 2016, December 22).

Mainstream news outlets varied in how long they waited to send reporters to cover the activism on the ground at Standing Rock. The New York Times and NPR sent reporters at the end of August even before the September 3 incident, while others did not send anyone until October or November (Ahtone, 2016, December 14). As journalists were starting to provide more coverage, water protectors were also making Facebook live videos and posts, tweeting, and otherwise directly sharing online. Additionally, when journalists did come to provide coverage on the ground, Indigenous leadership at the Standing Rock camps directed them to focus on Indigenous voices (Steinman, 2019). This all added to the global attention around the struggle. It brought issues such as sovereignty to the non-Indigenous consciousness and even global consciousness (Ellis, 2019; see also Reclaiming Native Truth, July 2018).

Some have argued that media focus on the clashes obscured the day-to-day peaceful actions at the camps (Estes, 2019). While this is a fair point, since the focus of this paper is on how the news media covered this movement, focusing on the clashes is both informative and a practical choice. As Estes notes, there were no journalists from major media outlets at many of

the peaceful marches that occurred on back roads in rural North Dakota. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Indigenous issues are primarily covered by the news media when there is conflict or relation to political elites (McCallum et al, 2012). As a study of how journalists *did* cover the events surrounding Indigenous-led #NoDAPL resistance, I focus on the clashes that received a good deal of media attention.

Methods & Data

I used content analysis to study when the news media cited Indigenous water protectors and when they used frames sympathetic to the #NoDAPL movement. I searched for and downloaded a corpus of relevant news stories using the ProQuest US Newsstream, which includes national papers such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, as well as local papers such as the Bismarck Tribune.

As mentioned earlier, I focused on three incidents of violence during the actions against the Dakota Access Pipeline occurring on September 3, October 27, and November 20, all in 2016. For each incident I used a keyword search to select articles about the event based on a transparent, systematic process rather than my discretion that could bias the results. This resulted in 150 total stories (29 for time period 1, 44 for time period 2, and 77 for time period 3). More information about my methodology can be found in Appendix A.

Coding

I developed a coding scheme based on theory and the sample coding of 30 articles (10 per time period), which I formalized in a codebook. I used this codebook, which is included in Appendix A, to guide my content analysis. I coded along three dimensions: news outlet, citation,

and content. The news outlet coding provides information about what type of news outlets reported on the issue. The citation coding corresponded to the questions of this paper around who the news media cites and amplifies at different points in time. With attention to who was cited and in what proportion, this kind of analysis reveals the perspectives that are included in different stories. Content coding is additionally essential, to see what the media write in the text of articles. This coding allowed me to study the frames in stories and how they shifted over time.

Under citation coding, I coded for features such as what types of sources they cited on the pro-pipeline side (law enforcement, etc.), what types of sources they cited on the anti-pipeline side (Indigenous water protector, etc.) and what types of neutral sources they cited (judge, etc.). See Appendix A for the full list of sources I coded. I also counted how many graphs cited pro-pipeline, anti-pipeline, and neutral sources in each story.

For content coding, I coded for violence and unlawfulness. I coded for who was framed as violent due to the long history of the U.S. media framing Indigenous people as violent (Nairn et al, 2017; Robyn, 2002). This connects to the ways in which tribal nations were historically framed as violent or “savage” to justify violence against them under settler colonialism (Robyn, 2002; Coté, 2010; Berkhofer, 1978). Following scholarship on who the media frames as the aggressor in stories (Atteveldt et al, 2017), I coded not simply if Indigenous people were framed as violent, but who was framed as more violent in the clashes. For unlawfulness, I coded each article for which side, if any, was framed as “unlawful.” In the early United States, colonists largely believed that Indigenous people did not have property rights and white settlers’ property rights allowed them to take Indigenous lands and use the law to legitimize this (Harris, 1995; Frymer, 2017). This history is relevant when powerful actors and even the law say that Indigenous people are trespassing on their own tribe’s ancestral lands. The law is often used to

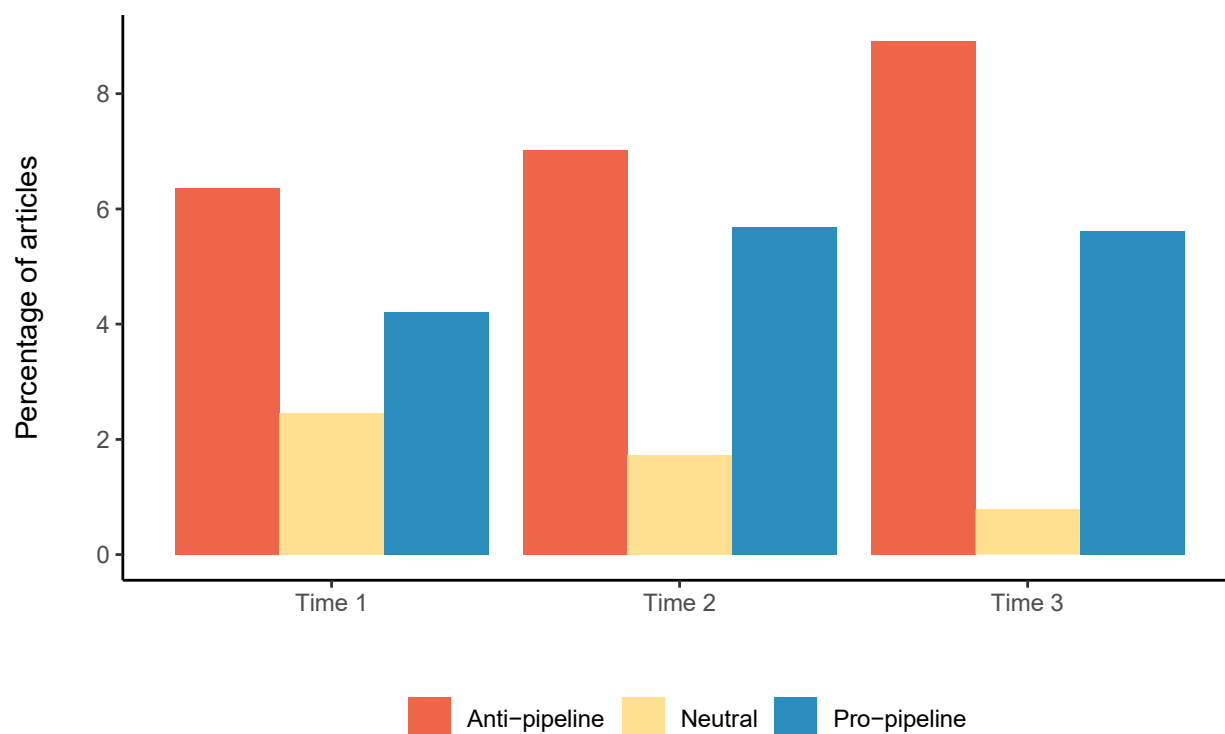
reinforce power hierarchies (Harris, 1995), though it can also be used to make subversive rights claims (McCann, 1994; Polletta, 2000). To better understand how these dynamics play out in the news media, I examined how the media used legal language—particularly constructions of “unlawfulness”—in their framing of the DAPL clashes. Based on the history of Indigenous people and the law, I expected them to be framed as unlawful initially, but for this to decrease and for the state to be framed as more unlawful as time went on and journalists interacted with more Indigenous people.

Results & Discussion

I find that news coverage shifts over time from citing the most easily accessible sources to citing more water protectors, especially Indigenous water protectors. Additionally, frames shift over time to be more sympathetic to the #NoDAPL movement. More unexpectedly, I find that anti-pipeline sources are cited more in all time periods, which departs from the literature that argues journalists favor more institutionalized sources and suggests this is not always the case.

While I hypothesized that as the Standing Rock activism progressed more anti-pipeline sources would be cited, I found that news outlets cited more anti-pipeline sources than pro-pipeline sources on average in articles in all three time periods (figure 1). While more anti-pipeline sources were cited over time, it was not the case that the news media cited more pro-pipeline sources than anti-pipeline sources in the first time period.

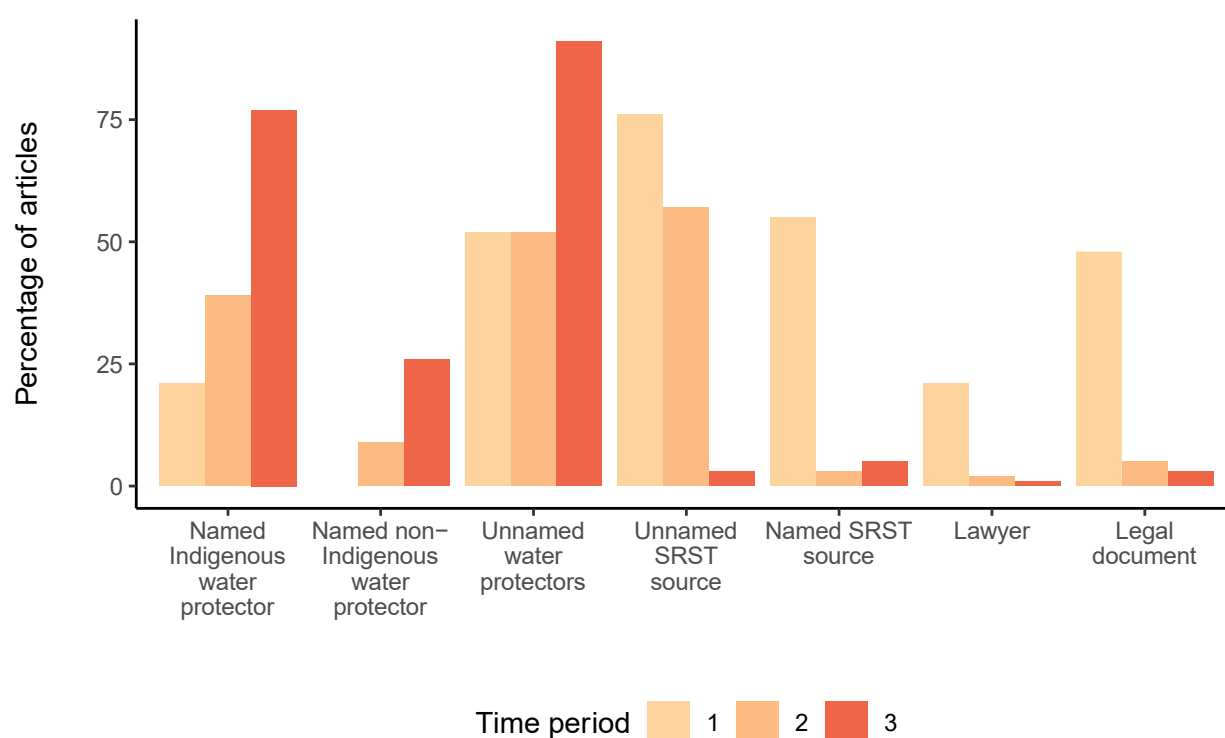
Figure 1: Average number of paragraphs that cite sources from each side, per article



The greater number of anti-pipeline sources cited per article may be because news outlets saw the actions by anti-pipeline actors as what made the event newsworthy. Coverage was not about the pipeline being built, but about the resistance to the pipeline (and how law enforcement reacted to that resistance). Therefore, while it was not what I expected, it makes sense that the news media included these perspectives. The greater inclusion of anti-pipeline sources across time periods implies that the news media is not opposed to citing movement actors or those who oppose government or industry generally, and they do not always favor more institutionalized sources. This departs from past research that has suggested the media favors institutionalized and pro-government sources over challengers (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Gitlin, 1980; Ryan, 1991). It suggests this preference may be less dominant now than it was in the past, at least in some circumstances. It also suggests there may be more media openness to challengers than previously thought. Further study of this question would clarify contemporary news behavior.

As the media consistently cited anti-pipeline movement sources, it is important to examine who news media cited to represent the movement. When I disaggregate these pro, anti, and neutral categories into more specific types of sources, the types of sources cited across the three time periods align with my second hypothesis, as more named Indigenous water protectors were cited as time went on.

Figure 2: Percent of articles with each type of source - anti-pipeline



As expected, the presence of Indigenous water protector sources increased over time (figure 2). While only 21% of articles cited a named Indigenous water protector in the first time period, that increased to 39% in the second period and 77% in the third period. This confirms my hypothesis that as time went on and more news outlets sent journalists to cover the movement on the ground, more named Indigenous water protectors were cited. It also aligns with

reports that Indigenous movement leadership worked to direct media to Indigenous water protectors (Steinman, 2019).

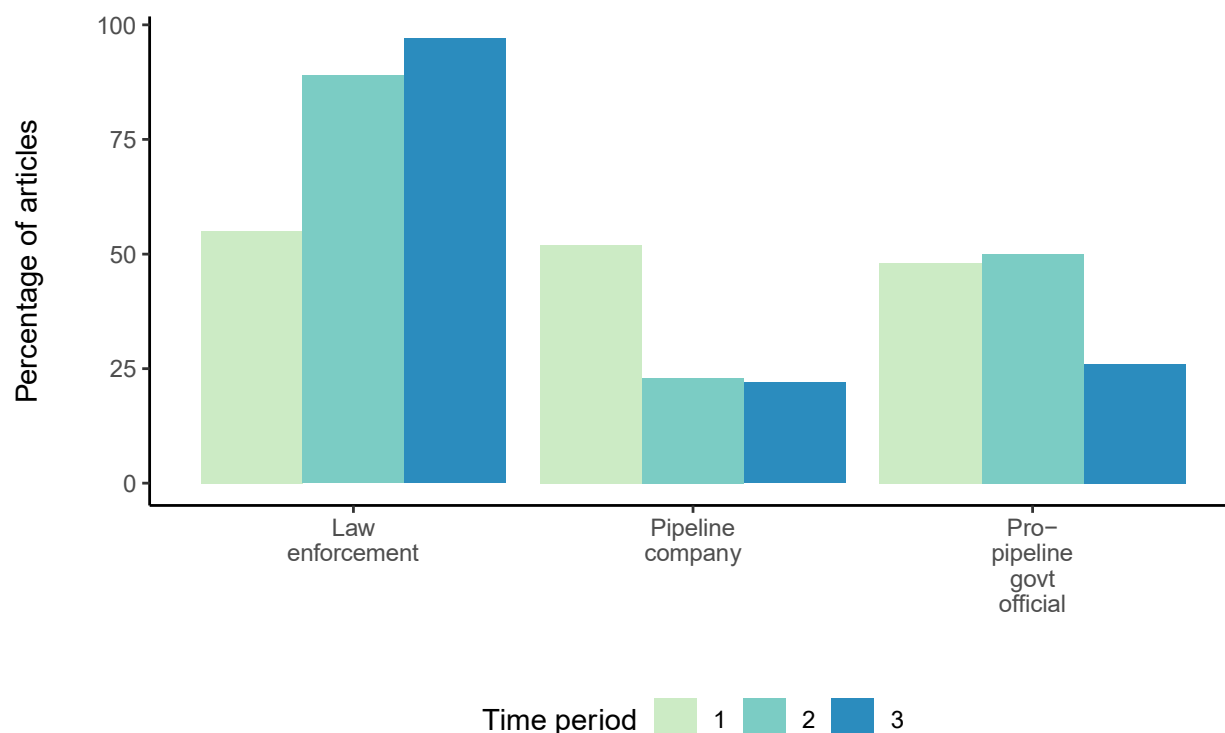
There was a notable shift toward citing water protectors generally over time. As discussed above, the number of named Indigenous water protectors increased over time, but so did the number of named non-Indigenous water protectors. This suggests that journalists reached out to more water protectors on the ground overall over time, in line with my expectations. Still, journalists did seem to prioritize the perspectives of Indigenous water protectors, as they were cited more in every time period: 77% of articles in time period 3 quoted a named Indigenous water protector, while only 26% quoted a named non-Indigenous water protector (figure 2). The percent of stories that cited unnamed “protesters” or water protectors generally also increased over time. Nearly half of all stories early on cited unnamed “protesters” generally, but these citations increased to appear in more than 90% of stories in time period 3.

Over time, the number of stories citing Standing Rock Sioux Tribe representatives—both named and unnamed—decreased. This also aligns with my expectations, as the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was an easily identifiable and more accessible source for journalists who were not on the ground in North Dakota, and who had few Indigenous contacts. Contact information for tribal offices was readily available on the tribe’s website, the tribe was working with a communications firm, and they were publishing press releases—including one on September 3 that was linked on the tribe’s homepage (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe via Internet Archive; Pyramid Communications, n.d.). When journalists cited unnamed tribal sources in particular — attributing things to “the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe” or “Standing Rock Sioux Tribe officials”—it is likely that media sources were pulling quotes from press releases. A reduction in citing named Standing Rock Sioux sources, usually the tribal chairman Dave Archambault II,

may be because initially these sources were the most obvious or even the only relevant Indigenous people newspapers knew to name. Additionally, some of the initial citations of Archambault were quotes pulled from press releases or other places that did not require reporters to talk to him themselves. As reporters cited more water protectors, they cited Standing Rock Sioux Tribe officials in fewer stories.

I expected that journalists would cite lawyers and legal documents less over time, and I found this to be true. As discussed earlier in this paper, lawyers representing activists or tribes are a clearly identifiable source that journalists have often cited on behalf of those they represent. They also provide information that conforms to expected narratives. Legal documents are perhaps less costly to pull a quote from, much in the same way that press releases are appealing. Over time, they became eclipsed by quotes from water protectors on the ground. While activists may be harder to reach and less likely to conform to expected frames, their first-hand experiences make for compelling coverage. Additionally, activists on the ground can provide unique quotes so that journalists can avoid repeating quotes that other news outlets are using.

Figure 3: Percent of articles with each type of source - pro-pipeline

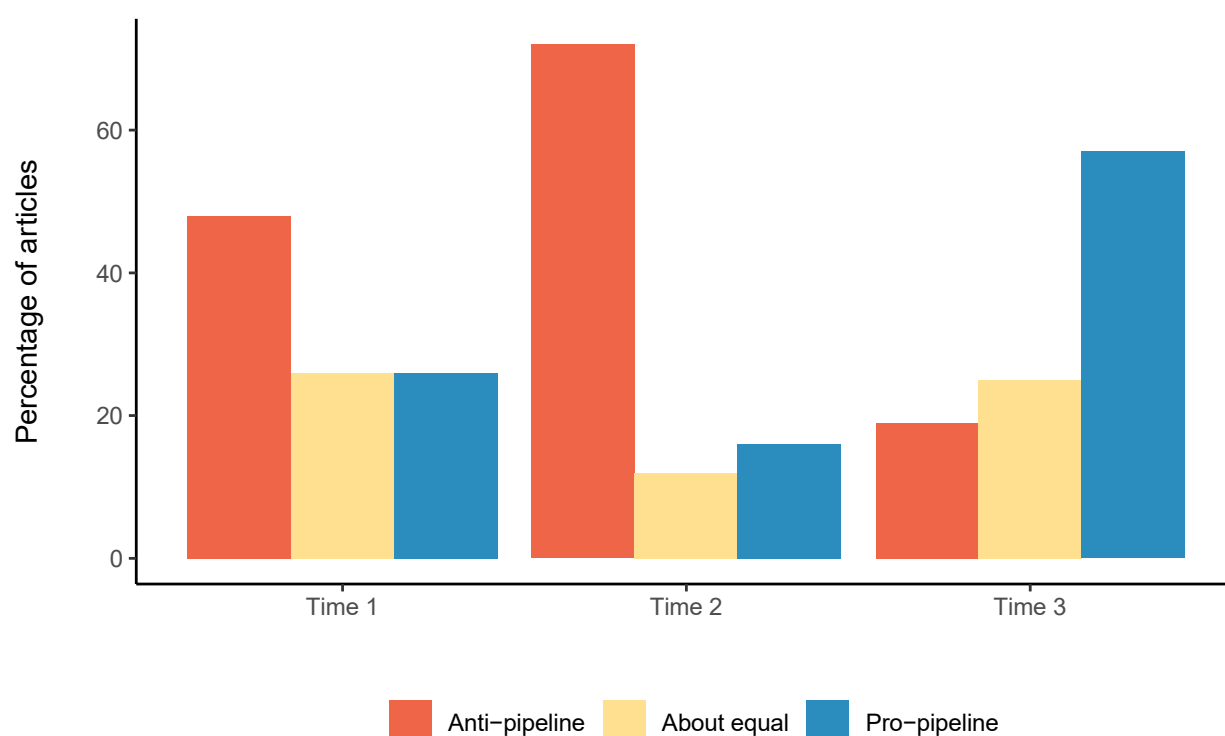


While the percentage of stories citing law enforcement in time period 1 is relatively high at 55%, it only increases over time (figure 3). This aligns with other scholarship that I discussed earlier in this paper. As events increase in profile, law enforcement officials become more invested in having their voices heard because they see it as an opportunity to shape the narrative around an issue (Chermak, 1997). As I will show, they are not always successful in shaping the media narrative, however the increase in police citations to near ubiquity in time period 3—97% of stories in this time period cited law enforcement—suggests a concerted campaign to do so.

All other types of pro-pipeline sources cited decreased by the third time period. This includes pro-pipeline government officials, such as then-governor of North Dakota Jack Dalrymple, and the pipeline company. Overall, this suggests that law enforcement sources were uniquely persistent over time among pro-pipeline sources. This may be because police were directly involved in the latter two incidents. It also suggests the continued hesitancy among journalists to shun police sources entirely. While journalists do not always carry police framing

and they show willingness to cite institutional outsiders, this finding follows the literature that journalists view law enforcement as a valuable resource and see a benefit to maintaining relationships with them.

Figure 4: Which side is framed as more "unlawful"?



In relation to framing, my results support my third hypothesis: as time progressed, framing shifted to be more sympathetic to the Indigenous-led water protectors. While there is some variation, particularly between time periods 1 and 2, the framing does become more sympathetic to Indigenous-led water protectors in time period 3. Overall, slightly more articles framed the anti-pipeline side as unlawful, rather than the pro-pipeline side (41% vs 39%). However, these frames varied across time periods (figure 4). More stories in time periods 1 and 2 framed the anti-pipeline side as unlawful. In time period 1 48% of stories framed the anti-pipeline water protectors as unlawful, and in time period 2 72% of stories did so. In time period 3 more stories framed the *pro*-pipeline side as unlawful; 57% of stories had this framing.

Furthermore, the media wrote about unlawfulness differently for pro-pipeline actors and anti-pipeline actors. When anti-pipeline actors were framed as unlawful, quotes from law enforcement or government officials referred to pipeline opponents as criminals or even “criminal agitators.”

““Water hoses were used to keep distance between officers and criminal agitators and also to put out fires set by those agitators,’ [Morton County Sheriff spokesman Rob Keller] said.”

- *MacPherson & Nicholson, AP via the Dubuque Telegraph Herald, November 22, 2016*

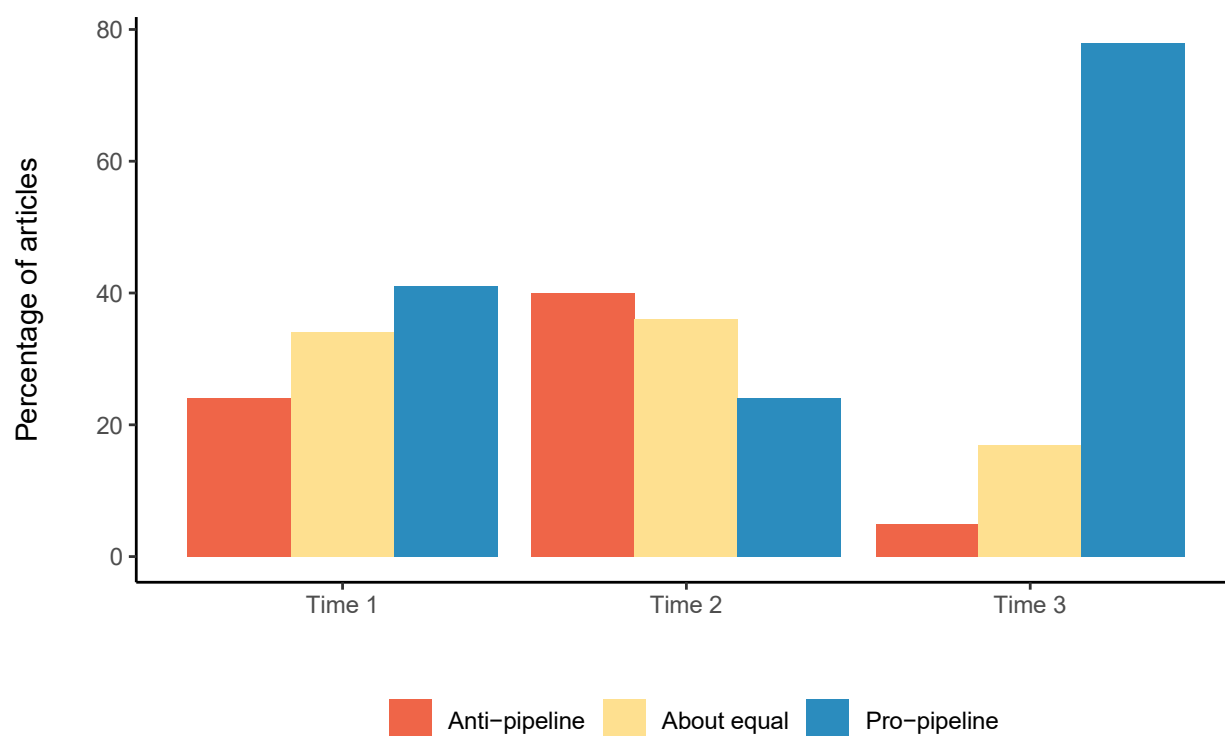
In contrast, when pro-pipeline actors were framed as unlawful, quotes from water protectors, lawyers, and NGOs used rights language:

"Militarized law enforcement agencies moved in on water protectors with tanks and riot gear today," Dave Archambault II, the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, said in a statement last week. "We have repeatedly seen a disproportionate response from law enforcement to water protectors' nonviolent exercise of their constitutional rights."

- *Tchekmedyan & Etehad, Los Angeles Times, November 4, 2016*

This language make sense, as Indigenous people have been historically criminalized, so framing them as such plays upon familiar stereotypes. Alternatively, for Indigenous people, invoking rights can be a powerful reclamation of rights that they were historically not seen to have.

Figure 5: Which side is framed as more violent?



While more stories in time period 1 framed the anti-pipeline water protectors as unlawful, more stories during this time period framed the pro-pipeline actors as violent (figure 5). This seemingly contradictory coverage is likely due to the details of that incident, which was often described as activists trespassing on DAPL-owned land and being attacked by DAPL security guards with dogs. Additionally, this incident has been called the event that got the mainstream news media to cover the #NoDAPL movement, so the news media did not yet have well-defined frames in place when covering this event. Additionally, with the exception of journalist Amy Goodman who filmed the event for Democracy Now (who did not write any stories in my corpus), journalists did not witness these events firsthand, and many papers covered the event from afar. Particularly among the national papers or outlets in other regions without reporters on the ground, many journalists relied on police and tribal press releases and court documents.

The framing of violence in events 2 and 3 more clearly matches expectations (figure 5). Time period 2 was more hostile to the #NoDAPL water protectors, with more stories framing them as violent, though about a quarter of stories had the opposite framing. Then, there was a dramatic shift to time period 3, when pro-pipeline actors were framed as more violent in the overwhelming majority of stories.

Compared to the framing of unlawfulness, the violence framing had more shared themes on both sides. Regardless of who was framed as more violent, it was common for the peacefulness of the allegedly less violent side to be emphasized, as well as the specific weapons and tactics of the allegedly more violent side. This suggests these frames are not specific to either side, rather journalists expected them to resonate for either side.

“Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said Thursday that he was trying to enforce the law while removing protesters peacefully. He blamed protesters for escalating illegal activities over the weekend, including setting up illegal roadblocks with cars and rocks.”

-Maher, Wall Street Journal, October 28, 2016

“Authorities also said they pulled back Tuesday from responding to a report of 150 to 200 protesters, some with hatchets and knives, gathered at a construction area on private land because they determined it wasn't safe to respond.”

-MacPherson, AP via Dubuque Telegraph-Herald, September 8, 2016

“Goldtooth reported that police sprayed protesters with a water cannon and used tear gas and concussion grenades to repel the protesters. It was 26 degrees in Cannon Ball at 9 p.m.”

-Grueskin, Bismarck Tribune, November 21, 2016

However, stories that framed the #NoDAPL water protectors as more violent tended to quote pro-pipeline sources emphasizing a risk to public safety.

“‘I am being asked by outsiders and millionaire Hollywood actors to let agitators and rioters walk onto private property, destroy equipment, and endanger lives,’ [Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier] said in a statement. ‘We have patrolled the county and enforced the law because our number one priority is public safety, separating the unlawful actors from legal protestors.’”

-Adranga, Politico, October 28, 2016

This may be an attempt to appeal to the non-Indigenous public’s fears based on stereotypes of violent Indigenous people. On the other hand, stories that framed the pro-pipeline side as more violent were more likely to quote water protectors discussing the number of people injured and the extent of injuries.

“Protesters against the Dakota Access Pipeline say hundreds of people were injured in clashes with law enforcement on a bridge near Cannonball, N.D., Sunday night...

‘They deployed 20 mace canisters in a small area in less than five minutes to the point where people have lost bowel function,’ Bibens said. ‘At least one seizure has been witnessed by our legal observers.’ One woman suffered a broken kneecap and one elder ‘went into cardiac arrest’ but was revived at the scene, Bibens said.

-Hult, Argus Leader, November 22, 2016

Discussing bad injuries may be a way to humanize Indigenous water protectors even to those who may be skeptical of their cause. By discussing large numbers of people injured and some injured badly, activists might seek to make the violence of law enforcement undeniable.

Overall shifts in framing

Overall, there was a large shift toward news coverage that was more sympathetic toward the #NoDAPL movement by time period 3. In time period 3 57% of stories framed the *pro*-pipeline side as unlawful (figure 4) and the vast majority of articles (78%) framed the *pro* side as violent (figure 5). The shift in time period 3 provides evidence that Indigenous activists were successful in their strategies to gain positive media coverage. While the protest paradigm suggests reporting on clashes harms activists' causes as it detracts from coverage of the issues in question, I find evidence of a positive effect for this Indigenous movement. Indigenous people and frames being amplified by the news media—one of the institutions that has historically perpetuated their erasure—creates political openings and sends a clear message that Indigenous people are still here.

This amplification may be due journalists talking to Indigenous activists more. Though named Indigenous sources were increasing by time period 2, the percentage of stories including these sources nearly doubled between time periods 2 and 3, from 39% to 77% (figure 2). There was potentially a critical mass effect as journalists began to talk to Indigenous activists on the ground for most stories. There may also have been a cumulative effect as journalists built relationships with these contacts, and listened their perspectives at multiple points in time (Ryan, 1991). This fits with past research that has found that journalists with cultural competence from personal experiences—including reporting experiences such as witnessing police brutality against Indigenous people—are more likely to include Indigenous voices (McCallum et al, 2012). Additionally, in line with past scholarship, there is evidence that Indigenous activists utilized media strategies to attract positive attention and center Indigenous activists and their preferred

frames (McCallum et al, 2012; Steinman, 2019; Ellis, 2019). Finally, as journalists were talking with Indigenous activists more, they were also simultaneously witnessing clashes first-hand. There is evidence in the coverage itself that what they saw delegitimized police narratives, and perhaps validated Indigenous activists' narratives for journalists.

“They eventually fell back under a force of pepper spray, rubber and bean bag bullets, tasers, smoke grenades and relentless, inch-by-inch, pressure from police, witnessed by Tribune reporters. Law enforcement claims they only used pepper spray and high-pitch warning tones.”

-Grueskin, Bismarck Tribune, October 28, 2016

Beyond this event, what journalists witnessed at Standing Rock may affect those journalists' perspectives in the future (McCallum et al, 2012). Furthermore, sympathetic coverage of activists in violent clashes with the state can increase public support for their cause¹. The shifts in coverage at Standing Rock may therefore have important implications for future news coverage and even public opinion.

Conclusion

This paper documents several ways in which the U.S. news media covered an Indigenous social movement over time. Through empirical analysis of news articles, I find evidence that news media cited more individual Indigenous water protectors and used frames that are more sympathetic to the movement as time went on. As expected, Indigenous people's perspectives were rare in early coverage. However, the news media included more Indigenous voices as

¹ One historical example of this is the positive shift in white attitudes toward the Civil Rights Movement after the media televised the violence at Selma to white American households (Klarman, 1994; Lee, 2002).

events receiving significant coverage progressed. Frames shifted as well. This paper therefore contributes to the scholarship on Indigenous social movements and news coverage of movements over time.

My results affirm two of my hypotheses, but I also find that coverage is not always linear; in this case it went from mixed and indeterminate to negative for activists and then to positive. This pattern may hold in other cases as well. Alternatively, it is possible that journalists covering activism or other events involving plains tribal nations will have more established contacts for future coverage, which could lead journalists to amplify Indigenous voices earlier on. Connections made during the #NoDAPL movement were evident on social media and in campaigns around the Native vote in 2018 and against Native voter suppression in North Dakota that year, and later in the actions to stop Line 3; it is possible that connections like this could shape news coverage of other salient events as well (Vigil-Hayes et al, 2019; Kurtz, 2018, October 24; Rahman, 2021, September 1). Research on media coverage of Indigenous movements after #NoDAPL would help to answer these questions.

It is also important to note that generalizability is complicated when it comes to Indigenous peoples due to the heterogeneity in history, politics, culture, and contemporary experiences (O’Keefe & Greenfield, 2019). On one hand, since this study focused on how the news media listens to Indigenous people and frames issues, the results may be generalizable to news coverage of other tribal nations. While there is great variation across tribes, the news media treats Indigenous people as less varied than they actually are since news routines are embedded in a settler colonial context that applies common tropes and discourses to peoples from all tribal nations. Additionally, although the #NoDAPL movement was led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, citizens of many tribal nations participated, and news media quoted activists from many

different tribal nations. Admittedly, my analysis did not separate cited sources by tribe, except for official representatives or tribal leaders. Therefore, my findings may suggest directions for further analysis of movements led by other tribal nations.

On the other hand, the activist camps took place near on the ancestral lands of a particular tribe, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and they led the fight against the pipeline. In this way, the issue as well as the news coverage operates in a particular historical context. The news media may cover tribal issues in different contexts that center other tribes differently. I expect that my findings hold for other geographically isolated tribally-led actions; the media may cover actions taking place in cities differently due to easier access to events, though they may still lack Indigenous contacts to talk to early on.

Notably, none of the articles that I analyzed were written by Indigenous journalists. While there are some Indigenous journalists in the United States, Indigenous people are severely underrepresented in the news media; in 2005, the American Society of Newspaper Editors reported that there were only 295 American Indian journalists out of 54,100 professional journalists in the U.S. (Wilkins & Stark, 2018, p. 258). This paper demonstrates that even when news outlets cover stories that greatly affect Indigenous communities, they typically do not have Indigenous writers cover them. This may be a function of the journalistic norm of unbiased coverage. Those within and outside of news organizations may assume that Indigenous writers cannot provide unbiased coverage of such events, in denial of the fact that everyone is situated in their own experiences (Ryan, 1991) and white authors typically cover stories affecting white communities and this is not seen as a conflict of interest. It also may be due to a lack of Indigenous journalists working at major news outlets, though this too is sometimes related to a perception of Indigenous journalists as activists and therefore not neutral (Ryan, 1991). The

result is news practices that are shaped predominately by non-Indigenous people (van Dijk, 1996). While listening to Indigenous people as sources is vitally important, it is also necessary that the news media hire more Indigenous journalists and have them cover Indigenous issues on a regular basis. Tribal newspapers do this well, but it is essential for the mainstream media, with their extensive reach, to improve on this dimension (Monet, 2017). Future work might investigate how this affects coverage. What is clear is that the news media needs to listen to Indigenous people when writing about issues that matter to tribal nations. This project provides evidence that the #NoDAPL movement made strides in that direction.

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Appendix A: Methods & Data

I used content analysis to study when the news media cited Indigenous water protectors and when they used frames sympathetic to the #NoDAPL water protectors. The unit of analysis is the article, and I searched for and downloaded a corpus of relevant news stories using the ProQuest US Newsstream. This database includes national papers such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, as well as local papers such as the Bismarck Tribune.

As mentioned earlier, I focused on three incidents of violence during the activism against the Dakota Access Pipeline occurring on September 3, October 27, and November 20, all in 2016. For all three events I collected stories in the 11 days following the event. Most stories about each event occurred during the first 11 days. Additionally, I expected early coverage to be influential and set the narrative for later coverage; this was confirmed in my analysis as articles sometimes cited other news coverage of the same event.

For each incident I selected keywords to include as search terms that I suspected would be present in most stories about the event. These keywords are listed in the table below. By using keywords, I was able to select articles specifically about the event based on a transparent, systematic process rather than my discretion that could bias the results.

	Date of event	Search Date Range	Keywords
Time period 1	September 3, 2016	9/3/16 – 9/13/16 (including 9/3 and 9/13)	“dakota access pipeline” and “dogs”
Time period 2	October 27, 2016	10/27/16 – 11/06/16	“dakota access pipeline” and “bridge” OR “dakota access pipeline” and “private”

Time period 3	November 20, 2016	11/20/16 – 11/30/16	“dakota access pipeline” and “bridge” OR “dakota access pipeline” and “cannons”
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I then downloaded all stories returned by these searches and reviewed them by hand to filter out any stories that were either not primarily about the event of interest or did not include a significant amount of text about the event. If an article did not include at least one long graph or two short graphs about the clash of interest it was not included. I also filtered out opinion pieces, and pieces from student newspapers. I removed student papers because they have a significantly different staff composition and different dynamics than mainstream news sources. This resulted in 150 total stories (29 for time period 1, 44 for time period 2, and 77 for time period 3).

Coding

I developed a coding scheme based on theory and the sample coding of 30 articles (10 articles per time period), which I formalized in a codebook. I used this codebook, which is included below, to guide my content analysis. I coded along three dimensions: news outlet, citation, and content. The news outlet coding provides information about what type of news outlets reported on the issue, and in what ways. The citation coding corresponded to the questions of this paper around who the news media cites and amplifies at different points in time. With attention to who was cited and in what proportion, this kind of analysis reveals the perspectives that are included in different stories. Content coding is additionally essential, to see what the media write in the text of articles. This coding allowed me to study the frames in stories

and how they shifted over time. The content coding included the quotations from sources that journalists chose to include, as well as factors such as other statements, headlines, and tone.

For content, I coded the basic features of the article such as article title, paper and journalist's name, in addition to the type of newspaper (local/regional, national, tribal), the region of the paper (if local/regional), whether or not it was a wire story, and whether or not an Indigenous journalist wrote the story. Under citation coding, I coded for features such as what types of sources they cited on the pro-pipeline side (law enforcement, pipeline company official, etc.), what types of sources they cited on the anti-pipeline side (named or unnamed Standing Rock Sioux Tribe source, Indigenous activist, etc.) and what types of neutral sources they cited (judge, other news media, etc.). See Appendix A for the full list of sources I coded. I also counted how many graphs cited pro-pipeline, anti-pipeline, and neutral sources in each story.

For content coding, I coded for violence and unlawfulness. I coded for who was framed as violent due to the long history of the U.S. media framing Indigenous people as violent (Nairn et al, 2017; Robyn, 2002). This connects to the ways in which tribal nations were framed as violent or “savage” to justify violence against them under settler colonialism (Robyn, 2002; Coté, 2010; Berkhofer, 1978). In line with work on who is framed as the aggressor in stories (Atteveldt et al, 2017), I coded not simply if Indigenous people were framed as violent, but who was framed as more violent in the clashes.

For unlawfulness, I coded the content of each article for which side, if any, was framed as “unlawful.” Indigenous people were legal subjects without rights in the early United States—they were denied rights, or sometimes granted secondary rights, but still faced oppressive law on terms set by settlers (Harris, 1995, p. 278; Frymer, 2017, p. 39-41). According to the American colonists, Indigenous people did not have property rights, and white settlers' property rights

allowed them to take Indigenous lands and use the law to legitimize this (Harris, 1995; Frymer, 2017). This history is relevant when powerful actors and even the law say that Indigenous people are trespassing on their own tribe’s ancestral lands. The law and legal discourse are often used to reinforce power hierarchies (Harris, 1995), though they can also be used to make subversive rights claims (McCann, 1994; Polletta, 2000). Furthermore, legal language confers legitimacy on claims (Harris, 1995). To better understand how these dynamics play out in the news media, I looked at how the news media used legal language—particularly constructions of “unlawfulness” in their framing of the Dakota Access Pipeline clashes. Based on the history of Indigenous people and the law, I expected them to be framed as unlawful initially, but for this to decrease and for the state to be framed as more unlawful as time went on and more Indigenous people were listened to.

Codebook

	Category	Explanation	Coding
Source coding			
1	Cite pro source	What type of pro-pipeline sources, if any, does this article cite? With quotes or with statements such as “according to...” Government officials are considered pro-pipeline in they have spoken out and expressed views in favor of the pipeline.	Law enforcement: 1 Private security: 2 Govt official/dept: (pro): 3 Pipeline company: 4 Other: 5
2	# of graphs citing a pro source	To see balance of coverage of pro ideas & anti-ideas.	count
3	Cite anti pipeline source	What type of anti-pipeline sources, if any, does this article cite? Also will enable a count of Indigenous sources vs. non-Indigenous sources cited overall. Water Protectors are determined to be Indigenous if their tribal affiliation is mentioned in the article or if a 1-minute	SRS Tribe (unnamed source): 1 Tribe (named source): 2 Tribal (or WP) Legal proceeding: 3 Lawyer (non-Indigenous representing tribe or WP in case): 4

		search on Google returned results that suggested they had self-identified tribal affiliation. Common sources of positive identification were other news stories and social media biographies. Water protectors who did not have a tribal affiliation listed and for whom a quick search did not return any tribal affiliation, or who were referenced as not being Indigenous, were categorized as non-Indigenous or unclear.	Water Protector- Indigenous (or Indigenous org affiliated with activism like IEN): 5 Water Protector- unclear or non-Indigenous: 6 “protestors” or “opponents” general: 7 Indigenous source who’s not a #NoDAPL water protector: 8 (Indigenous public figures not present, scholars not present, tribal members not IDed as water protector) Environmental org/activist 9 Govt official/dept/politician (anti/ally): 10 Other non-Indigenous: 11 Other tribe/tribal assoc: 12 Tweet from Indigenous activist: 13 Lawyer (giving advice, coordinating but not repping in a case): 14
4	# of graphs citing an anti source	To see balance of coverage of pro ideas & anti-ideas.	Count
	Cite neutral source	Government officials who seem to be avoiding taking a side, possibly just give statements when necessary in official capacity in a fairly neutral position	1 Judge 2 Other newspaper 3 Govt/official neutral/undeclared 4 Other
	# of graphs citing an anti source		Count
Content coding			
5	Movement goals	What does the article say movement’s goals are? – If say they are protesting the pipeline or to stop the pipeline, code as 1. Only a 0 if don’t say why they’re protesting or goals (just saying “Dakota access pipeline protesters” and nothing else, or just “protesters” is a 0. Has no perspective or words from protesters about what they’re doing and why).	Don’t mention goal/no information about why/to what end they’re protesting: 0 Stop this pipeline: 1 Something in middle: 2 End fossil fuel reliance or more: 3
6	Mention history of land, treaties	Do they mention (and explain) history of land where the pipeline would run &/or treaties related to it? (If reporter only briefly mentions it as ancestral land/sacred land do not include	No: 0 Yes: 1

		because not an instance of reporter reporting history & making clear what occurred with land).	
9	More violent/blame	Which side do they suggest is (more) violent or the aggressor? Might be that they suggest one side started clash or that one side was disproportionately violent.	No discussion of violence: 0 Anti-pipeline: 1 Neutral/about equal: 2 Pro-pipeline: 3
10	Unlawful	Is either side framed as unlawful somewhere in the article?	No one framed as unlawful: 0 Anti-pipeline: 1 About equal: 2 Pro-pipeline: 3
Type of newspaper coding			
11	Type: national, regional/local, tribal		National: 1 Regional/local: 2 Strong Partisan: 3 Tribal: 4 Other: 5
12	If not national, region		Plains: 1 Midwest: 2 NW or West: 3 SW: 4 SE: 5 NE: 6 Other: 7
13	Type: Wire or paper	Some articles are from sources like a CNN or AP newswire. Since these are picked up by many papers, it may be useful to code for this.	Wire: 1 Paper: 0
14	Indigenous journalist	Is the author of an article an Indigenous journalist? Determined by quick google search of their biography on the news outlet's website and their social media biographies.	No: 0 Yes: 1

Appendix B: Notes on language

I use Indigenous to refer to people who are citizens of the hundreds of distinct tribal nations in the land that we now call the United States, as well as from other parts of the world. When discussing an individual with a known tribal affiliation, I identify them by their tribe. Also, when referencing another scholar's work I generally use their terminology.

News media is used to refer to institution made up of newspapers, online news publications, television news publications, and other news formats. In using "news media" I intend to acknowledge that there are multiple roles and many individuals who make up the news media. While journalists reporting stories occupy one important role within the news media, there are also editors, owners of major media corporations and others who influence news coverage. I use mass media and news media interchangeably in the context of this article as both apply here.

Solidarity with racialized protest movements: Testing factors impacting support for

Black protestors after reports of protest violence

Dennis Young, Julia Wejchert, and Brian Leung

Abstract: During the George Floyd protests, despite instances of reported violence, the majority of the American public continued to stand in support of the movement. This offers a theoretical puzzle as the literature on protests movements suggests that violent protest is very likely to drive down public support for a social movement. To this end, we develop a factorial survey experiment to test the conditions under which the public may remain in support of a movement like Black Lives Matter (BLM), even after the public receives reports of violence concerning particular protest incidents. We test three main variables, the targets of the violence, the motivation for the protest, and whether the protesters had a clear organizational structure. We theorize that each of these factors could contribute to the perceived legitimacy of the movement, offsetting the potential negative public opinion effects of protest violence. We find that respondents were most likely to remain in support of protestors when the reported protest violence was directed against the police or counter protestors, rather than private property. We also find that the protests having a clear motivation impacted the degree of support, although the distinction between protests against specific instances of violence and systemic issues was not impactful.

Introduction

Following the death of George Floyd, protests erupted across the United States. The simmering anger of communities plagued by police violence was catalyzed into one of the largest protest movements the country has ever seen. However, when instances of violence occurred in several locations, these instances provoked headlines and media attention depicting them as riots and looting. These fears were stoked by prominent political figures, including then President Trump who referred to protestors as “thugs” and said, “when the looting starts, the shooting starts” (Haberman and Burns 2020). The depictions of this type of protest, particularly when the protests are primarily made up of Black participants, often tend to draw disproportionate coverage as riots, or violent (Myers et. al 2004). Yet, a Pew Research Center poll found that 67% of the American public, including an unusual 60% of white adults, remained in support of the protests in June of 2020 and 38% said they strongly supported the movement's efforts (Parker et. al 2020). While these levels of support declined as the protests waned (see Thomas and Horowitz 2020), the majority of Americans still remained in support of the movement. This poses a worthwhile question for scholars, because, while a substantive section of literature on protests suggests that protests portrayed as violent are likely to generate public disapproval (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Lupu and Wallace 2019), this particular set of protests continued to receive high levels of support amongst the American populace, even after highly visible instances of protest violence. Thus, this study investigates the conditions under which the public will remain in support of racialized protest movements, despite reported instances of violence from protestors.

The study of protest movements often takes for granted that peaceful protest is more likely to generate positive outcomes for protestors. However, this does not mean that violent protest will inherently drive all supporters away from the movement. Other studies have

examined the relationship between racialized protest and public opinion, such as the role of the George Floyd protests in affecting attitudes about police violence (Reny and Newman 2021) and how the use of different frames by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement affects movement support amongst the public (Bonilla and Tabernathy 2020). However, scholars have not yet investigated why the public may remain in support of a movement that has been portrayed as violent in the media. This is particularly important for the study of racialized movements. Black movements are disproportionately likely to be portrayed as violent or to be met with police violence, and being met with police violence is a major predictor of protestors employing violent tactics in response (Davenport et. al 2011). By understanding how the public reacts to and interprets reports of violence within a particular protest conflict, this study helps develop a more nuanced understanding of protest dynamics, and the relationship between protests and possibilities of social change.

To examine these dynamics, we developed a survey experiment designed to test several key factors that we theorize may be key to understanding the dynamics of solidarity. We conducted a factorial survey experiment, in which participants were asked about the likelihood that they would remain in support of a pro-Black protest that was reported as resulting in a particular type of violent activity, and tested three main factors that we hypothesized could affect movement support. The main variables that we examine are the targets of protest violence, the motivation for the protest, and the degree to which the protestors appear to be organized. While not an exhaustive list of potential factors, we have theoretical motivation to suggest that these three are particularly relevant. The targets of protest violence often affect public opinion, where if the public sees a person or piece of property as unjustly targeted, this will create distrust from the public. The protest motivation matters in that if a protest's motivation is seen as illegitimate, it is less likely to garner support. If violence occurs, this could further reduce support. By

contrast, if the protest is perceived as worthwhile or legitimate then it could offset some of the effects of violence. Finally, the degree of protest organization may play a role in whether the public sees an instance of violence as tactical, or simply random violence, which could drive movement support.

To this end, we suggest that the likelihood of the public supporting the protestors despite reports of violence is conditional on the particular targets of the protest and the motivation behind the protest. In the context of a BLM protest, this effect is likely differentiated by race, with different racial groups having variation in degrees of support and Black respondents being most likely to remain in support of the movement. We argue that the public is more likely to remain in support of movement activity if, when instances of protest violence are reported, the public perceives that the use of violence was relatively legitimate, or not inherently opposed to the aims and objectives of the movement. Our survey finds that the targets of protest violence had the largest effect on whether respondents would remain in support of the protestors. Surprisingly, we find that when protestors were reported to use violence against private property, respondents were least likely to remain in support of the movement. By contrast, respondents were most likely to continue to support the protest if violence was used against the police or counter protestors. The motivation for the protest was less relevant in terms of overall assessment, but had some impact in terms of how respondents might assess the overall morality of the protest movement. We also find that for Black respondents, the perception that the protest is well organized may also help offset some impacts of violent tactics. It is important to note that our argument focuses on moving the needle of public opinion, rather than altering the scope of how the public behaves. The mechanisms we examine are most effective for altering public opinion of the protest, but not necessarily for prompting further action in support of the protestors.

To illustrate our theory, we begin by examining relevant literature, social movement theory, violence in protest dynamics, and conditions of solidarity. We highlight key dynamics in

the literature around non-violence that helped us formulate our factors that might contribute to remaining in solidarity. We elaborate our hypotheses on how these factors will play out in the context of movements like BLM, and develop a more generalizable theory. We then present and contextualize the results. We conclude by briefly reflecting on our contribution and directions for future research.

Social Movement Dynamics and the Public Response

The idea that engaging in violent tactics will reduce popular support for movements in a liberal democratic society where the voting public has influence on politics is central to the modern study of social movements (Pivens and Cloward 1977, Munoz and Anzaldúa 2019, Wasow 2017, Chenoweth et. al 2011). This stems from the theoretical understanding that in order to make tangible progress, social movements need to win over a broad base of popular support, and in turn, create pressure on key decision makers to achieve their electoral, legislative, or political aims (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Cunningham et. al 2017, Wasow 2020). Public opinion matters to movements because generating support is vital to putting additional pressure on legislators or other key actors to accomplish movement goals (Munoz and Anduzia 2019). However, the BLM protests of 2020 provide an important counterpoint. Many protests in cities such as Minneapolis and Seattle had instances of reported protest violence, yet the movement still experienced high degrees of support among the general American public. This leads to the theoretical question at the heart of our empirical study, which is, what causes protestors to continue to support a movement, when reports of violence emerge at that movement's events?

The scope and persistence of activity by BLM activists has sparked a wave of scholarship concerning the possibilities and difficulties this movement, and other racialized movements, face in affecting change. To this end, scholars have considered the various movement frames causing individuals to provide greater support for the movement (Bonilla and Tillery 2020), the effects of the 2020 protests on public opinion (Reny and Newman 2021), and the impact of BLM on other

racial groups (Arora and Stout 2021, Eidgahy and Perez 2023). While this research has examined various facets of public opinion on BLM, less work has been done to analyze what causes individuals to continue to support racialized movements, particularly given the complex constituencies that movements like BLM rally to their cause.

How a movement frames its cause also shapes public opinion responses; this is particularly true in examining the work of BLM. For example, a survey experiment designed by Drakulich and Denver (2022), found that BLM using broader framings about racial injustice led to a decrease in support for BLM among some groups. Relatedly, Bonilla and Tillery (2020) found that movement frames which specifically referenced sub-identity groups within the movement, such as queer members of BLM, led to decreases in support from larger groups including Black men. The process of presenting a movement's grievances to the public is already challenging and by utilizing less normalized frames, such as queerness or systemic racial injustice, activists may lose engagement from certain members of the public. If reported protest violence is already likely to weaken support for a movement, movements whose causes are less digestible to the general public may suffer further from these reports. By contrast, easily digestible frames with clear grievances may prompt the general public to remain in support of the movement, regardless of tactics.

The effects of BLM protests are also likely to be stratified by those who fundamentally tend to agree with the movement and those who do not. Reny and Newman (2021) leverage a regression discontinuity design in the wake of the George Floyd protests and show that while there was a strong shift in public opinion on BLM protests, the vast majority of the attitudinal movement came from those who were Democratic leaning or had already expressed support for the movement. There was no meaningful change among those who leaned conservative or who already had a higher degree of prejudice against Black movement actors. Thus, while social movement actions have a strong effect on public opinion, the possibility of winning over skeptics remains challenging, and may require the development of different types of movement frames.

It is also important to highlight that many movement actors within racialized movements do not align with the consensus of the “general public” and their preferences often defy expectations rooted in assumptions about the average white person. Black movements often display a unique sense of linked fate; members of this racial group recognize that their individual fate is tied up with the fate of their racial group as a whole (Dawson 1994). This provides a strong possible mechanism to explain why certain movement actors might express solidarity, even if they privately disapprove of some violent action. As Taylor (2016) suggests, BLM is intended to provide a way to elevate the voices and experiences of Black activists. BLM activities are not always as concerned with winning over the general public and instead aim to energize their core movement supporters. This also links up well with Bloom (2020) who suggests that protests challenging particular historical circumstances may spark increased mobilization. In the case of the Civil Rights movement, police repression of riots may have temporarily quelled the violence but in the long run led to greater Civil Rights mobilization. If movement actors are strongly in support of the movement, they will continue to turn out in spite of violent tactics. These organizers do not want to condemn violence publicly, even if they denounce it privately, which can keep movement support high, leading to remobilization after incidents of violence or repression. Commitment to a movement could lead to movement actors acting differently in public than their private moral evaluations. Taken together, this set of points illustrates that scholars should expect for there to be strong support for Black protest movements amongst Black activists, even if there have been violent tactics associated with the movement. The strength of the demands for change for Black people may often outweigh these concerns. However, for the white public, and other non-Black racial groups, there is considerably less incentive to support a potentially divisive movement.

Protest Violence and Movement Dynamics: Targets, Motivations, and Organization

In studies examining protest activity, it has been widely agreed that movements are likely

to avoid violent tactics because violence is likely to result in a decrease in public support.

Historically, violence has been conceptualized as one tactic amidst many utilized by social movements to create pressure and induce change. However, many social movements will avoid violence because it is seen as a costly tactic (Munoz and Anduzia 2019). There are several reasons why violence tends to generate negative outcomes for movements. Firstly, when the public sees a movement engaging in violent tactics, it will tend to cause many members of the public to see the protests as dangerous or opposed to the public interest, leading to decreased support for the movement (Munoz and Anduzia 2019). Violent incidents during protests can also prompt calls for greater social order, increasing the likelihood of state repression (Wasow 2020). Public support is often a crucial mobilizing resource for social movements, and part of the success of a social movement relies on persuading relevant actors that the will of the public is on their side (Wasow 2020). The media is also more likely to cover violent protest events (Myers and Caniglia 2004), and their coverage tends to be negative. The movement's goals of winning public support could easily be derailed by a single violent protest incident.

How a movement is covered also makes a tremendous difference in terms of how the public at large will respond to the movement's demands. The extent to which a movement is visible plays an important role in how likely the movement is to generate positive outcomes. For example, Arora et. al (2019) show that greater coverage of a movement tends to lead to different responses among state legislatures, where increased positive coverage can lead to state legislators being more likely to bring forward legislation supporting the movement's goals. However, the extent to which a movement is supported by the public can often depend on whether or not the movement is seen as legitimate. Generally, movements that are perceived to be violent have a much lower degree of perceived legitimacy and thus movement opponents may present movements as violent or potentially violent (Edwards and Arnon 2021). Furthermore, the public is also more likely to perceive actions as violent if they are committed by a racial out group (Huff

and Kertzer 2016). Therefore, protests conducted primarily by racial out-groups, such as BLM, are often operating under significant duress and the costs of violence are relatively high, even compared to other protest movements. It is worthwhile then to consider the separate factors that would keep protestors with a movement where reports of violence have occurred.

For BLM in particular, the role of police repression is likely to play an outsized role in how individuals assess the legitimacy of a movement, and make decisions about continued movement support in the face of reported violence. Repression is generally triggered when state actors feel threatened by the work of a movement (Tilly 1978, Earl et al. 2003). More specifically, Black movement actors are often the disproportionate targets of police violence, in part because of the long history in the United States of using police violence to repress the Black population. In their article, “Protesting While Black” Davenport et. al (2011) find that while there is some variation across time, Black led movements are much more likely to be the subjects of police repression than non-Black led movements. Their findings show that if the protest was led primarily by Black activists, there is a much higher likelihood of there being a police presence, and in turn that the police are much more likely to make arrests or use violence against protestors. Furthermore, the literature also suggests that movements that particularly target the police or the state are much more likely to be met with police repression (Reynolds-Stenson 2018). When these active, highly mobilized, and racialized movement actors have taken to the streets, there tends to be a high degree of police and state violence in response (Earl et. al 2003, Earl 2011). This more general dynamic for racial movements, combined with the BLM connection to the problem of police violence has led to a high degree of concern among the public about interactions between the police and BLM activists. Public opinion tends to be highly divided based on whether or not members of the public believe that police repression is justified (Ilchi and Frank 2021), which in turn is often stratified by race and party affiliation.

Furthermore, as Martin et al. (2009) suggest, targets of violence very much matter in

terms of public opinion. While Martin et al. (2009) are specifically developing a theory in relation to why people are more likely to use violence, their insights about the distinction between persons and property are very insightful in terms of developing a better understanding of movement solidarity. Individuals generally tend to view violence against property as less egregious than violence against persons (Martin et al 2009). Furthermore, there are also distinctions between state and non-state targets in terms of public opinion. Because the state has a monopoly on violence, actions taken against the state (if deemed to be for a legitimate reason) are much less likely to have a negative effect on public opinion than those against private property. Private property is seen as belonging to innocent bystanders, and therefore damaging it has negative consequences.

Within the literature on the use of violent tactics, there are two major theories concerning how protest violence emerges. One set of theories hinges on the idea of spontaneity, or the idea that certain protest dynamics develop on the fly in response to the circumstances on the ground (Snow and Moss 2014). Others suggest that protest violence occurs as a result of structural calculations. One of these calculations may include the degree of threat the social movement faces from the state; in circumstances where the social movement is faced with extreme desperation owing to poverty or other extraordinary circumstances, movements may be more likely to escalate individual protests into violence (Gustafson 2020). Another factor is the protestors assessment of relative risk, where protestors may be more likely to escalate into violence when their assessment of risk is relatively low, perhaps because there is no police presence or because they are backed by many other protestors (Ives and Lewis 2020).

However, the structure of the social movement and its degree of control over the incident may also shape likelihood of violence where relatively organized movements are better able to maintain control in their protest events (Ives and Lewis 2020, Munoz and Anzaldúa 2019). Furthermore, a movement's portrayal as violent can be offset if the protestors are seen as

organized or working towards a clear, powerful political goal. Ives and Lewis (2020) found that when movements were seen as being in control of the protests, by having a tight organizational structure, even if violent tactics were used the movement was more likely to be perceived positively. This provides an interesting source of tension with one of BLM's goals of being a "leaderful" movement. While from a theoretical perspective this idea represents an important step in terms of developing a grassroots movement that is not held together by a single figure, for the public at large, a leader or set of leaders can be seen as evidence that a movement is aimed at a constructive goal, even if there are instances of violence. Thus, it is important to study the extent to which the perception of a movement as organized, or disorganized, impacts public support when violence is utilized.

Theory and Hypotheses

From the review of the literature above, we have developed a series of hypotheses regarding the conditions under which members of the general public may be more, or less, likely to support racialized social movement activity like that of BLM. It is important to clarify that we are not investigating the conditions under which these social movements turn to violent tactics. While this is a theoretically and empirically rich avenue of discussion, the results of our survey are concerned with addressing when and how reports of violent tactics impact public support for social movements. Thus, our independent variables are manipulated within the vignette that each respondent reads, and our dependent variable is the degree to which respondents are likely to remain in support of the protestors. We also suggest that each of our main independent variables may generate very different effects when we subset by racial group or party affiliation. As the literature review above showed, strong movement supporters like Black activists will be very likely to interpret the actions of protest violence differently than an average white voter.

The first hypothesis stems from a theoretical impulse about how people evaluate the use

of violence more generally. Other research in the literature (see Edwards and Arnon 2021, Bloom 2020, Bloom and Martin 2016) has suggested that the escalation of violence from

property damage to interpersonal violence is likely to be looked upon highly unfavorably by the general public. For racialized social movements like BLM, this may be heightened as the general public is already somewhat predisposed to interpret these events as violent. Racialized scripts around Black protestors often portray Black actors as more likely to engage in the use of violence (Earl et. al 2003). This stems from a long history of racial stereotyping depicting Black folks as backwards, irrational, and thus predisposed to utilize violence unnecessarily (Bonilla Silva 2018). In the context of protest violence then, we suggest that the general public may see reports of interpersonal violence as confirming their suspicions about Black protestors, and therefore interpret the events as particularly morally reprehensible. By contrast, while reports of violence against property are not necessarily looked upon favorably, people are still likely to treat violence along a sliding scale and highlight interpersonal violence as one of the most negative, dangerous, or unlawful (Metcalf and Pickett 2021). Given that BLM operates under a strong degree of racial animus from the general public, we hypothesize that tactics perceived to be “more violent” would be likely to engender more strongly negative reactions. However, “less violent” tactics may be easier for most members of the public to overlook. Similarly, we also develop a distinction between targeting state vs. private property. Movement actors who are proposing the defunding of the police, or the withdrawal of an oppressive government may be more likely to condone violence against the appropriate targets. We theorize that responses may be influenced by protestors' perceptions of the legitimacy of the violence, and that when violence is perceived as being directed against more appropriate targets, the degree of support will be higher. Thus, we suggest that respondents will be more supportive of the protests when actions are taken against property, whether state or public, rather than taken against individuals.

However, it is possible that because of public perception of BLM as being primarily

oriented towards addressing police violence, this will color public perception of reported violence against the police. This in turn could lead to violence against the police having a less detrimental effect on public opinion. In the context of the United States however, it is also very possible that the average person will consider violence against private property to be a major issue. Private property has long been a central concern of the American government, and much of the existing government structure is devoted to the protection and acquisition of private property (Harris 1991). Thus, given that BLM protests have been depicted as being composed of “looters” or other people engaging in unnecessary violence, there may be a strong reaction against protestors if they destroy private property. However, given the extent to which violence conducted against persons is condemned in the literature on protest violence, we would still expect to see violence against people lead to the greatest reduction in support.

H1: Respondents will be more likely to remain in support of the movement’s goals after a reported instance of protest violence if the reported use of violent tactics is against property, rather than an individual or group of people.

Our second hypothesis concerns the protestors motivation for engaging in protest. We suggest that the public at large will generally be willing to accord more leeway to protestors if they are seen as responding to a specific instance of police violence. This stems from a theoretical intuition about the extent to which protests are seen as legitimate. Generally, the literature on protest suggests that groups who are seen as experiencing acute discrimination, and in particular violent discrimination, are more likely to be looked on favorably by the general public (Simmons 2021). BLM has been portrayed primarily as an organization working against police brutality, however, many activists also stress that the movement aims at more systemic overhaul for issues that impact the life chances of Black people in America. Police violence and systemic racism could both represent genuine grievances that supporters of the movement would perceive as legitimate goals. Our experimental design tests the extent to which these goals may be seen as overriding reports of violence, and leading the public to remain in solidarity with the

movement as a whole. To that end, our research design incorporates a protest motivation cue that looks at police repression, voter suppression, or provides no cue for the protest motivation. We use a cue about voter suppression laws because it represents a type of systemic discrimination and serves as a useful proxy for how the public will assess protests motivated by addressing systemic racism. Our survey was completed while Georgia was considering a number of voter suppression laws, and thus should have been pertinent to many members of the general public. Our hypothesis is that despite the overarching goals of BLM and other racialized protest movements, police violence is such a clear and obvious threat that members of the general public are more likely to take it seriously, and therefore boost assessments of the movement, even after reported protest violence. Thus, while many Black protests may be engaging with the question of systemic racism, it is more likely that the public will better understand and respect specific protest grievances, such as speaking out against police violence. We therefore suggest that when the protest is responding to a specific instance of violence, rather than a more generalized form of oppression, the public will be more likely to be tolerant of reported protest violence. However, it is also likely that the cue about voter suppression as a proxy for systemic discrimination will still be higher than not receiving any cue about protest motivation, because having a movement objective should still help engender support for protestors.

H2: Respondents will be more likely to remain in support of the movement's goals after a reported instance of protest violence if the protest occurred in response to a particular instance of police violence rather than a systemic issue.

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Our third hypothesis addresses social movement literature on protest organization. Ives and Lewis (2020) suggest that violence may be more likely to occur when the organizations conducting protest have looser organizational structures. A more discernible organizational structure is more likely to lead to groups being better able to constrain potentially violent

protests. We extrapolate that if organizations are perceived as being well organized and rationally pursuing their ends, public perception will likely be more positive even if a protest is reported to become violent. Public opinion tends to be more negative when organizations are seen as deviating from the political mainstream, or are engaged in overly violent tactics. However, this could potentially be mitigated if the organization is perceived as having a clearly defined set of goals and leaders. Indeed, Tillery (2019) found that many members of the public believe that BLM would be more effective with a more centralized leadership structure. We test this theory to assess the degree to which organizational structure may serve as a potential way to offset the effects of violent protest actions on public opinion.

H3: Respondents will be more likely to remain in support of the movement's goals after a reported instance of protest violence if the protestors are seen as operating with discernable local leadership.

Methods

We conducted a factorial survey experiment in the United States from October – December 2021. The survey was distributed by Lucid, an online survey sampling tool that provides nationally-representative samples, and hosted on the online survey platform Qualtrics. Using a between-subjects design, respondents were presented with a vignette that indicated there had been recent protests about racial inequality in the United States near their neighborhood, and then asked about the likelihood that they would remain in support of the protesters. Respondents were told in the survey instructions that the survey was about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Our factorial experiment is designed around 3 factors – target of violence, motivation of the protesters, and organizational structure of the protest. Each factor consists of different possible levels. Each vignette that a respondent receives is a combination of the randomly drawn levels from each of the three factors. In other words, our experiment is one of 4x3x2 factorial design, where there are 24 possible vignettes in total.

Targets of protesters' violence

There were four possible targets of protesters' violence in the vignette. Below are the four possible statements:

During the current protest, some participants <i>violently clashed with the riot police, resulting in bodily harm of certain officers.</i>
During the current protest, some participants <i>violently clashed with the counter-protesters, resulting in bodily harm of certain counter-protesters.</i>
During the current protest, some participants <i>broke down the door and entered city hall, resulting in state property damage.</i>
During the current protest, some participants <i>broke down the door and entered a private store, resulting in private property damage.</i>

Motivation for the protest

The vignettes included one of three different possibilities in terms of motivations for the protest, which are included below:

[No information about the motivation for the protest]
<i>Last week, it was reported that the riot police exercised disproportionate violence on the participants in a similar protest, resulting in several protesters being seriously injured and hospitalized.</i>
<i>Last week, your state passed a law that limits people of color's ability to exercise their right to vote in elections. This law will most impact black voters and means that approximately 22% of black voters who would previously have been able to vote will no longer be able to.</i>

Protest's organizational structure

The vignettes included one of two possible statements about the protest's organizational structure, which are included below:

The current protest is <i>mobilized by citizens with no identifiable organizations or leaders.</i>
--

The current protest is <i>mobilized by several local organizations and political activists.</i>

Respondents were randomly assigned vignettes with different characteristics; all possibilities for each field that varied in the vignette were equally likely to be assigned. After reading the vignette, respondents were asked to fill out the remainder of the survey, including six questions measuring their level of support for the protesters.

Overall, 3,216 people completed the survey. The experimental groups were balanced across demographic characteristics, suggesting randomization was successful (see Table A2 in the Supplementary Materials for a description of the sample and the experimental groups). To assess the impact of each different option in the vignette on the support for the protesters we estimated an OLS regression model for each outcome measure. Feature selection for the models used was conducted using LASSO regression for increased precision.

Results and Discussion

Our findings provide an interesting contrast with what we initially anticipated we would find, given extant theories about protest violence. When respondents were asked to assess the degree to which they would continue to view protestors' actions as morally acceptable after being exposed to the treatment, we find that respondents were most likely to remain in support of the protesters when the violence was directed against the police. Respondents were least likely to remain in support of the protestors when the violence was directed against private property. On a scale of 1-5, we found that switching from a vignette saying the target of violence was private property to saying the target was police *increased* support for protesters by an effect size of 0.2 (cohen's $d = 0.15$). Switching from violence against private property to violence against counter protesters increased support by an effect size of 0.16, also on a 5-point scale (cohen's $d = 0.12$).

These effects, while marginal, are significant and can be understood as one factor among others that shapes the extent to which people continue to support protesters, even when violence is reported. Respondents' reactions to violence against public property were not significantly different from respondents' reactions to private property (see Figure 1). Overall, the average level of support for protesters in these scenarios was 2.25 on a 5 point scale, with support being lowest when violence was targeted at private property.

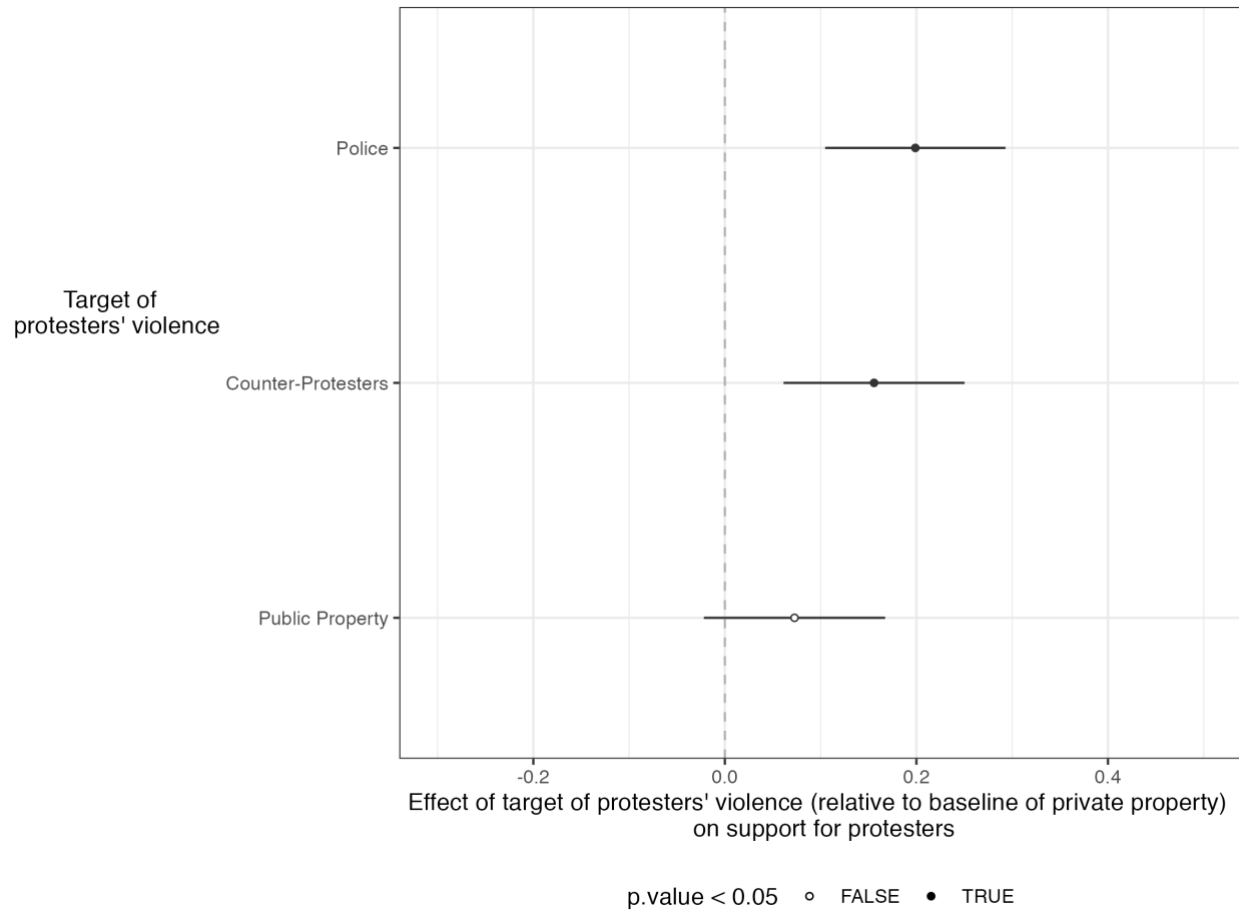


Figure 1

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This is particularly striking because we would have expected respondents to have the most extreme reaction to any type of violence that caused bodily harm to people, where instead we find that property damage is perceived as the least acceptable form of violence. From a theoretical standpoint, there are several possible reasons for this divergence. First is the increased likelihood of Black protest movements being associated with property damage. The work of Myers et. al

(2004) finds that despite the difficulties in using newspaper analyses to look at protest dynamics, cities with higher Black populations were more likely to receive coverage of protests or to interpret these protests as “riots”. Indeed, Myers et. al (2004) also found that civil disorder activities where Black protestors damaged property are often “culturally resonant” for the white population, reinforcing and confirming pre-existing stereotypes about Black folks. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) highlight that this movement is also among the most likely to have protest disparaged as “looting”, which as mentioned earlier in the paper has been substantiated by high level political discourse, including from President Trump. Thus, while bodily harm may be perceived negatively, damaging property may reinforce extant stereotypes about Black protestors, causing respondents in aggregate to have a more negative reaction.

This may also be complicated by how BLM has highlighted the impacts of police violence on the Black community. The hyper-visibility of police instances of violence against Black people may affect attitudes when it comes to use of force against the police. If the police are interpreted as the primary instigators of violence against protestors, particularly for BLM, then protestors could easily be seen as more legitimate if they are directly responding to police violence.

To substantiate our primary findings, we included 6 different outcome variables measuring support. For our primary measure of support, which asked whether respondents would view the protestors’ actions as moral, the largest effects came from experimental manipulation of who the targets of protest violence were. The manipulations of the type of repression motivating protests led to a significant effect, though a smaller effect than manipulations of targets. Finally, across all of our dependent variables, the manipulations of organizational structure were not significant for the full set of respondents. However, as we discuss below, organizational structure became significant when the data was subset along certain demographic lines.

Additionally, some of our measures for respondent support for protests were behavioral,

rather than simply attitudinal. Several of our response variables focused on whether or not the respondent would take action, including asking if respondents would join similar protests or would provide a public demonstration of solidarity with the protest movements. In contrast with response variables focused on attitudes, behavioral response questions found that it made little difference who the target of the protest violence was. While respondents may have changed their overall assessment of the movement's moral legitimacy based on targets, they were not likely to take additional action in support of movement activities. The fact that these response variables were not significant along this dimension serves as a further reminder that there is a notable step between supporting a movement and taking action in support of that movement. However, the experimental manipulation which listed voter repression as the motivation for the protests did provide some degree of change in the behavior related responses, as we show below.

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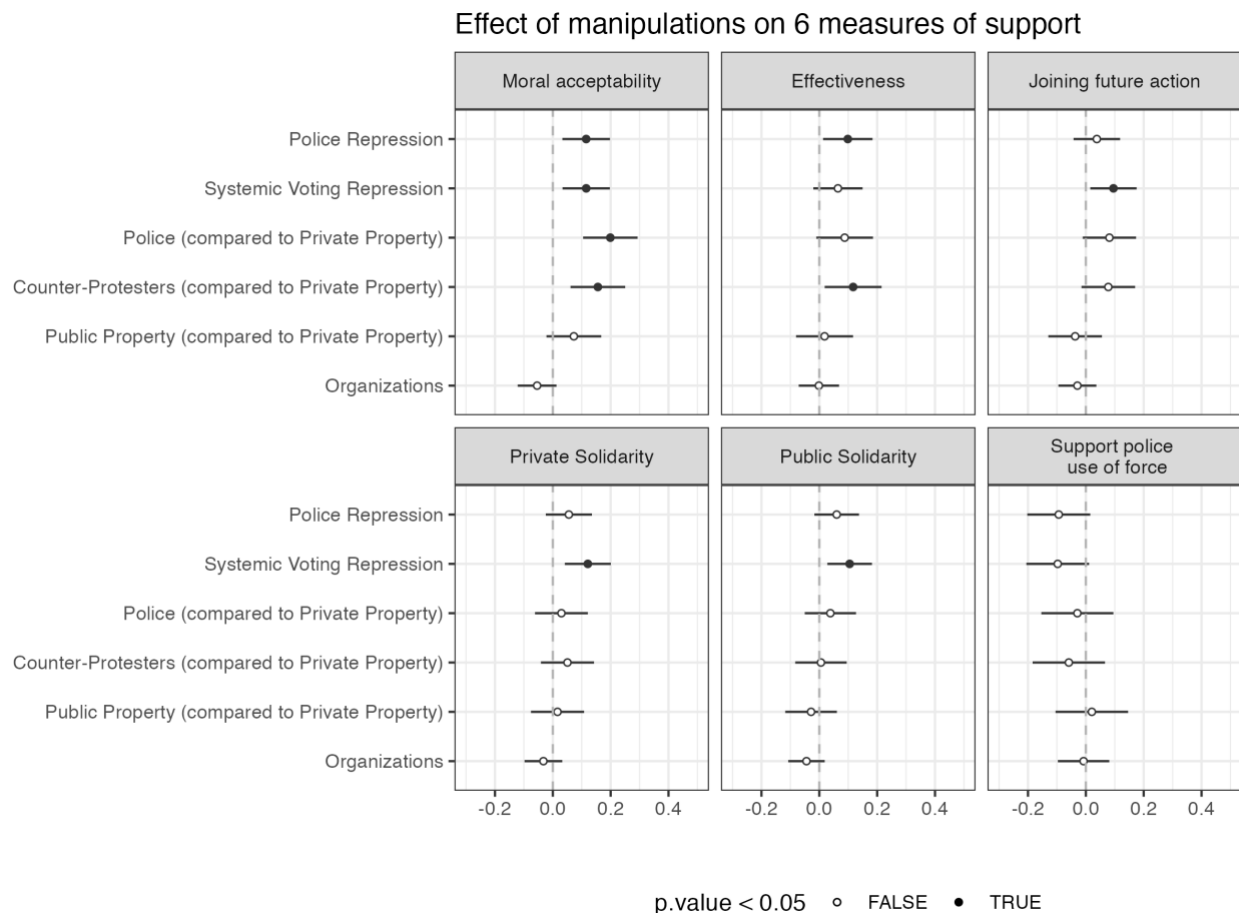


Figure 2

A closer look at the results on protest motivation also reveals an interesting trend in the data in terms of how participants assessed the morality of protests. Generally, respondents were more likely to find the protests morally acceptable when either the cue of police violence or voting repression were utilized as compared to the baseline of no distinct motivation for the protest. It is interesting to note that neither of these cues appears dramatically more impactful than the other, both cues generated an increase of 0.12 on the 5 point scale in terms of the likelihood of respondents finding the protest morally acceptable compared to the baseline (cohen's $d = 0.09$ for both). This further highlights the importance of perceptions of protest legitimacy; respondents are more likely to view protest violence as morally acceptable if there is a clear issue that protestors are responding to. While this is not necessarily an immensely novel finding, it does further underscore the importance of this idea in the empirical literature on public opinion and protest.

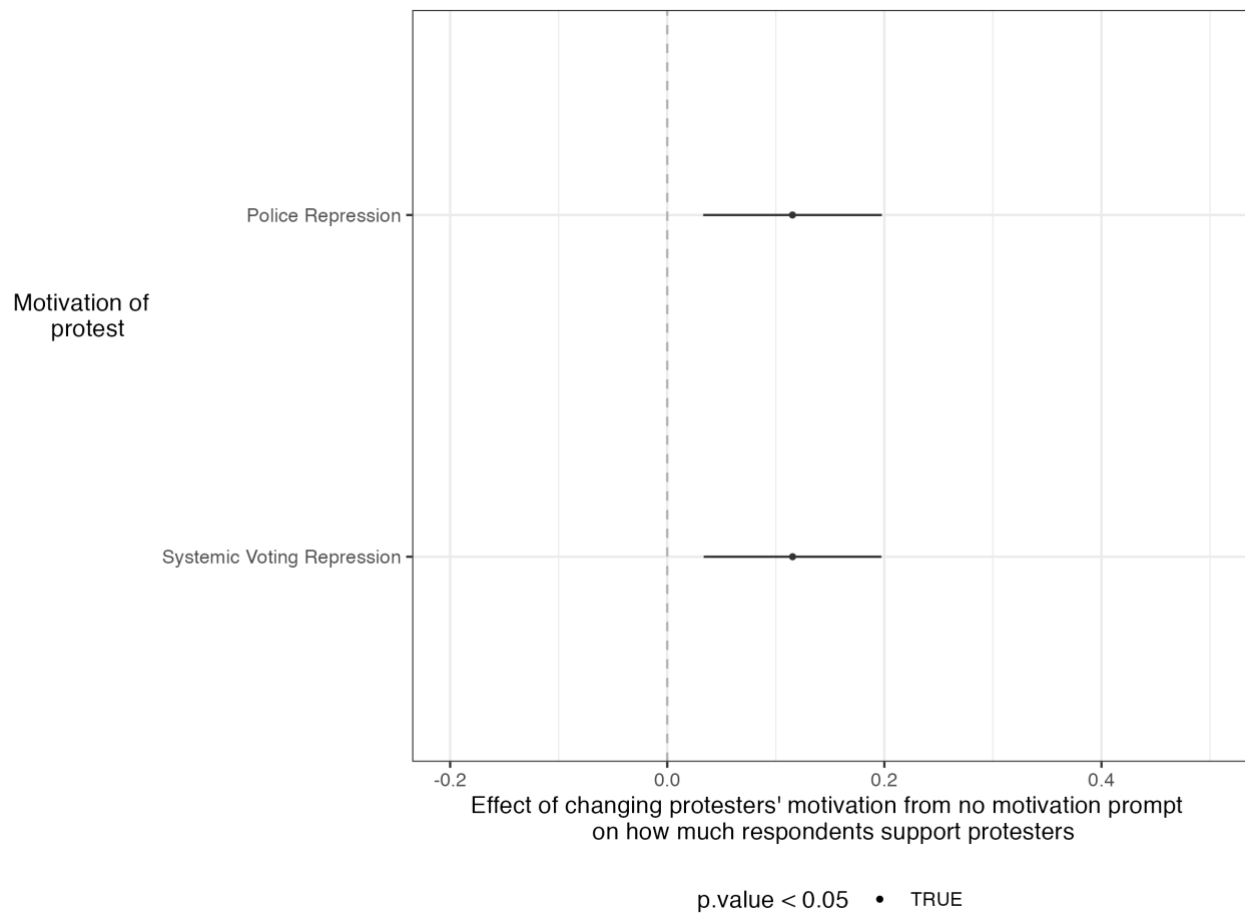


Figure 3

Attitudes towards protest are often differentiated along lines of racial identification (Bonilla and Tillery 2021, Reny and Newman 2020). Black respondents are generally shown to have much more positive responses to BLM than white respondents so it is worth examining the extent to which this also affects attitudes towards protest violence. Generally, as shown in Figure 2, organizational type did not have a major impact on public perception of protest violence. However, when we subset by race, organizations do matter. White respondents tended to view protest actions as more morally acceptable when there were no local organizers, although the effect size is small (Cohen's $d = 0.08$). By contrast, Black respondents were more likely to assess protest violence positively if they were presented with a vignette involving local organizers rather than a leaderless movement. Black respondents demonstrated an effect size of 0.26 on a 5 point scale (Cohen's $d = 0.18$), which represents a potential shift in attitudes based on this experimental manipulation. While the confidence intervals are relatively large, which may be due to the fact that the proportion of Black respondents in the survey is proportional to the American general public and therefore relatively small, the effect is significant at the 0.05% level of significance. This suggests that Black respondents may see the role of organizations differently than white respondents. Theoretically, the most likely explanation for this variance is the historic role of Black indigenous organizations in projects of civil disobedience. The influence of the Civil Rights Movement (Clayton 2018, Mazumder 2018) remains an extremely important image in how the public at large assesses a protest movement. It is likely that Black respondents, knowing the significance of organizational leadership to the Civil Rights Movement, may place increased emphasis on having a strong leadership structure to continue to support a movement. It is possible that this effect generates more support, even when protest movements turn to violent tactics.

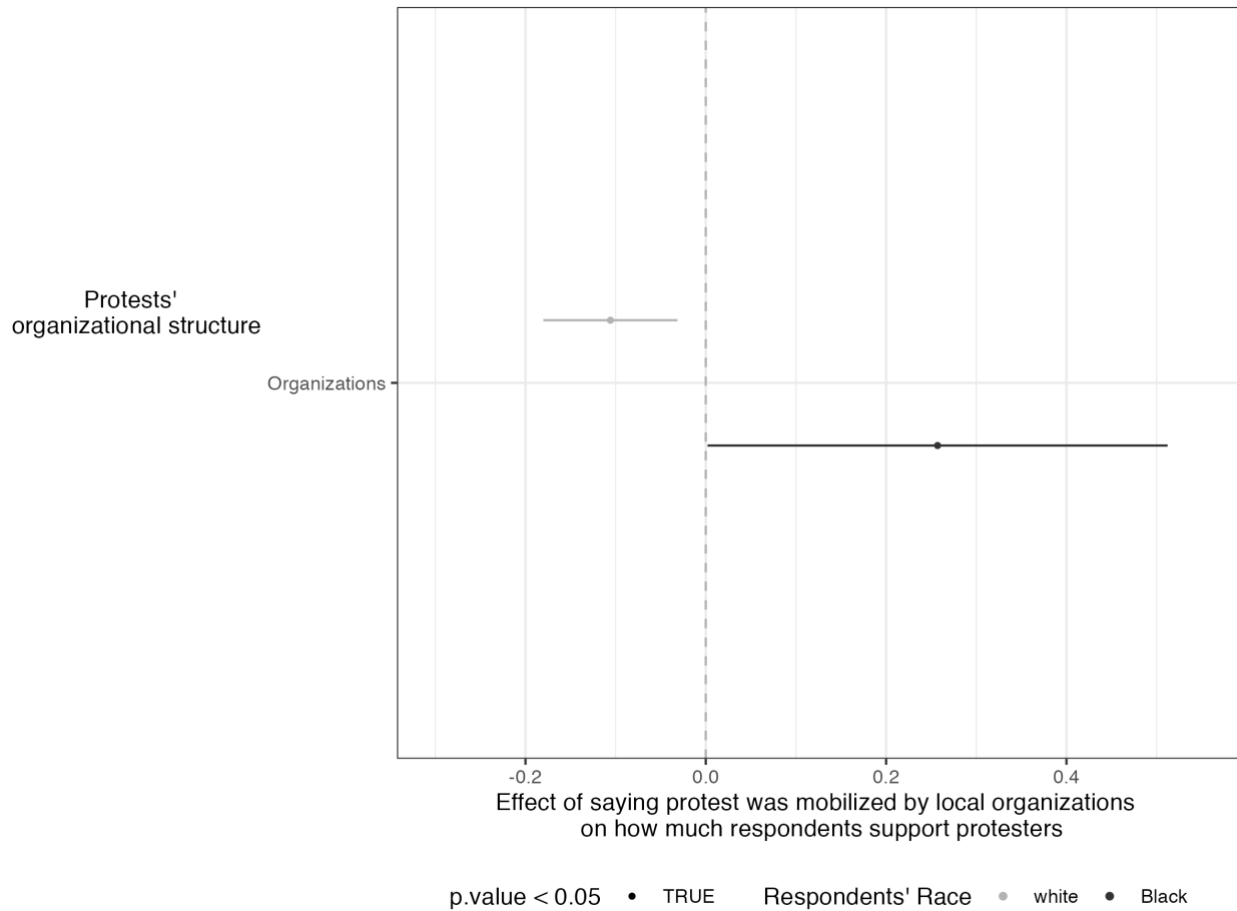


Figure 4

Previous studies have also suggested that responses to protests by BLM are interpreted fundamentally differently depending on the political affiliation of those assessing the movement. Tesler (2016) has found that racial attitudes play a vital role in partisan sorting, and BLM has been one of the most visible components of this affiliation. Drakulich and Denver (2020) also found that the degree to which individuals were likely to alter their opinion on the movement was linked to how strong their partisan affiliation is; the stronger the partisan affiliation, the less likely individuals were to change their opinion for both Democrats and Republicans. Furthermore, Reny and Newman (2020) found that in the wake of the George Floyd protests, changes in public opinion, in particular the likelihood of assessing the protests favorably, were more noticeable and durable amongst Democratic leaning voters. Consequently, we also subset this data by party affiliation to further investigate the extent to which these effects might be

stratified along these lines. The results remain consistent even when subsetting by party affiliation, although the baseline favorability scores amongst Republican leaning voters are lower. This suggests that the mechanism behind how respondents assess protest violence remains the same, even if the overall likelihood of supporting the protest is lower. This provides more convincing evidence that the mechanisms we have identified are reasonable predictors for public assessment of reported protest violence.

Conclusion

Our study has provided experimental evidence to suggest that perceptions of protest violence affect degrees of movement support. By examining BLM and conducting a factorial survey experiment, we have shown that the targets of violence are important to the public's assessment of a movement. We have also shown that while having a discernible motivation for the protests impacts the likelihood of respondents remaining in support of the movement, there was not a strong difference between whether the protest was responding to a specific instance of police violence or a broader example of systemic oppression. While some respondents were invested in whether or not the protests were organized by local organizers, across all respondents this variable had less impact on respondents' assessment of the protest.

While this survey provides useful data in terms of analyzing responses to protest violence, more work should still be conducted in this area. This survey examined a particular type of racialized movement, and while BLM is one of the largest racialized movements in modern history, it is still a particular case study. It is worth conducting further survey experiments to see if these results hold across other contexts, including different racial groups, other countries, and different protest motivations. The finding that violence against private property is the most frowned upon by the public is particularly interesting, but may be unique to the United States context. Thus, examining this idea outside of the United States may be a useful direction for future research.

Relatedly, there is an important question as to whether BLM use of intersectional framing or gender related framing may impact the degree to which the general public will remain in support of the movement after an instance of protest violence. While this survey did not specifically examine the effects of this framing, it is highly possible that for certain groups an intersectional framing may increase the likelihood of that group remaining in support, while for others it may serve as a deterrent. Future research should consider how and when gender or intersectional framings may impact how protest activity is interpreted.

Finally, this research suggests that responses to protests are very dependent on time, place, and portrayal. Given the ongoing patterns of global protest, and increasingly divisive coverage of these issues, further exploration of the factors driving protest support will likely be needed in order to fully understand how and when different forms of protest will or will not be effective.

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Supplementary Materials

Table of contents

1. Vignette examples
2. Covariate balance
3. LASSO variable selection procedure
4. Long regression and possible interaction effects

1. Vignette examples

Factors			
	Target of violence (4 levels)	Motivation (3 levels)	Organizational structure (2 levels)
Level 1	<i>Police</i> : During the current protest, some participants violently clashed with the riot police, resulting in bodily harm of certain officers	<i>[Blank]</i> : No information about the motivation for the protest]	<i>Leaderless</i> : The current protest is mobilized by citizens with no identifiable organizations or leaders.
Level 2	<i>Counter-protesters</i> : During the current protest, some participants violently clashed with the counter-protesters, resulting in bodily harm of certain counter-protesters.	<i>Police repression</i> : Last week, it was reported that the riot police exercised disproportionate violence on the participants in a similar protest, resulting in several protesters being seriously injured and hospitalized.	<i>Local organizers</i> : The current protest is mobilized by several local organizations and political activists.
Level 3	<i>Public property</i> : During the current protest, some participants broke down the door and entered city hall, resulting in state property damage.	<i>Voting repression</i> : Last week, your state passed a law that limits people of color's ability to exercise their right to vote in elections. This law will most impact black voters and means that approximately 22% of black voters who would previously have been able to vote will no longer be able to.	
Level 4	<i>Private property</i> : During the current protest, some participants broke down the door and entered a private store, resulting in private property damage		

Table A1: Full design of the factorial experiment

Our factorial experiment is designed around 3 *factors* – target of violence, motivation of the protesters, and organizational structure of the protest. Each factor consists of different possible *levels*. For violence's target, there are four levels: police, counter-protesters, public property, and private property. For motivation, there are three levels: no cue, police repression, and voting repression. For organizational structure, there are two levels: leaderlessness, and local organization. Each vignette that a respondent receives is a combination of the randomly drawn levels from each of the three factors. In other words, our experiment is one of 4x3x2 factorial design, where there are 24 possible vignettes in total. Table A1 illustrates the structure of the factorial design.

Below is an example of one version of the vignettes where, by random assignment, the target of violence is police, the motivation of protest is police repression, and the organizational structure is local organization; these randomly drawn levels for each factor are italicized:

Imagine the following situation: There is a protest going on near your neighborhood about racial inequality in the United States. The current protest is *mobilized by several local organizations and political activists*. Last week, *it was reported that the riot police exercised disproportionate violence on the participants in a similar protest, resulting in several protesters being seriously injured and hospitalized*.

During the current protest, *some participants violently clashed with the riot police, resulting in bodily harm of certain officers*.

Below is another randomly generated vignette where, by random assignment, the target of violence is private property, the motivation of protest is voting repression, and the organizational structure is leaderlessness:

Imagine the following situation: There is a protest going on near your neighborhood about racial inequality in the United States. The current protest is *mobilized by citizens with no identifiable organizations or leaders*. Last week, *your state passed a law that limits people of color's ability to exercise their right to vote in elections. This law will most impact black voters and means that approximately 22% of black voters who would previously have been able to vote will no longer be able to*.

During the current protest, *some participants broke down the door and entered a private store, resulting in private property damage*.

2. Covariate balance

Characteristic ¹	Treatment factor: Organizational types		Treatment factor: Types of Repression			Treatment factor: Types of harm			
	No organizations, N = 1,602 ²	w/ local organizations, N = 1,612 ²	No repression cue, N = 1,069 ²	Police violence, N = 1,066 ²	Voter suppression, N = 1,079 ²	Physical harm against counter- protesters, N = 806 ²	Physical harm against police, N = 807 ²	Property harm against city hall, N = 797 ²	Property harm against private stores, N = 804 ²
Age	4.61 (1.73)	4.54 (1.75)	4.60 (1.76)	4.57 (1.69)	4.56 (1.77)	4.60 (1.77)	4.58 (1.70)	4.57 (1.77)	4.55 (1.72)
Income group	6.0 (3.5)	5.9 (3.5)	5.9 (3.5)	5.9 (3.5)	6.0 (3.5)	6.0 (3.5)	6.0 (3.5)	6.0 (3.5)	5.8 (3.5)
Class perception	2.76 (1.05)	2.79 (1.05)	2.78 (1.04)	2.78 (1.07)	2.76 (1.04)	2.82 (1.05)	2.75 (1.05)	2.78 (1.06)	2.75 (1.05)
Educational level	3.63 (1.52)	3.68 (1.56)	3.64 (1.52)	3.66 (1.55)	3.66 (1.55)	3.68 (1.55)	3.68 (1.53)	3.65 (1.53)	3.60 (1.54)
Race = White	0.74 (0.44)	0.75 (0.43)	0.75 (0.43)	0.74 (0.44)	0.74 (0.44)	0.76 (0.43)	0.74 (0.44)	0.73 (0.44)	0.74 (0.44)
Race = Black	0.14 (0.34)	0.12 (0.33)	0.11 (0.31)	0.14 (0.35)	0.13 (0.34)	0.13 (0.33)	0.12 (0.33)	0.13 (0.33)	0.14 (0.35)
Party = Democrats	0.41 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.39 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	0.39 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)
Party = Republicans	0.27 (0.44)	0.28 (0.45)	0.29 (0.45)	0.26 (0.44)	0.27 (0.44)	0.27 (0.44)	0.28 (0.45)	0.29 (0.45)	0.26 (0.44)
Party = Independents	0.25 (0.43)	0.26 (0.44)	0.25 (0.43)	0.26 (0.44)	0.26 (0.44)	0.27 (0.45)	0.25 (0.43)	0.25 (0.44)	0.26 (0.44)

¹ Categorical variables are treated as ordinal ones with their means and standard deviations being reported. Age is originally coded as Under 18 (1); 18-24 (2); 25-34 (3); 35-44 (4); 45-54 (5); 55-64 (6); 65-74 (7); 75-84 (8); 85 or older (9); Income group as Less than \$10,000 (1); \$10,000-\$19,999 (2); \$20,000-\$29,999 (3); \$30,000-\$39,999 (4); \$40,000-\$49,999 (5); \$50,000-\$59,999 (6); \$60,000-\$69,999 (7); \$70,000-\$79,999 (8); \$80,000-\$89,999 (9); \$90,000-\$99,999 (10); \$100,000 - \$149,999 (11); More than \$150,000 (12); Class perception as Lower class (1); Working class (2); Lower middle class (3); Upper middle class (4); Upper class (5); Educational level as Did not graduate from high school (1); High school graduate (2); Currently enrolled in college (3); 2-year college degree / community college degree (4); 4-year college degree (5); Post-graduate degree (6)

² Mean (SD)

Table A2: Covariate balance across treatment factors

To check that if the randomization of treatments has been successful and that our results are not driven by respondents' characteristics other than the treatments, we assess the covariate balance across different treatment conditions across a set of demographic variables. This includes age, income group, class perception, education level, race and party identification. Table A2 reports the mean and the standard deviation across respondents, given a particular factor, who received different treatment values (levels). Overall, the demographic variables are balanced across all treatment values.

Furthermore, Table A2 also reports the specific number of respondents who received a particular treatment value across all factors. For example, within the factor of organizational structure, the number of respondents who got the no organizational cue is 1,602, whereas that who got the local organization cue is 1,612. Again, the number of respondents are balanced across treatments. We conclude that there is no evidence suggesting the failure of the randomization of treatments.

3. LASSO variable selection procedure

Apart from our factorial experiment, our survey also contained questions regarding political preferences, political participation, and standard demographic information. These covariates are likely to be predictive of our outcomes of interest (i.e., support for protest violence), but are themselves *not* correlated with the treatments due to randomization. This represents a valuable opportunity of including some of these covariates in our regression analyses for the purpose of increasing *precision* of our estimates. Cinelli et al (2022) calls this kind of covariates *neutral control*, where controlling them in the regression increases the precision of the causal estimate because it reduces the variation of the outcome variable.

But we also want to use a principled method to select those covariates that have the best predictive performance and are least correlated with one another. LASSO regression, commonly used in the field of machine learning, provides such a principled method. LASSO regression is a regularization technique that encourages parsimony in a model. It does so by “shrinking” the coefficients of those variables that do not improve our predictive performance. It has been used for precision improvement for causal estimation in an experimental setting (Bloniarz et al 2016).

We perform standard LASSO regression procedures by using k-fold cross-validation to select the best lambda value (the penalizing parameter that controls shrinkage) which minimizes the mean squared error (MSE). Crucially, this procedure is done separately on each one of the outcome variables. In other words, each outcome variable has its own set of LASSO-selected predictors, which are included in our regression models to improve precision for our causal estimates. Below we report, for each of the outcomes, the number of covariates that are selected by LASSO procedures and the R-squared of the associated, best-performing models:

Outcome variable	Number of covariates selected	R-squared
Joining future action	68	0.51
Moral support	68	0.47
Effectiveness	80	0.44
Private solidarity	69	0.48
Public solidarity	49	0.49
Support police use of force	70	0.19

Table A3: LASSO variable selection results

4. Long regression and possible interaction effects

Our factorial experiment design consists of multiple treatments produced by randomly selecting and combining particular levels from three factors: target of violence, motivation of protesters, and organizational structure. It is plausible that the *interactions* among treatment factors might induce a particular effect on the respondents. For example, it is not so much the protesters targeting the police *per se* or the cue of recent police repression *per se* that makes our subjects respond in one way or the other, but it is the interaction of both values that makes them particularly impactful. The statistical models in our main analyses, in the language of Muralidharan et al. (2019), are *short models* in which treatment factors enter into the regression as separate dummies, which essentially assume that the interaction effects across treatments are zero. If the models are misspecified, the causal estimates can be biased and lead to incorrect inference.

As a robustness check, we thus perform *long-form* regressions where the three treatment factors are allowed to interact *three-way*, which produces 24 main plus interactive terms and the associated coefficients. We then compute the Average Marginal Effect (AME) from the long regressions using the margins package in R. Figure A1 visualizes the AMEs for each treatment for each outcome variable, displaying the results from short and long models side-by-side. In general, the results from short and long models are similar. This is especially true when the outcome variable is moral support, the results are essentially the same and do not change our main findings. However, we do see some treatments losing statistical significance when other outcomes are considered.

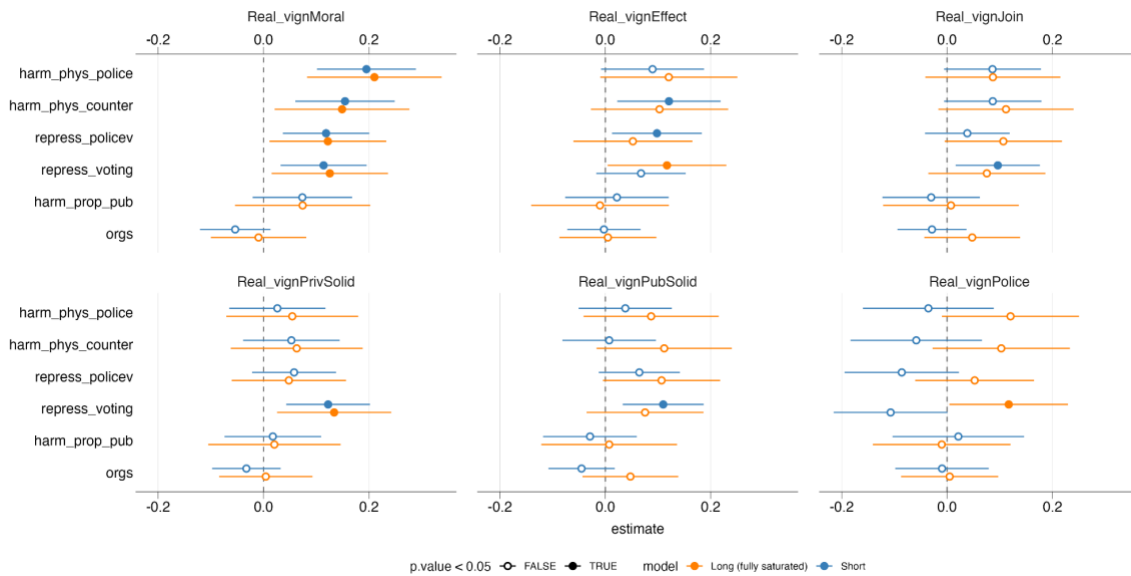


Figure A1: Estimated coefficients from short (no interaction among treatments) and long (allowing interaction among treatments) regression.

5. Voting repression statistic

The statistic of a 22% reduction in the Black voting public is based loosely on data about the Georgia voter registration changes passed in 2021. One key aspect of this voting law was the reduction in the number of voting drop boxes from 94 in the 4 counties with the most Black voters, to 23 drop boxes, representing a 76% reduction in the available locations to drop off absentee ballots. Data from the 2021 runoff election (Benner et. al 2021) shows that 27.65% of Black voters utilized absentee ballots. We then extrapolate that the reduction in drop locations would prove a significant deterrent to these voters, and a 76% reduction in absentee ballots for Black voters would equate to a little under 22% of the voting public. We slightly scale up this number for the purposes of the vignette.

Additional Citations:

Benner, K., Corasaniti, N., & Fandos, N. (2021) *Justice Dept. Sues Georgia Over Voting Restrictions Law*. *The New York Times*, June 25, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/25/us/politics/justice-department-georgia-voting-law.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Bloniarz, A., Liu, H., Zhang, C.-H., Sekhon, J. S., & Yu, B. (2016). Lasso adjustments of treatment effect estimates in randomized experiments. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS*, 113(27), 7383–7390. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1510506113>

Muralidharan, K., Romero, M., & Wüthrich, K. (2019). Factorial Designs, Model Selection, and (Incorrect) Inference in Randomized Experiments (Working Paper No. 26562; Working Paper Series). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26562>

Pipelines as protection?

Discourses of progress, protest, and local support for the Line 3 Pipeline

Abstract: In 2021, Enbridge completed the Line 3 Pipeline in Minnesota, despite nearly 7 years of Anishinaabe-led resistance. Yet, throughout many rounds of administrative approvals, numerous legal challenges, and a variety of direct actions against the pipeline, there was not only vocal opposition, but also people who spoke out in support of the pipeline, including local individuals in the state. While familiar slogans such as “not in my backyard” suggest local residents would not support potentially dangerous fossil fuel projects in their communities, these individuals engaged in active support of the project through public comments, op-eds, and other forums. How can we understand this advocacy for, and even pride in, fossil fuel projects? Through analyzing discourses circulating among individual supporters, I argue that local individuals go beyond exclusively economic arguments to draw upon, adapt, and circulate 2 discourses in order to protect their established ways of life from disruption: (1) a locally-specific progress discourse that valorizes rural hard work and support for natural resource projects, and (2) a contemporary anti-protest discourse that discredits water protectors as fraudulent paid professionals, outsiders, and hypocrites. By legitimizing one way of life and delegitimizing those who threaten it, Line 3 supporters reflect a desire to maintain their way of life as it is, and reveal their anxieties about possible disruptions to this way of life. What is ignored is how their white, settler way of life has relied on, and continues to rely on, an ongoing disruption of Indigenous life.

While familiar slogans such as “not in my backyard” suggest local residents would not support potentially dangerous fossil fuel projects in their communities, there are local individuals who emphatically support projects such as the Line 3 pipeline. In fact, the first Line 3 supporter I interviewed gave me a tour of his yard to show me the multiple pipelines running through it. When we went back inside, he told me about the comments he made to public officials advocating for Line 3 and critiquing its opponents. How can we understand this advocacy for, and even pride in, fossil fuel projects?

We can find some clarity in the local and national discourses that circulate among supporters and help to frame these projects not as corporate self-interest that harms local communities, but as projects that bring jobs and help local communities—and their ways of life—survive. In the case of Line 3, what some locals fear is not a disruption from a pipeline. Instead they believe that a pipeline will protect them from disruptions to their ways of life. Therefore, they are concerned about Line 3 opponents and related movements disrupting their ways of life. This is a new formulation of an old settler colonial anxiety—that their claims to land and governance will be destabilized, in particular by Indigenous peoples (Simpson, 2017).

As they try to protect their lifestyles from disruptions and protect the status quo, individuals who support Line 3 adapt settler colonial discourses to their particular time and place, perpetuating and reformulating these discourses. The settler colonial status quo provides them with material and cultural benefits, as it maintains their lifestyles and keeps white, non-Indigenous people in a dominant position in society. In this paper I focus on two discourses that individual Line 3 supporters draw upon, adapt, and circulate in order to protect their established lifestyles from disruption: (1) a locally-specific progress discourse that valorizes rural hard work and support for natural resource projects, and (2) a contemporary anti-protest discourse that

discredits water protectors as fraudulent paid professionals, outsiders, and hypocrites. By legitimizing one way of life and delegitimizing those who threaten it, Line 3 supporters reflect a desire to maintain their lifestyle as it is, and reveal their anxieties about possible disruptions to this lifestyle. What is ignored is how their white, settler way of life has relied on, and continues to rely on, an ongoing disruption of Indigenous life.

This paper builds upon other scholarship about how white and settler communities in America react politically to perceived loss. Race, ethnicity, and politics scholarship and scholarship on settler colonialism offer relevant concepts such as “anticipatory losses” and “unsettled expectations” that provide a foundation for making sense of the protective discourses of Line 3 supporters. Still, by examining the settler colonial discourses that circulated in the context of Line 3, we can better understand how old stories are reused and adapted to maintain dominant lifestyles, and to advocate for contemporary natural resource projects that enable those lifestyles. Settler colonial progress narratives and hostility to protesters are not new in American politics; Line 3 supporters retrofit familiar discourses to their place and time, incorporating reactions to contemporary Black and Indigenous-led movements, anxieties about lost status and rural blight, and claims of paid protesters in a post-Trump¹ America where truth is not agreed upon.

The Case of Line 3

This paper focuses on one case of support for a local fossil fuel project, to examine the discourses people circulate as they advocate for such projects and try to protect their way of life:

¹ With Donald Trump’s role in politics as central as ever as in 2026, I use post-Trump in the same way that scholars such as Emma LaRocque have used post-colonial. I do not use “post” to mean Trump or Trumpism is in our past, but rather that Trump’s rise to power was a rupture in history, and “post” signals everything from then on (Teves, 2015).

Enbridge's Line 3 "replacement project" in Minnesota. This project, which many opponents argued was an entirely new pipeline, was first proposed in 2014 and drew substantial resistance led by Anishinaabe nations. This resistance, and the national attention to it, delayed the project from being completed by its targeted 2017 deadline, and shaped the route of the project, but Line 3 was ultimately completed in the fall of 2021 and is operational today. It runs across Northern Minnesota from Clearbrook, MN to the Superior terminal near Duluth, cutting through the Fond Du Lac Reservation and a region known as the Iron Range.

The Iron Range is an area with a history of iron mining, which brought Northern European immigrants to the area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of the local supporters I interviewed live in this region. The "Iron Range" actually includes three ranges: the northernmost Vermilion Range, the Mesabi Range, and the Cuyuna Range the furthest south. A fairly rural area, the Iron Range Tourism Bureau's website describes the Iron Range as a "collection of small towns." It is also an area where settler history and resource extraction are more obvious than in other places. Monuments to mining dot the rural landscape—like the 85-foot-tall Iron Man statue in Chisholm, Minnesota—and people talk of their ancestors getting land through homesteading. Another part of the history of the area, which was not brought up by the Line 3 supporters I spoke with, is that the U.S. government signed significant treaties with the Anishinaabeg in this area in the 19th century, with three of the most notable signed in 1837, 1854, and 1855. In particular, the Line 3 Pipeline crosses 1855 treaty land.

While this paper focuses on the 21st century project, and references to "Line 3" throughout will generally refer to that project, Line 3 has existed in some form since the mid-20th Century. The original Line 3 pipeline became operational in 1968. In 1991 it resulted in the largest inland oil spill in US history near Grand Rapids, MN, leaking 1.7 million gallons of crude

oil onto the Prairie River, which was frozen at the time (MPR News Staff, July 16, 2021). One of the primary justifications Enbridge gave for the Line 3 replacement project was that the old line was compromised, and they could only run it at half capacity due to its condition (Kraker & Marohn, March 3, 2021).

Approving the new version of Line 3 was largely a bureaucratic process. Line 3 had to receive two types of approval from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) — a certificate of need and a route permit. A certificate of need concerns whether there is a need for the project and the route permit determines whether the particular proposed route is approved. The Minnesota PUC, a state agency, therefore played a major role in the approval process. At each stage of the administrative approval process, public comments were invited; I connected with the Line 3 supporters I interviewed by reaching out to people who submitted public comments in support of the pipeline.

Anishinaabe nations such as the Red Lake Nation and the White Earth Nation, as well as Indigenous-led organizations such as Honor the Earth, responded to the Line 3 project with resistance in various forms (and forums) from legal appeals to resistance camps. Included in this was a significant grassroots response from groups such as Camp Migizi, Red Lake Treaty Camp, the Giniw collective, RISE Coalition, and others. Legal challenges included a rights of nature case with manoomin (wild rice) as the lead plaintiff (*Manoomin et al v. Minnesota DNR*), and a challenge that was appealed to the Minnesota Supreme Court over whether Enbridge demonstrated a need for the pipeline. Pipeline opponents also made political appeals to officials including then-President Biden.

This resistance can be viewed as a continuation of resistance to other fossil fuel projects such as the Dakota Access and Keystone pipelines. Line 3 resistance was led by local Indigenous

nations with long histories in this area, but the struggle is linked to other resistance efforts such as the Standing Rock-led resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Some people and groups have participated in more than one of these resistance efforts, and there has been intentional knowledge and strategy sharing between efforts. In addition to the years of learning that have built this movement, these efforts can be viewed as part of much longer movements for tribal sovereignty and resisting settler colonialism. Scholar Nick Estes (2019) said “What happened at Standing Rock was the most recent iteration of an Indian War that never ends” (p. 10).

While these efforts of resistance and tribal sovereignty have had significant impacts, from stopping or delaying pipelines² and making investors wary of new ones, to shaping public consciousness, it is important to understand them as part of a dynamic relationship of settler colonialism and decolonial resistance. It is therefore also necessary to study the often-overlooked other side of the dynamic—in this case, the advocates of the Line 3 pipeline project. While the state is often the focus of discussions of a structure such as settler colonialism, other actors also play roles, including the local individuals whose support can help legitimize fossil fuel projects. While individuals do not have the power of the state and major corporations, the fact that these projects are not universally opposed by local residents is important to the projects’ credibility.

Who Are These “Local Individuals”?

This paper draws from interviews I conducted with 19 individuals who supported Line 3 and submitted public comments to Minnesota state institutions in support of Line 3³. I conducted

² One example of this is the Sandpiper Pipeline, which was proposed by Enbridge in 2013 to run along a similar route to where Enbridge would later propose to extend Line 3. Enbridge withdrew its application for the Sandpiper following significant opposition from nations such as the White Earth Nation and groups such as Honor the Earth (Ahtone, June 24, 2015; Engelfried, Dec 14, 2020).

³ One interviewee did not submit a comment to the state, but her husband did.

these in-depth, semi-structured interviews in person, and via video and phone call from June-December 2023. All of the people I spoke with live in Minnesota, or did when they submitted a comment. These local supporters are not intended to represent the “average” point of view in America, or even in Minnesota, but instead are helpful for understanding the perspective of those who actively advocate for natural resource projects like Line 3. These individuals cared enough about the Line 3 project to follow it, take action to comment to a state institution, and spend 1-2 hours speaking with me about their perspective.

Most individual Line 3 supporters I talked to described themselves as middle class, though they ranged in income from an individual on permanent disability to an individual who said they were in the top 5% of earners in Minnesota. Nearly all described themselves as white—though many deflected discussions of both their class and race. A majority were men, though about a third were women. Their ages ranged from 35 to 80 years old, and a majority were older than 50 years old. The age distribution was likely influenced by who has time and willingness to be interviewed for at least an hour.

Politically, interviewees ranged from self-described strong Democrats to strong Republicans, with a number of people identifying as Independents. The most common political identification was with the Republican party, but this group of interviewees did not make up a majority. Donald Trump was often mentioned in interviews, but opinions expressed about him ranged from one interviewee who said they attended a Trump rally and it was “one of the most peaceful groups I’ve ever been in” to another interviewee who said they would likely never vote for a Republican politician again because of Trump’s influence over the party. People varied in their level of political activity across different measures, but every person interviewed said they

had voted within the last year; this further underscores that these people are not average Americans, but rather politically active Americans.

These interviewees, like other individual Line 3 supporters, varied in their connection to the pipeline. One person I spoke with had worked for Enbridge, while others had a more removed association with the project: transporting natural resource executives for work, or living in a town where the pipeline was built and interacting with water protectors. It is not surprising that many of these individuals have some, though often an indirect, tie to Enbridge. The public relations firm Velocity Public Affairs used a strategy they call an “advocacy elevator” to help Enbridge identify likely supporters to build support for the Line 3 project—a strategy some might refer to as “astroturfing”—and the connections people had to the project made them likely targets for such a campaign.

It is also important to note that the individual Line 3 supporters I interviewed generally did not see themselves as powerful; many interviewees contrasted themselves to elites during our interview. Yet, these supporters possessed some forms of power and they even leveraged identities that could give them authority and legitimacy on the Line 3 issue. In addition to a majority of them being white men, individuals mentioned certain qualifications to explain why they spoke up about Line 3, such as work expertise in engineering and being a lifelong or multi-generation Minnesotan. As I will elaborate, supporters also drew upon values of working hard to legitimize their perspectives.

Literature on Political Loss and Progress

People in dominant positions in American society expressing concern about changes to their status is not new. Race, ethnicity, and politics scholarship and scholarship on settler

colonialism offer relevant concepts for making sense of the protective discourses of Line 3 supporters, as does scholarship on rural consciousness.

The concepts of anticipatory losses and imagined losses capture how white individuals may fear loss of status or material loss, even if they are unlikely to actually experience these things. Anticipatory losses are losses felt by white people, though they haven't happened yet and these perceptions of loss are often not accurate (Hooker, 2023). The concept of imagined losses also captures this inaccuracy; imagined losses go beyond actual losses to blame people of color for any hardships white people have faced recently (Haney-Lopez, 2013). Moreover, the people acting on these imagined losses are often not those white people who are struggling most, but instead tend to be financially well off (Haney-Lopez). Despite the inaccuracy of these perceived losses, white people feel them strongly, and these felt losses shape political behavior. People may act, for instance, to prevent losses that are said to be coming in the future, and to reassert white dominance (Hooker).

A related concept focused more specifically on the white *settler* experience is unsettled expectations and uncertainty. As a result of colonialism and United States law, non-Indigenous people in the U.S. expect that they have a right to private property and say over what happens to land within this country. The law tends to protect and affirm the expectations of non-Indigenous Americans (Harris, 1995). This is reflected in court decisions such as *Sherrill v Oneida* (2005) and subsequent decisions that protect the "settled expectations" of current landowners (Mackey). For example, in *Stockbridge-Munsee Community v New York* (2014), the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals stated: "it is now well-established that Indian land claims asserted generations after an alleged dispossession are inherently disruptive of state and local governance and the settled expectations of current landowners, and are subject to dismissal." It is therefore perhaps not

surprising that when Indigenous people assert rights and challenge expectations about ongoing rights to land, many non-Indigenous people feel anxiety and anger about the uncertainty this brings. Non-Indigenous people are used to feeling certainty about their control over land, so challenges to this certainty can bring forth strong, negative feelings.

In ways made explicit in the case of the Line 3 pipeline, the settled expectations of white, non-Indigenous people depend not only on personal property rights, but also on control over how land is used locally and even nationally. This includes the continued extraction and transport of fossil fuels and other natural resources, regardless of whether that causes the continued disruption of Indigenous lands and rights. Any challenge to this continued extractive “progress” exacerbates uncertainty and anticipatory loss. It threatens the white settler dominance and legal priority over territory that has become the familiar status quo for white, non-Indigenous people, and their perceived right to a certain future.

Scholarship on rural consciousness relatedly argues that rural Americans often feel that they are getting an unfair deal, compared to Americans in cities (Cramer, 2016). An, at times overlooked, aspect of this is that rural Americans who believe this are often white, while the cities they resent are associated with larger Black populations. As rural towns struggle in contemporary times and the people who live there blame this on urban Americans and politicians favoring cities, this resentment is another emotion white people feel about loss, which shapes their political action. Rural consciousness is furthermore relevant to this case as rural consciousness is associated with particular beliefs about hard work and a place-based identity, all of which impact individuals’ political actions. Pipeline politics, and broader natural resource politics, are place-based conflicts over land. They often, though not always, play out in rural locations. Therefore, rural consciousness is a relevant concept to understand American natural

resource contests, and those who advocate for natural resource projects. I found that pipeline supporters often frame themselves in opposition to powerful people in cities, despite the fact that those leading the pipeline resistance are Indigenous people who also live in rural areas. Indeed, some supporters I interviewed actively denied that local, rural Indigenous people were leading the Line 3 resistance to instead focus on a rural vs urban fight.

Finally, when discussing progress narratives and settler colonialism, it is necessary to mention the well-established ways that progress and modernity have been imagined in contrast with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have long been imagined by non-Indigenous people as unchanging and tied to the past. White Americans have often frozen Indigenous people in time, tying authenticity to impressions established at the time of contact. The more “modern” Indigenous people are, the more their Indigeneity is questioned. Furthermore, early white settlers conceptualized Indigenous peoples, whom they called Indians, in contrast to themselves and therefore in contrast to civilization (Coté, p. 152). This contrast of Indigenous peoples with progress, civilization, and modernity has continued to shape settlers’ perspectives. Descendants of Europeans are seen as aligned with progress, while Indigenous people are seen as the opposite. A contemporary progress discourse circulating to support a fossil fuel project—against Indigenous-led resistance—in the 2020s demonstrates that this depiction of progress and Indigenous people as opposite has not gone away, and shows one of the forms in which it continues.

A Locally Specific Progress Discourse

In line with the literature on anticipatory or imagined losses and uncertainty, some individual Line 3 supporters I spoke with expressed fears of loss and change for the worse, and

uncertainty about the future. However, there was also an aspirational component to many people's thoughts of the future. Many people I spoke with suggested that the United States as a nation had to continue its "progress." These people celebrated improvements that have been made in recent decades, and discussed the need for continuous improvement and progress, which explicitly included natural resource use. Their orientation toward the future was therefore not always angry and defeated, but often driven to *avoid* loss and disruption and to continue progress. To convey this, individual Line 3 supporters drew upon familiar progress narratives, but centered local history and understandings of hard work and natural resource beneficence—all things that corresponded to the potential threat they were feeling in this particular circumstance.

Regardless of the level of positivity they had about the present state of things, individuals I spoke with expressed that we need natural resources to either revive or continue progress, and the Line 3 pipeline was seen as a necessary component of that progress. As Kojola (2020) has argued, the hopes supporters feel about extraction projects are not only about material benefits, but also about restoring "a sense of community identity, history, and pride tied to labor, class, and masculinity" (p. 906). One interviewee spent nearly our entire interview telling me about his initiative to bring jobs and vitality back to his northern Minnesota town—an initiative that included supporting natural resource projects. He said that halting one particular natural resource project, the Twin Metals mine:

"will irreparably damage our communities, our schools and Northeastern Minnesota's economy. Simply put, [a newspaper that spoke out against the mine] has *stolen our heritage*." -Dave⁴ (emphasis mine)

⁴ Names have been changed. Interviewees were given the option to select the name that would be used for them.

This man's investment was not for personal economic gain, as he was retired and exclusively volunteering. Instead he was invested in preserving the community he lived in and protecting it from continued decline—something that offered an emotional benefit. This relates to the emotion of anticipatory and imagined losses, and the broader “settler states of feeling” (Mackey, 2016). It is not only that people support natural resource projects like Line 3 for material benefit, it is also to restore feelings of pride and to protect their community identity into the future. In the face of the threat of movements that challenge their “heritage” and pride, Line 3 supporters instead hope that by advocating for Line 3, they can protect these things into the future. They suggest that if they do this, there may be continued progress that mirrors how things have been.

On the other hand, there was one time during my interviews when Line 3 supporters spoke with explicit negativity about disruptions to their communities and lifestyles: when discussing people who spoke out *against* Line 3, in particular the water protectors, whom they often referred to as “protesters.” When Line 3 supporters talked about this group of people, they often denied that there could be genuine, local resistance to Line 3, instead claiming water protectors were paid or were outsiders. Water protectors were also discussed as hypocrites who were misinformed, careless, rude, or even stupid. While this image was occasionally challenged when some interviewees qualified that they believed in free speech rights, the primary discourses invoked in relation to water protectors were discrediting. In this way, a clear contrast was drawn: Line 3 supporters and their ways of life were legitimized and protected from disruption, and those standing against Line 3 were delegitimized. There was little to no acknowledgement of how settler lifestyles have relied on the disruption of Indigenous life—and continue to.

Hard Work on the Iron Range...

Valorizing work is not unique in America. Still, the value placed on hard work in Minnesota's Iron Range is shaped by its history and has a distinctly rural character. The attitude toward labor is deeply impacted by the mining history of the region. Some Line 3 supporters, such as the individual quoted earlier, directly discussed this history and the continuation of mining:

"Most towns in our area exist because of our mining history, and new generations are now ready to carry on our mining legacy to... provide our state and nation with the critical minerals that we need." -Dave

This history helped to create a culture that takes pride in working hard in blue collar jobs. Part of this is a belief that people in rural areas work harder than others. Supporters of Line 3 often discussed themselves and fellow supporters as aligned with this work culture.

"The people [at a Line 3 hearing] that were for the pipeline were a lot of your everyday blue collar workers. Concerned about their family, concerned about, you know, we don't have technology to replace this, what's it going to be, the costs, things like that, jobs."
-Stephen

"I mean, the vast majority of broader Minnesota is just people working hard, trying to make a living. I mean, it's not easy up there." -John

“[As workers, we are] just normal people out there just trying to trying to get paid and and trying to have benefits and maybe live in a community or a home, or something that that was homesteaded through your family, without having to move away. Because, you know we don't get those opportunities like the big cities do.” -Alan

All of these individuals expressed a belief that life is more difficult in rural areas, and people get by from working hard. The final quote in particular demonstrates rural resentment, by contrasting people in cities are with those in rural areas, and claiming urban residents have things easier.⁵

This discourse about hard work also surfaced as individual supporters criticizing people they *didn't* see as hard-working. For example, one woman I interviewed, who works in the building trades, questioned what “protesters” did for work:

“I remember them talking about how they had arrested all these people and, and my first thought... was, what are these people doing for a living that they can sit out there all day and night, weeks, months, whatever, and as I'm at work.” -Betty

Stephen, quoted above, also discussed a negative view of “protesters” work ethic:

“When you go to a lot of these protests, it's not Natives. They're protesting for the Natives, but they're not Native. They're mostly white. Younger, white, I need a cause, but

⁵ Some people even explicitly blamed the better opportunities in big cities on government officials, who they saw as favoring cities, like one man who said: “Once again the governor, that's Governor Walz, has displayed his contempt for rural Minnesota, and [his preference for] deferring to metro area special interests.”

I don't really want to work. So, I don't know where their funding came from. ... You'll probably be able to read about that, you know, 40 years from now, where the money trail actually originated from. But somebody's sponsoring them. [Or] you know, maybe they got a trust fund."

Here, alongside skepticism of water protectors' jobs, this individual also brought in one of the fraud narratives I will discuss later in this paper: the idea that water protectors were paid. As this quote demonstrates, these discourses are not isolated from each other, but interwoven to support a particular worldview and material interests.

As these quotes exemplify, Line 3 supporters expressed pride in working hard. To work hard in difficult conditions to keep your family and community afloat was presented as a common experience of living in Northern Minnesota. To not work hard was used as an insult, something shameful, and a way to delegitimize people. While "the vast majority" of local people were described as hard-working, Line 3 opponents were described as not hard-working. Opponents were therefore imagined as less legitimate. To say that water protectors do not work hard is to say they are "not like us" and arguably suggests they do not deserve a say in what happens locally.

This link becomes clearer when considering the historical connection between work and land control. Labor and land have long been intertwined in American settler politics. In the primary period of territorial expansion, labor, such as agriculture, was seen as necessary to claim property rights over land. John Locke argued that Indigenous people did not adequately work and improve the land, therefore European settlers were the first to turn land into private property. Settlers used this as justification to expropriate that land and bring it under settler ownership in

what would become the United States (Frymer, 2017, p. 39; Rogin, 1971, p. 153). Settlers furthermore saw this Indigenous dispossession as necessary for progress (Rogin). Related themes have continued to show up in struggles between settler and Indigenous communities over land through the 21st century (Mackey). It is therefore not surprising that here, in these communities that valorize the mining labor of early European immigrants, people continue to discuss labor as a way to make judgments about people, and discount the claims water protectors make about land.

As this shows, projects like the Line 3 pipeline are not just about jobs per se. There has long been a focus on jobs in this region, perhaps best exemplified by what some have called the catchphrase of the Iron Range: “jobs, jobs, jobs”⁶ In relation to the Line 3 pipeline specifically, Enbridge has often highlighted the pipeline’s economic benefits, and the media has commonly framed the conflict over Line 3 as one of jobs vs the environment. But from talking with Line 3 supporters, it is clear that beneath any discussion of jobs and economics is a desire to preserve their own values and a particular local way of life. Working hard is not just something people living on the Iron Range do to earn money. It is something that is part of their identity, passed down from generations shaped by mining. And it is something they take pride in, that they see as conferring deservingness. Hard work is required to maintain progress, and to maintain the culture of the region into the future. Moreover, all hard work is not created equal here. The work that is arguably the most symbolically central to this region—as evidenced by the region’s nickname—is work in the natural resource industries.

...And Natural Resource Beneficence

⁶ This phrase was initially coined by the only Minnesota governor to ever come from the Iron Range, Rudy Perpich (Brown, 2020, August 4)

Hard work is closely linked to mining and natural resources on the Iron Range, all of which is connected to the mining legacy in the region. Some interviewees explicitly discussed this connection to history.

“I think a lot of the people up here on the Range though are practical about using resources and using them wisely because a lot of them are up here, either their ancestors or their current relatives, mined.” -Krista

In a region where settler life was built upon natural resource extraction and it continues to be commemorated, it is not surprising that the people I spoke with viewed natural resource extraction as a beneficial necessity.

“I believe in environmentally friendly logging and all these, but yet at the same token it’s not wise to not use a natural resource either. It’s made life better. For every generation life gets better and that’s why, because we’ve learned to use more things.” -Carl

“I think that we've had it really good in this country... we are so fortunate we've had such good lives, most, I mean many people, that they don't realize just exactly what it would be if you had to go with limited energy, because even when, you know, back in the day, people had one car, one phone, one TV if they had one, and so now we have several phones, several TVs, you know, and you can't do that if you don't have the energy for it.”
-Mary

“When other people start making decisions, like the protest, ‘we’ve got to close all the pipelines.’ Well, it affects me. Are you going to come and pay the extra money that I lose because of this? Or, you know, [my wife’s] kids. You know, we made everything so expensive they can never afford a house. Well, that ain’t fair to them. Shouldn’t they have an opportunity? I had one.” -Stephen

As each of these statements show, Line 3 supporters have a certain vision of progress that calls for society to keep following a path of using natural resources such as fossil fuels to improve their lives. Or, at the very least to ensure that they and their children can *maintain* the same lifestyle. This progress discourse fits with moving forward on the same path that things had been on before environmentalists and Indigenous water protectors intervened.

This discourse also extended beyond Line 3 and fossil fuels to other natural resources:

“I feel like in this state in particular, which is probably the reason why I’m thinking of moving, it’s gotten out of hand... I can’t understand some of the thinking behind it where they want everybody to go green, they want battery operated cars, they want all this stuff. Well, in order to do that, you have to mine it. But they don’t want to do that.” -Betty

“People are saying ‘Okay, yeah, we want electric cars. But we’re gonna shut down nickel mining in Minnesota.’ Well, what do you need to go into your electric car? ‘Yeah, we’re gonna shut down lithium mining in Arizona, because the you know Native Americans don’t want you to do it.’ Really isn’t their land, but they don’t want you to do it. So they shut down the lithium mining. So where do we get our nickel, where do we get our

copper, where do we get it from, for all these electric cars that you wanna build? Uh, let me think... China, Russia.” -David

Here, two interviewees were talking about mining materials for electric cars, but they related this to our conversation about Line 3 through a similar narrative of needing these resources for progress. They both suggest that even for a politically left vision of progress that environmentalists or Democrats want, you still need to extract natural resources. The latter quote also acknowledges Indigenous resistance to mining, but claims it “really isn’t their land.”

Others Line 3 supporters brought up the various products that use extracted materials:

“You know everything inside of these phones and computers is precious metals that take to make it, and petroleum to form the phones and the screens and everything else. And we just can’t exist as a community anywhere, without some of the stuff that we have to mine, log, or transport. You know, pretty much everything out there has those things in it.” -Alan

This individual combines the necessity of petroleum with mined metals or other things “that we have to mine, log, or transport.” The extraction and transport of natural resources is viewed collectively as necessary for modern products like phones and computers. Without them, he says, “we just can’t exist as a community anywhere.” This highlights how essential people say these industries are: they are necessary for continued existence.

Other people particularly focused on the local necessity of mining. Dave, the retired man quoted earlier who volunteers with a job creation-focused group in Northeastern Minnesota did

mention that mining provides Minnesota and the United States with “critical minerals that we need,” but he also discussed the local impacts of mining:

“The economy up here, as we say, is like a three legged stool. Mining, logging, and tourism are the three legs of the stool. And our economy depends on those three industries. And if we don’t have a strong mining industry in [my town], we suffer.” -

Dave

What each of these people expressed is that natural resources are a necessity that must continue to be extracted and transported. They were discussed as necessary for numerous necessary goods, for the local economy, and for continued existence and progress. Therefore, when people or movements challenge the continued extraction and transport of natural resources, local Line 3 supporters viewed it as an existential threat.

Rejection of Racial and Environmental Justice Movements

Many Line 3 supporters I interviewed directly mentioned and criticized recent protests and social movements led by Black and Indigenous people for racial and environmental justice. Interviewees discussed the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock, resistance to the Keystone Pipeline, and Black Lives Matter specifically, and related these Indigenous and Black-led movements to the opposition to Line 3.

“One of the biggest environmental disasters that we’ve had in this country was that Standing Rock protest. And the Standing Rock protest was against a pipeline that was

going to go across an Indian reservation. And they, you know, they had all kinds of a protest there to stop it from going across. And, you know, save mother earth, they're big on that... However, there's a lot of national coverage of that particular Standing Rock pipeline, and you know a lot of it comes from the Indian reservations and which automatically made the bias- the bias from the news would be that, you know, it's the evil social aspects of white society forcing a pipeline across a river. And that belonged to the Indians. Well, you know, that's the bias I noted. And when I say environmental disaster, it was an environmental disaster because of the you know the number of vehicles and dogs and human feces and piles of garbage and over 300 vehicles that were all left in a flood plain that would have been incredibly harmful to the environment. But you never heard anything about that." -Phil

"And then obviously there was another situation in North Dakota with a similar kind of a... similar situation where it was, you know, controversial about the installing and building of a new pipeline there. And there was, you know, I think there was a lot of protesting and, and different activities. So, you know, as far as that goes, it was, I think it was the timing of this project and with how all that happened in North Dakota, there was a lot of concern I felt like and heard about in the area about, you know, are we going to have a similar situation with like violent rioting, protesting, you know, this project." - Josh

These comments show that the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock was seen as relevant by many Line 3 supporters, and was seen as overwhelmingly negative. People I interviewed discussed it as a disaster, as dirty, as a chance to get on television, and as violent. Some people,

as seen in Phil's comment above, said that media coverage of #NoDAPL unfairly maligned white society.

Some supporters discussed the local actions of water protectors in Minnesota in a similar way:

“And they did this big sit-in thing where they camped out to where they're gonna build the pipeline, or something like that, on some river... And then they finally got them to move out after so many months, and it cost the state of Minnesota like a million dollars to clean up the mess. And that's when the public, I think, kind of shifted... They left behind like old buses and campers and tents, and it's like when you have to clean up a homeless encampment. It was worse than that, and it literally cost over a million dollars for the state to clean up later after they finally got them cleaned out.” -David

The similar language used to discuss water protectors resisting Line 3 and the Dakota Access Pipeline further shows the way that people connected the actions, or at least viewed them through the same lens. In this way, it was not only water protectors opposed to pipeline projects who viewed these movements as connected, but pipeline supporters too.

Many Line 3 supporters also specifically mentioned and criticized environmental movements and environmentalism:

“I find that those who tend to make the most noise about supposed environmental concerns...they're the last people to actually have facts. Or put any effort in their own lives to do it.” -John

“The logging has been difficult with the environmental activists trying to control the amount of wood that’s logged.” - Dave

“It was a big headache for Enbridge to go through with the environmental stuff. All of the hurdles are a big issue for the future—how are we going to do stuff with all of the environmental requirements? It takes three years to do anything. An important thing is how can we streamline [processes]. We need to. What kind of a country are we going to have in 10 years? Things will just get worse.” -Anita

This could be seen as another component of the embrace of fossil fuels and natural resources discussed in the last section. As Line 3 supporters depicted natural resources as vital, they also viewed environmentalists—who were associated with resisting natural resource projects—as harming their communities. It is therefore not surprising that many people I interviewed enthusiastically rejected the term environmentalist, even as they defended their care for nature. This was something that came up repeatedly in interviews: people wanted me to know that they cared for the earth, but not like “those environmentalists”.

Overall, these comments firmly reject social movements calling for racial and environmental progress. A vision of “progress” has long been at the center of settler colonialism, but that version reacts to and rejects the type of future Indigenous and Black-led movements and environmental movements call for. Instead, this version of progress seeks to further the white, settler⁷ way of life and dominance. A long-invoked vision of progress tied to white settlers and

⁷ I use the combined description “white settler” here and elsewhere because the dominance of white people and settlers is interlinked, the identity of US as a white settler nation (Frymer), and because while not all settlers are white, in this case most of the people I talked to—the most active and vocal—were.

modernity is prioritized over ideas of progress that place racial justice and equality at their center, such as those advocated by left-leaning movements. It makes sense that these progressive movements would be seen as threatening, as they combine two forms of perceived threat for many Line 3 supporters: 1) the racial threat of the loss of white dominance and control of land from Indigenous and Black-led movements and 2) the economic and cultural threat of the end of fossil fuel dominance from environmental movements. For people on the Iron Range, these threats are fused through their identification with the northern European mining legacy and culture of the area.

And it is in the context of this contemporary time period that Line 3 support played out. This time, with the resurgence of Indigenous and Black social movements, as well as the national resurgence of overt racism and a uniquely contemporary disagreement over truth in American politics, has shaped both Line 3 support and denigration of those who disagree.

A Contemporary Anti-Protest Discourse

In addition to comments about related social movements, Individual Line 3 supporters had a lot to say about water protectors or Line 3 “protesters.” Sometimes they came up in our conversation when we discussed the process of building the Line 3 “extension” (as many supporters called the project) and the related media coverage, or sometimes I asked for their thoughts on those who were against the project amidst my other questions. But often, Line 3 supporters made a special point of bringing up the “protesters.” One individual I interviewed had written down notes she wanted to share with me, and one of the major points was to discuss the protesters and how rude they were.

Perhaps this is not surprising, as “protesters” and their actions made national and local news and were often physically visible. It may also be because other Indigenous-led movements against pipelines like #NoDAPL drew comparisons from both supporters and detractors of the movement, and made water protectors’ actions more salient, as discussed in the previous section. But discussions of water protectors were not limited to those points made by the media. Individual Line 3 supporters, in fact, talked about “protesters” in a few different ways. I identify three ways that they talked about water protectors that together constitute a contemporary anti-protest discourse—and one *positive* way “protesters” were discussed that exists in tension with the three negative ways. Water protectors were discredited as paid protesters, as outsiders, and as hypocrites. They were also sometimes discussed in relation to a positive conception of free speech. As has nearly always been true in American politics, contradictory positive and negative views of protest exist in tandem within the country, within communities, and even sometimes within a single individual.

Water Protectors as Paid Protesters

One of the ways that individual supporters discredited water protectors was by suggesting they were paid professionals. This discourse was one of the clearest themes to emerge from interviews with individual supporters of Line 3 as nearly all supporters I interviewed discussed it.

“They were paid, they received money for protesting. When they were arrested, someone came with a duffel bag with \$40,000 in hundred dollar bills. They were paid for somebody’s political whims...I don’t know who paid them.” -Anita

The quote from Stephen I highlighted earlier is also relevant here.

“When you go to a lot of these protests, it's not Natives. They're protesting for the Natives, but they're not Native. They're mostly white. Younger, white, I need a cause, but I don't really want to work. So, I don't know where their funding came from. ... You'll probably be able to read about that, you know, 40 years from now, where the money trail actually originated from. But somebody's sponsoring them. You know, maybe they got a trust fund.” - Stephen

Presenting water protectors as paid protesters is a notable claim as it challenges their genuine commitment to the cause. It furthermore borrows a strategy from contemporary right wing politicians and media, including Donald Trump.

In the period following Donald Trump's 2015 rise to the presidency in the United States, claims of fraud have become commonplace in American politics.⁸ Claims of “fake news” and misinformation have been frequently repeated and warped to discount stories that people simply don't like. Donald Trump has led the way on this, calling reporting from reliable new sources fake news, but people do this in everyday conversations as well. It is now common for people to discredit information as fake news or misinformation. There is less agreement on facts, and additionally, there has been a notable rise in affective polarization among the public, where people dislike and distrust people in the other party (Iyengar et al, 2019). This compounds the impacts of claims that the other political party is trafficking in “fake news” and other falsehoods.

⁸ Indeed, the Oxford English dictionary named post-truth their word of the year for 2016 (Oxford Languages).

In this climate it is unsurprising that Donald Trump has also made claims about protesters not being what they seem. For example, he claimed that groups protesting the following events were “paid protesters” or “paid agitators” since his rise to political power: his presidential campaign in 2016 and inauguration in 2017 (Benen, May 1, 2024), efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act in 2017 (Zernike & Burns, Feb 18, 2017), and Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court in 2018 (Choi, October 09, 2018).

Right wing media outlets and pundits have also made these claims. For example, in a series of tweets, Candace Owens claimed that Black Lives Matter protesters in Minneapolis in 2020 were funded by George Soros (Venezky, June 1, 2020). She also claimed protesters were not from Minneapolis, demonstrating the overlap of claims that protesters are paid and that they are outsiders. Additionally, Trump at times amplified claims previously made by unreliable right wing media outlets. When a 75-year-old man was injured by police during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, unreliable right wing news sources such as The Conservative Treehouse, Natural News, and One America News claimed that the man was a “professional agitator” (Deutch, Jun 18, 2020). Trump then tweeted about this, claiming the man “could be an ANTIFA provocateur” (@realDonaldTrump, June 9, 2020). This rhetoric is furthermore unlikely to end soon as Trump called pro-Palestine protesters “paid agitators” in 2024 before being re-elected president, and has resumed that rhetoric during his second term (Benen). In March 2025, he said that people showing up to town halls of Republican Members of Congress were “Paid troublemakers” (Benen, March 4, 2025)

In this context, it is unsurprising that Line 3 supporters used paid protester narratives to discount Line 3 water protectors. Some individuals I interviewed also extended this theory to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in Minneapolis.

“A lot of [the Line 3 water protectors] are paid. I can show you time and time again on Craigslist... During our [2020 Black Lives Matter] riots here, we saw crisis actors... they’d hire these people, they pay them.” -John

Here, this Line 3 supporter said that both water protectors against Line 3 and Black Lives Matter protesters were paid “crisis actors.” He borrows the term used by conspiracy theorists to discuss school shootings such as Sandy Hook and Parkland and claim that they were a hoax. This linguistic connection is revealing as here too people involved with a movement are being portrayed as someone other than who they say they are.

This narrative of paid protesters was often discussed in connection with a view that supporters’ own perspectives were “common sense”—a phrase used by many local supporters—and no one could possibly have the opposite view if they were genuine and properly informed. Rather than seeing the pipeline as a contest of competing interests, or even expressing an attitude that they didn’t care what the other side wanted, many supporters insisted that Line 3 opponents were misinformed, duped, misjudging the situation, or entirely inauthentic. This attitude could even be called authoritative, which aligns with how white settlers have long discounted Indigenous perspectives and knowledge (see Smith, 1999; Mackey, 2016; Wolfe, 2006). As Wolfe (2006) puts it, Indigenous dispossession has been based on the idea “that ‘we’ could use the land better than they could” (p. 389). With an attitude of knowing best, and of their own views being the obvious and only correct conclusion, many supporters then concluded protesters had to be paid.

“The protesting... the people chaining themselves to the tractors, that was all positioned. That wasn't genuine. Nobody's actually going to tie themselves to a caterpillar and think that that's going to make a single bit of difference besides media...It's not effective. And plus those people they were all paid. They just, it was obvious.” -John

Other Line 3 supporters said protesters were either paid *or naive*. Here, the idea that paid “agitators” were involved was intertwined with the idea that some people were not paid, but were just misguided.

“I think there are a few that are agitators, that are paid agitators that go around to different things. I do think that. But I think most of the people, you know, especially the young people, tend to be idealistic. You know, they want the world to be a great place and all this and that. And we all do, but... You know, there's some things we can't control.” -Mary

This narrative also contains a belief that the person's own view is the common sense one. That interviewee specifically used the phrase “common sense” at other points in her interview. At one point she said:

“I think we need to take care of our environment. But I, we have to do it with a little common sense. And I think replacing the old pipeline was good.”

And expressed the same idea later.

“It's an aging line. It needs to be replaced. It's just common sense I think.”

Yet even with this more sympathetic, paternalistic view of water protectors as naive, this individual still claimed that some protesters were paid.

Water Protectors as Outsiders

“A lot of the people that were here working with the water protester—the water protectors—protesting the pipeline they, like, I'm not kidding when I say there was license plates here from every state you could think of.” - Ralph

“I think a lot of what you get for protesters are people from outside this area that really don't know this area, you know...Because even in the local paper where you see that they made arrests for trespassing a lot of them were from other states... And I know you have basically professional protesters that run around the country just protesting things...if you read the court reports in the paper people that were arrested, a lot of them were from, most of them were actually from other states.” -Carl

Another discrediting discourse suggests that Line 3 opponents were outsiders not from the area, and thus illegitimate. This strategy of casting demonstrators as illegitimate outsiders is not new. The idea of “outside agitators” has a long history of being used against nonwhite protesters such as by political officials and in media coverage (Boyle, 2022). It is often noted that

it was used against Black protesters during the civil rights movement in the mid-20th Century,⁹ but it was also used against Black people taking part in urban riots in that period (Brush, 1996) and much earlier to blame Northern “agitators” for slave revolts (Aptheker, 1969). It was also used to discredit Indigenous resistance to removal and land dispossession in the 19th Century, and shift blame to “half-breeds and renegade white men” (Rogin, 1971, p. 157). More recently, this outside agitator trope was used against Black Lives Matter protesters in Ferguson in 2014 and across the United States in 2020. In recent years it has also been applied to discredit Indigenous-led efforts to resist pipelines. Applying the “outside agitator” trope to both groups makes sense as both Black and Indigenous-led movements threaten the status quo of white dominance with collective resistance from a marginalized group. By blaming outsiders, this trope discredits the movement and avoids acknowledging it as a real challenge from the local community. In this case, it also allowed for the rural vs urban framing to flourish, instead of acknowledging they share the rural region with Indigenous people who may feel differently.

The trope of the outside agitator is effective in part because it suggests local people are content with the way things are and would not take part in such actions, or at least would not take part without the influence of outsiders. This was an idea that was discussed by individual supporters of the Line 3 pipeline.

“I talked to many of my Ojibwe friends, and then many of my other friends from the Leech Lake area, Native Americans. And they're like, yeah, we don't know why these people are protesting because...they were like we already have the old pipeline through our reservation.” -John

⁹ One only has to look to Martin Luther King Jr's Letter from Birmingham Jail to see evidence of the protester-as-outsider discourse being used against civil rights movement demonstrators.

Here one Line 3 supporter states that the local Ojibwe people he knows don't understand or support the water protectors. This suggests local Indigenous people are content with things, and it is outsiders who are against the pipeline, in line with other supporters' claims quoted above.

This trope further suggests that protesters' views are not important, because they aren't local community members (Boyle, 2022). This idea was reflected by individuals I spoke with:

“If they have that feeling that they don't support a project and it's gonna be bad for the environment and everything, but they live in that area, I will give them the time of day and I will listen to it. I respect these people. They have an opinion. The problem that I have is a lot of these people that show up and take these seats [at hearings], they're not even from the state, you know. They're from different groups throughout the United States...They're funded by groups that spend a lot of money to pay these folks to travel and be against projects.” -Alan

Here, a pipeline supporter combines the outsider and paid protester tropes.

Notably, this is contrasted with Line 3 supporters, who are presented as local to the area. We could recall the earlier quote, also from Alan, presenting supporters as normal people working hard in this area:

“[As workers, we are] just normal people out there just trying to trying to get paid and and trying to have benefits and maybe live in a community or a home, or something that

that was homesteaded through your family, without having to move away. Because, you know we don't get those opportunities like the big cities do.” -Alan

This positions pipeline supporters views as more authentic, local, and legitimate. It also aligns with rural consciousness that sees rural Americans as authentic, and people in cities as less legitimate. When it comes to land use in rural areas, this narrative therefore has particular resonance for local project supporters. Casting project opponents as outsiders fits with a discourse of urban elites who are seen to have decision-making power that locals view as unfair (Cramer). Protesters may be viewed as coming from urban areas, but even if these outsiders are not exclusively framed as such, this discourse resonates with the local hostility to outsiders having too much say over things that they don't know about or experience first hand.

“...My confusion was, why is it some white liberals from the metro area that have never been up there before [who are protesting]? They've never claimed to have vacationed there. They don't have property there. They have no relationship with the land or the people there. Why are they chaining themselves to tractors that are just building roads? Like, why are they doing this?” -John

By framing protesters as “white liberals from the metro area” with no ties, property, or relationships in the area, protesters are delegitimized as people who shouldn't have say over this local issue.

This trope furthermore invokes the importance of place in politics. This is somewhat ironic, as place is central—albeit quite differently—to Indigenous politics. This demonstrates

that, while non-Indigenous people do not view land and particular places through the same relationships that Indigenous people do, place is far from irrelevant to settler politics. In rural America, location and local identity is important, making it vital to pay attention to the politics of place (Cramer). In the Line 3 case, this rural emphasis on local identity merged with longstanding conservative tropes about outsiders. The irony, of course, is that a certain type of place-based politics is being used *against* an Indigenous-led movement, which includes people from local tribal nations trying to protect the land and waters that are integral to their culture and survival. This settler politics of place is trying to upend Indigenous place-based politics. In this way, these claims are both ironic and a present-day form of a very old story. Because indeed, to build the American nation, settlers had to replace Indigenous claims to land with their own claims, however unfounded (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Simpson, 2017; Frymer, Mackey).

Water Protectors as Hypocrites

“[The camps resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock] that got out of hand. That’s what I see happening there too is, you know, it got on the news that these people were gathering, so everybody thought ‘oh, let’s go gather there like Woodstock,’ whether or not we’re for it or against it. Then they left all their garbage behind. In a flood plain. Well, it’s like, that’s worse pollution than an oil leak. I can’t remember how many semi-loads of garbage they left. I think it was at least six. Because it was in the river flood plain. It would’ve polluted the river. And I think a lot of those people weren’t even true protesters that were for you know what the Natives stood for, I think they were just people going there to be on tv and for the notoriety of saying I was there.” -Krista

Another stream of fraud discourse casts water protectors as hypocrites. In this discourse, water protectors are fraudulent because they claim to be devoted to protecting the environment but actually damage the environment as much as—or more than—fossil fuel proponents do.

Sometimes this narrative takes the form of highlighting that “protesters” drive cars that use oil just like everyone else. It might specifically point out that they drive cars to meetings where they protest fossil fuels. Other times, the focus is on the alleged environmental harm caused by direct actions, from saying water protector camps left behind a mess to focusing on the dangers of actions that compromise fossil fuel infrastructure.

“A lot of the people that were against the pipeline were, you know, uh, water first and the land, which is nice if you walk the walk, not if you just talk the talk. And I didn't see any horses in the parking lot [at public comment hearings]. There wasn't a bicycle anywhere. They all drove in and some came from a long ways away. ... We're having a meeting here in [town] about this area, you know, Itasca County. And some of these people, that one guy had come up from the cities. I mean, you drove all the way from the cities here in your gas power car, to tell us how bad gas is?” -Stephen

“Incidentally no one came to a meeting on a horse and buggy. And I didn't see one bus ever at a hearing. They all drove cars. Not one of them drove an electric car, because electric cars are ridiculous [in this region]. So everybody that was there to protest drove cars to get there. And to me that they're just that's phony.”- Phil

At times this discourse was also linked to more overt prejudice against Indigenous peoples. One Line 3 supporter directly tied supposed hypocrisy about opposing the pipeline to not only previous anti-pipeline camps, but also to his description of living conditions on reservations.

“They had that huge encampment out there. When when those people left, they left tons and tons of garbage and stuff that if you really believe that you're protecting the earth, why would you do that to the earth. I don't know. I, you know, if you've ever traveled Northern Minnesota or anywhere in the rural areas where the Indian reservations are and you travel through those locations, you'll see that there are probably three-quarters of the of the homes and the yards and the properties are unkempt...There's old cars, there's there's garbage everywhere. There's the houses are dilapidated. You know. They don't have the respect for the land that they say they do. Cause if they did, they wouldn't be, they wouldn't be littering the way they do.” -Ralph

As this comment shows, there is an aspect of the hypocrite narrative that suggests Indigenous peoples do not care about the land as they claim to. This critique challenges the stereotype that has elsewhere been called the “ecological Indian” trope (Coté, 2010). On one hand, under this trope, Indigenous peoples are romanticized as close to nature and the “original environmentalists.” But on the other, if Indigenous peoples do something settlers do not agree with, such as whaling or setting up water protector camps, they are charged with being hypocritical or even inauthentic. By framing things this way, even if water protectors are Indigenous people from the area who are not being paid, they can still be discredited. As a result,

pipeline supporters can claim that Indigenous people should not have say over what happens with land and infrastructure.

Water Protectors with Free Speech

Surprisingly, there was one positive discourse that some Line 3 supporters used when discussing water protectors: free speech. A number of Line 3 supporters noted that they believe in free speech, or stated that people should have a right to protest because of free speech in America. Individuals thus demonstrated the tension of how white Americans view protest. Among legacies of negative views of racialized protest and contemporary manifestations of these views, there is also a strong belief in the right to free speech, which is viewed as a core American value.

Some individual supporters discussed free speech as a reason why they were somewhat supportive of what water protectors were doing, though they disagreed on Line 3.

“Well, I believe in everybody’s right to protest. The foundation of our country is the right to say what you think, so... it probably cost us a few extra taxpayer dollars to protect the rights of the companies and the workers and stuff but it’s still, like I say, it’s still their right.” - Carl

Alternatively, other individual supporters named the right to free speech, but contrasted that right with how they viewed water protectors’ actions. Line 3 supporter Anita, who I quoted at the start of this paper, spoke in this way:

“Protesters to me might hold a sign, [they’re] not going to be paid... I understand they have reasons to speak up, that’s a freedom we have in this country, but don’t have paid protesters and don’t be so rude.” -Anita

When Americans speak out against protest, they may feel the need to draw a distinction between what certain protesters are doing and what they view as legitimate protest, protected by the 1st Amendment.

Finally, some people mentioned free speech in a way that revealed clear tension in what they were saying:

“Somebody that testifies and takes 3-5 minutes worth of time on a public comment period that doesn’t even live in the state, in my opinion...we shouldn’t be giving those people time, cause it takes away from time of somebody that really, you know, might need that job, or might need to live there, or whatever it may be. So, I always respect everybody’s got— *I mean freedom of speech is there right?* The problem that I have is when we load up buses. In particular, I remember one of the meetings in Duluth. There was a big bus that was outside that some of the anti Line 3 people were driving around on from place to place. And I can tell you that when that bus started and it ran there was the biggest smoke screen on the street that you could ever imagine...And then you’re reading off a script, you’re reading it word for word. It’s not coming from your head, it’s coming from somebody drafting a document... *I don’t wanna be, I’m not the guy that says that they have no right. They shouldn’t be here. They shouldn’t say that. I always listen to them.*

But I also take it into more context if it's somebody that's impacted because they live there. I live here.” -Alan (emphasis mine)

This interviewee discusses Line 3 opponents being outsiders and hypocrites, even them being supported by an outside group in some capacity, but he also discusses valuing free speech and allowing everyone to speak. His comment shows the tension of these discourses existing together. While there was some variation of views among the individual Line 3 supporters I spoke with, it was often the case that they voiced multiple pieces of these discourses that overlapped and were sometimes in tension with one another.

The mention of free speech by individual Line 3 supporters reveals some tension in their perceptions of protest, even protest they do not agree with. While Line 3 supporters suggested water protectors were dirty, paid, outsiders, and threatening their way of life, supporters also sometimes depicted this or other protest as a right. Invocations of free speech may furthermore represent an opening, however tenuous, for further acceptance of social movements, even in this period of increased political hostility.

Conclusion

Individual Line 3 supporters circulated discourses that reinforced the legitimacy of their lifestyle and vision of progress. On one hand, this included a local progress discourse that championed the hard work of local, rural people and the natural resource projects that sustain their present circumstances. On the other, it included a discourse that discredited the water protectors challenging a local natural resource project—the Line 3 Pipeline—as paid professionals, outsiders, hypocrites, or some combination of all three. These discourses drew

upon old narratives about settler hard work conferring control over land, and were adapted to new political circumstances like the contemporary resurgence of Black and Indigenous-led movements and the destabilization of trust and truth in America. By drawing from old and new rhetoric, these discourses become deeply resonant with individual rural residents who feel their ways of life under threat by Indigenous-led challenges to fossil fuel projects. This adaptation and resonance thus allows settler colonial discourses to survive and continue to shape American life in the 21st Century.

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Conclusion

When Black and Indigenous-led movements had a resurgence in the 21st Century, they brought new hope and excitement to long struggles and drew a new generation into progressive organizing. As intersectionally-marginalized outsiders challenging the status quo of white supremacy and settler colonialism, they also faced great obstacles. This dissertation has looked at some of the ways in which movements shaped perceptions of different audiences—particularly majority-white audiences. Whether reckoning with perceptions by the media, the public, or movement opponents, movements in this period showed what is possible, and where achieving change has proved more challenging.

Collectively, the three papers of this dissertation show that Black and Indigenous-led movements can mobilize large numbers of people and achieve substantial support by combining lessons from movements' long histories with innovative approaches. Where these movements have struggled more has been sustaining support and translating it into policy wins, while avoiding backlash. The movements of this period coupled racial critiques with economic critiques, which was one of the features that differentiated them from past eras of organizing and mobilized large, multifaceted collectives. However, challenging both racial and economic systems at once is a tall task. The papers in this dissertation show some of the impacts of this challenge. *Solidarity with Racialized Protest Movements* demonstrated the American public's deep investment in private property, and how violence toward it can be more detrimental to public perceptions of movements than physical violence against (some groups of) people. When people were told Black Lives Matter demonstrators harmed private property, they were less supportive of the movement than when they were told demonstrators harmed police officers or

counter-protesters. *Framing the Water Protectors* showed that Indigenous water protectors challenging a multinational corporation led to violent repression but also media coverage that cast the water protectors as the violent, unlawful ones—though it also showed how media coverage can shift. In *Pipelines as Protection*, an examination of discourses circulated by Line 3 supporters revealed that it is not only movements but also the backlash to them that may include both material and collective identity dimensions. With Line 3, an anti-pipeline movement based in Indigenous sovereignty and challenging the economic power of a major corporation was met with backlash that discussed a locally-specific mining identity that is tied to both European immigrant ancestry and jobs.

Organizing post-2024

With the unique context of COVID-19 waning, power becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of the hyper-wealthy few, and the re-election of Donald Trump, the landscape for progressive social change has shifted. For Black and Indigenous-led movements, some avenues for change have been foreclosed, new challenges have surfaced, and the need for new strategies has been revealed. With these shifts, the vitality of many of the movements of the 2010s and early 2020s has waned by the mid 2020s. In many ways, the present period feels different than years when movements like Black Lives Matter and #NoDAPL were surging. The backlash to the progress for racial justice has grown and been institutionalized, both social and traditional media have come to be more solidly controlled by a billionaire class, and American democracy is sliding further toward the grasp of authoritarianism. As of early 2026, this has coalesced in ICE agents escalating violence in the city of Minneapolis, killing Renee Good and

Alex Pretti, terrorizing immigrants, and broadly targeting people of color—all with the full backing of the Trump Administration.

However, there are some signs of potential for progressive social justice organizing as well. In the middle of the 2020s, we are seeing growing mobilizations focused on labor and progressive economic visions continue to grow and act in new ways, with the possibility to carry out the economic objectives that at times became overshadowed in the movements of the 2010s. The extreme actions of the Trump administration, the increasing power of billionaires, and the economic struggles of inflation and job loss that have followed for most of the population, create both challenges for protest and a strong motivation for action that could unite coalitions around shared economic and political struggles. And while the recent ICE actions are a significant escalation by the state, the community mobilization against it has demonstrated that progressive organizing continues to persist and innovate. This is perhaps not surprising, as scholars have noted that state repression can be detrimental to movements, but also inspire defensive collective action—especially at first (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999).

Final thoughts

With the escalations of ICE in 2026, and the strong community response on the ground, it is clear that the dynamic of white supremacist violence and mobilizations against that violence is as relevant as ever. While the Black and Indigenous movements that started in the 2010s have been less active in recent years, anti-racist organizing is once again building at a rapid pace.

As context and organizing has shifted in recent times, it continues to be vital to reflect on what innovations of 2010-early 2020s social movements have been durable, and what is

changing, in order to understand movements. For example, the power of social media appears to have been diminished by its increasing corporatization, but organizers supporting and learning from other mobilizations and leveraging decentralized leadership structures appear to still be central to organizing in 2026. With minimal initial mainstream media coverage of the recent ICE occupation in Minneapolis, the media shift that was demonstrated at Standing Rock may offer insights on how BIPOC social movements might shift media coverage, while information about what types of reported protest violence are tolerated by the public in relation to Black Lives Matter can suggest how protesters may challenge white supremacy today. Finally, as Minnesota continues to be a nexus of violence against people of color—and powerful organizing against it—the nuances of how some local white people discussed their animosity toward anti-racist organizing may offer relevant information about what fuels backlash. These and other dynamics of the Black and Indigenous movements from the first decades of the 21st century can help illuminate how we got to this political moment, and how movements might try to shape what comes next.

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