

# INTERPRETING UNREST: HOW VIOLENCE CHANGES PUBLIC AND INTERSECTIONAL SUBGROUPS' OPINIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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**ABSTRACT** Social movement scholars have long been interested in how violence impacts movements. A primary route to that impact is through public opinion. We build on Fraser's (1992) concept of 'counterpublics'—population subgroups that develop distinct opinions through alternate media sources and conversation networks—to segment changes in public opinion following dramatic sequences of movement-related violence. Using survey data collected in four US cities before and after the 'long hot summer' of urban unrest in 1967, we examine changes in public opinion about whether rioters reacted to legitimate grievances and whether the unrest would be effective in helping the plight of Black Americans. We find that violence expanded the opinion gap between the dominant white 'public' and Black 'counterpublic.' We also find unique opinion patterns among intersectional subgroups based on gender and education (Black women and college-educated whites). In effect, violence realigned the structure of public opinion allies for the Civil Rights Movement.

Key Words: public opinion, violence, riots, race, intersectionality, Civil Rights Movement

**\*\*\*Manuscript Under Peer Review\*\*\***

**Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to thank Robin Gratz, A. Ferne Baldwin, Charles Lamb, and Peter Lysy for assistance accessing the Lemberg Center archives; N. Eugene Walls and Keely Jones Stater for input on earlier drafts; Deana Rohlinger for helpful comments; Michael Frisby, Hannah Bolte, and the Indiana University Statistical Consulting Center for technical advice; and Andrew Cloran, Noah Hammarlund, and Elizabeth Benson for assistance with preparing the manuscript. This research was supported in part by grants from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, the Faculty Research Program, and the Francis M. Kobayashi Research Travel Program, all at the University of Notre Dame.

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In the wake of the 2020 killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, protest and violent unrest broke out across the United States and internationally. Although the magnitude of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ response was extraordinary (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020), the basic sequence of action was not new. For decades in the US, Black citizens have died at the hands of police officers, and protest and rioting have answered. From Ferguson, to New York, to Los Angeles, to Memphis, and many more, the world has come to witness these killings and respond. As Americans watched reports not just of the killings, but also of the subsequent protests and violent clashes with police forces, they had to interpret what was happening. Many digested reports from mainstream media and commentary from pundits and political elites. Others got information from first-hand accounts and video distributed through social media. Using such information, they formed opinions both on their own and, more often, through conversations with people around them. As a result, opinion—and changes in opinions—were far from uniform. While many Americans were sympathetic to the plight of Black people in these cities, others were considerably less so, and in particular their assessments of protest as a stimulus for change were widely disparate (Parker, Horowitz, & Anderson, 2020).

Media stories and other information that inform opinions are not neutral or unbiased. The set of reports people consume is conditioned by their own social networks and media consumption habits, and social media can amplify those biases by channelling material from like-minded individuals and sources. Those networks focus information flows and interpretation in distinctive communities, which then help people interpret events (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016). It is likely that the ‘counterpublics’ (Fraser,

1992) embodied by these online communities held, developed, and reinforced opinions about this ‘New Civil Rights Movement’ (Demby, 2014) in very different ways from people in the broader American public. Thus, the protest and violence may have had a different impact on the general public and various counterpublics. It is hard to know, however, as we lack data from such groups prior to the triggering events.

The expression of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, however, provides a parallel opportunity to examine differences in opinion trajectories, particularly as violent events began to accompany the movement. The ‘long hot summer’ of 1967 was a high-water mark for movement-related violence; a massive wave of urban unrest swept the country, leaving virtually no major urban area untouched. Two independent, cross-sectional public opinion studies asked similar questions about movement-related violence in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement before and after the ‘long hot summer’ of urban riots in 1967. As the movement took a violent turn, we examine whether respondents believed these riots were (1) rooted in legitimate grievances about the conditions Black Americans faced and (2) would be effective in addressing those conditions. We find that violent events changed opinions for the Black counterpublic in ways distinct from the ‘mass public’ (Lee, 2002). We also test for distinct patterns among two identifiable intersectional counterpublics—within-race subgroups that had access to alternative media, elites, and conversation networks—and find further support for the counterpublic hypothesis: both Black women and college-educated whites responded to the violence in ways that broke from the broader group trends. Our results suggest that events like the

‘long hot summer’ not only serve to change opinions, but also to realign the structure of opinion among potential opinion allies.

### **Violence, Public Opinion, and Movements**

While social movements often target states or other powerful actors, many tactics are performances viewed by broader publics. This is especially true of violent acts, which reach larger audiences through media coverage more than other forms of protest (Myers & Caniglia, 2004; Oliver & Myers, 1999). Violent protest, therefore, has the potential to shape and reshape public opinion, which in turn impacts elite responses, voting, and policy relevant to the movement’s objectives (Giugni, 1998; McAdam & Su, 2002; Wasow, 2020).

Public opinion researchers have long been concerned with identifying if and how events influence opinions (see Baum & Potter, 2008; Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Generally, events can influence the salience of issues and opinions about those issues, but the size and direction of influence depends on characteristics of the event and the opinion-holder (Branton, Martinez-Ebers, Carey Jr., & Matsubayashi, 2015; Mayer, 1993; Wallace, Zepeda-Millan, & Jones-Correa, 2014). Violent protests should be particularly impactful given the media coverage they receive (Myers & Caniglia, 2004; Oliver & Myers, 1999), but empirical findings are mixed (Bobo, Zubrinsky, Johnson, & Oliver, 1994; Giugni, 2007; Legewie, 2013; McAdam & Su, 2002).

Issues, however, are only part of the opinion landscape. Publics also hold opinions about movement actors and tactics including whether violent protest is intended

to address *legitimate grievances* and if it will be *effective* in furthering movement goals (Saunders & Klandermans, 2020). It is difficult to parse the contribution of events to opinion change about movements relative to other factors (Mayer, 1993) especially since opinion data are often collected after unexpected events (Andrews, Beyerlein, & Farnum, 2016). Post-hoc opinion studies show that observers of violent events see participants as everything from social justice advocates to criminals and that opinions predictably align with demographic subgroups (Bobo, 1988; Feagin & Hahn, 1973). What such studies do not show is opinion *change* in response to those violent protests. Were opinions, and opinion-alignments, set before the violent event occurred? Or did the event create, strengthen, weaken, or otherwise alter the structure of the general public opinion and the views of racial and other subgroups?

### ***Opinions in Mass Publics and Subgroups***

Public opinion theory predicts what we should see if pre- and post-event data were available. Zaller's (1992) 'receive-accept-sample' (RAS) theory posited that non-elites consume information as a function of issue awareness, incorporate it into existing belief structures, and then sample from those curated beliefs when pollsters call (with recently-considered beliefs selected more often). Mass opinion, then, is an aggregation of sampled individual interpretations.

Analyses of public opinion often compare opinions across population subgroups. Building on Fraser's (1992) concept of 'subaltern counterpublics,' Lee (2002) argued that during contentious periods population subgroups can have such distinct conversation

networks, alternative media sources, and rising elites that their aggregate opinions follow different trajectories than broader mass publics. His evidence from the US Civil Rights Movement demonstrated how Black Americans constituted a counterpublic by showing opinion variation by race, region, and time period—but his analysis ended before the movement’s turn from primarily non-violent tactics (Blumberg, 1991) to intense collective violence.

Nevertheless, Lee’s theory, Fraser’s (1992) initial thoughts, and recent research on intersectionality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) predict that violence should change opinions about the Civil Rights Movement and alter the structure of public opinion among population subgroups. While opinions often divide by race, intersectional analyses of race, gender, and class reveal situations where opinions break from primary subgroups (e.g. Allison, 2011; Berg, 2010; Ransford & Miller, 1983). Such intersections should produce opinions distinguishable from primary race-groups before the movement’s violent turn and follow distinctive trajectories after. If so, the Civil Rights Movement may have gained or lost opinion-allies in ways more complicated than a simple race-based analysis would uncover.

### ***Race and Opinions about the Causes and Effects of Unrest***

We examine opinions about violent protest along two dimensions. The first concerns the reasons that respondents attributed to the rioting: did they reflect *legitimate grievances*—were they driven by meaningful, inequitable, unaddressed conditions, in which case the violence may be an understandable part of a fight against injustice and inequity, even if

not condoned (Murakawa, 2008; Thomas & Louis, 2014; Wasow, 2020). If Blacks rioted because of discrimination, housing conditions, or police brutality, then riots arose from legitimate grievances and a desire to address those problems. If, however, riots were caused by criminal looters, communist agitators, or youthful hooligans, then riots would not reflect real problems. Many surveys conducted after riots in the 1960s examined beliefs about causes and as expected, both local and national surveys revealed substantial variation by race. Whites ascribed more personalized, less systemic, and less legitimate factors including agitators, looting, and criminals (Campbell & Schuman, 1968a; Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Newsweek, 1967), while Blacks were more likely to report systemic causes like police brutality, overcrowding, housing quality, unemployment, and poverty (Caplan & Paige, 1968; Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Newsweek, 1969; Tomlinson & Sears, 1970).

The second dimension examines whether respondents believed the unrest would be effective—would it help address the problems Black Americans faced? One measure of effectiveness can be the attention violence brings to an issue. Blacks in the 1960s frequently reported bringing attention to their communities' problems as a primary outcome of riots (Feagin & Hahn, 1973), but the effects of that publicity remain in dispute. Violence may publicize the intensity of grievances and force policy action, or it might invite repression, spur counter-movements, or alienate bystanders.

The scholarship on the effectiveness of violence as a tactic of dissent is mixed. Some have found violence to be advantageous or even essential in driving social change (Bell & Murdie, 2018; Confrontation, 1969; Sheatsley, 1966), while others find it to be

counter-productive (Braithwaite, Kucik, & Maves, 2014; Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013; Murdie & Purser, 2017; Thomas & Louis, 2013; Wasow, 2020).

Opinions about the effectiveness of violence in the Civil Rights Movement, however, are strongly connected to race. Black Americans in the 1960s believed the attention created would produce government support of the movement's ideological, legislative, and programmatic goals. Depending on the survey, anywhere from one- to two-thirds of Blacks believed that the riots had (or would have) a positive impact (Brink & Harris, 1967; Campbell & Schuman, 1968a; Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Newsweek, 1969). A substantial minority of Black survey respondents saw violence not just as helpful, but as necessary for winning equal rights (Campbell & Schuman, 1968a; Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Time, 1970; Tomlinson & Sears, 1970). White respondents, in contrast, largely believed riots would hurt the cause of civil rights.

### ***Opinion Impacts of the 'Long Hot Summer'***

Given those racial opinion baselines, we turn to the question of how the 'long hot summer' of unprecedented urban violence could have *changed* public opinion regarding the reasons for rioting and its effectiveness. We test two sets of hypotheses about how groups and subgroups reacted. The first builds on Lee's work and focuses on opinion changes and interpretive divisions by race. The second are hypotheses on intersectional dynamics by gender and education within race groups.

The summer of 1967 was a pivotal moment when an unprecedented wave of violence (Myers, 1997) spread across the U.S., shocking the American citizenry and its

governmental systems. The riot wave challenged public understandings of the problems Blacks faced and what needed to be done (National Advisory Commission, 1968). The mass media focused intense attention on the riots, highlighting the most violent and destructive components. Since dramatic, widely-publicized events have been shown to change public opinion (Legewie, 2013; McAdam & Su, 2002; Wallace et al., 2014; Wasow, 2020), we expect public opinion across the nation about riots and rioters to change markedly from 1967 to 1968.<sup>1</sup> We hypothesize that (H1) *aggregate attributions of legitimate reasons for rioting* and (H2) *aggregate attributions of effectiveness will change from 1967 to 1968*, as media drew national attention to problems in Black communities. Aggregate alignment with the movement could increase if more people interpreted the riots as emerging from legitimate grievances and driving meaningful policy responses, or could decrease if more interpreted the riots as criminal behaviour likely to hinder the movement's progress. The null hypothesis is that opinions were set before the riots and the events merely confirmed existing beliefs—as happened with the 1992 Rodney King riots (Bobo et al., 1994).

Our third hypothesis extends directly from Lee (2002): if opinions changed from 1967 to 1968, (H3) *opinion trajectories will differ for Blacks and whites* on both dimensions because Blacks constituted a 'counterpublic' (Fraser, 1992) with distinct elite opinion-shapers, conversation networks, and media sources (see also Davenport, 2010). The null hypothesis is that opinions of whites and Blacks will follow the same trends, maintaining the initial opinion gap.

### *Counterpublics and Intersectionality*

Race is not, however, the only potential counterpublic divide that conditions opinion about protest and movement-related violence. Research suggests that, within race, gender and education may define further levels of counterpublic alignment. Specifically, we expect distinct opinion patterns for Black women and college-educated whites.

#### *Black Women*

Outside of immediate family settings, relatively high degrees of sex segregation in social networks and institutional contexts are common (Kalmijn, 2002; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1986; Ridgeway, 1997). Even within Civil Rights Movement organizations in the 1960s, gendered roles and tasks were the norm (McAdam, 1988; Robnett, 1996). It is likely, therefore, that the interpretation of media reports about riots were conditioned by conversations in single-gender, single-race settings. This would not necessarily produce opinion divergence: single-race, single-gender groups might share broader race-group interpretations. Indeed, this is what we expect regarding grievance attribution: Black people would share a common understanding that legitimate problems drove action. Intersectionality research, however, suggests that the multiple dimensions of discrimination faced by Black women merits distinct consideration (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). The unique and overlapping forms of discrimination faced by Black women in education, housing, and employment has produced a ‘distinctive Black Women’s standpoint on gender-specific patterns of racial segregation and its accompanying economic penalties’ (Hill Collins, 2000:24). Consequently, the possibility of economic

sanctions following riots may have more salience for Black women than Black men, leading them to interpret the riots as threats to tenuous economic circumstances more than drivers of positive change. As such, we expect a divergence in opinions between Black women and men with respect to effectiveness. We hypothesize (H4) that *by 1968 Black women's' views of riot effectiveness will decrease relative to Black men.*

#### *College-educated Whites*

Colleges produce educational homogeneity in social networks by encouraging friendships among the similarly educated and by propelling people into careers populated with other college graduates (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008). While college graduates have more educationally-diverse networks than people without degrees, they are more likely to concentrate discussion within their own educational status (McPherson et al., 2001). This trend likely had smaller impacts on Black public opinion; while college attendance was increasing among Blacks in the 1960s (Willie & Cunnigen, 1981), rates were still low relative to whites. Coupled with high levels of racial segregation in other domains, the social networks of Blacks in this era were less likely to be educationally segregated—and the experiences of racism were shared across educational status.

For whites, however, educational status may have been more relevant. Education is a correlate of social justice attitudes in general (McCright & Dunlap, 2008) and, in the 1960s, was a significant predictor of support for the Civil Rights Movement (Campbell & Schuman, 1968a). Furthermore, student movements around free speech and civil rights

were in full flower and were major issues of concern for college students, producing and reinforcing educational effects (McAdam, 1988; Morris, 1984). Such concerns had been steadily rising in salience on college campuses: colleges had been adding courses and programs on social justice and African-American studies since the early 1900s (Rojas, 2006) and even if students were not directly involved with such activities, campus culture shaped experiences in white college-educated networks, influencing the interpretive apparatus they brought to bear on the riots. As such, we expect opinions to diverge between college and non-college whites after the riots, particularly with respect to the reasons behind violent activities. We hypothesize that (H5) *by 1968, college educated whites' views of the legitimacy of rioter grievances will increase relative to non-college whites.*

## **Data**

The later stages of the Civil Rights Movement in the US provide an ideal context to study the effects of violence on public opinion about movements. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s emphasized non-violent tactics like boycotts, marches, and sit-ins (Blumberg, 1991; McAdam, 1983, 1988; Morris, 1984), but after it peaked in the mid-1960s, a new tactic emerged—collective violence. Urban violence spiked in the ‘long, hot summer’ of 1967 which produced the most widespread, sustained, and destructive civil disorders in peacetime US history (Heaps, 1970).<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath, President Johnson formed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (NACCD) to study the riots and develop policies to prevent more. In addition to studying the causes of

the disorder, the NACCD and other researchers also studied reactions to the riots (see Feagin & Hahn, 1973 for a review). Their opinion surveys revealed what people were thinking about race, rioting, and protest after the violence.

To see if the riots changed opinions, however, data are also needed from before these violent events. Occasionally, scholars have been able to leverage accidents of timing—events occurring while surveys are in the field—to produce such data. Respondents from before and after the event can be considered paired cross-sectional samples who differ only in their exposure (e.g. Bobo et al., 1994; Legewie, 2013). We adopt a similar approach, using two separate surveys, one conducted before and one after the summer of 1967.

The first study was commissioned by the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University and conducted by Roper Research Associates (Roper 1967). The Lemberg Center selected six US cities based on shared structural and economic characteristics. In each city, approximately 500 Black and 500 white respondents were surveyed by an interviewer of his or her own race about race relations, rioting, and conditions in their cities. The second study was part of the NACCD effort (Campbell & Schuman, 1968b), similar in purpose to the Roper study but conducted in fifteen cities. The survey was administered to approximately 150 Black and 350 white respondents per city.

Although the two studies were not explicitly coordinated, three fortuitous elements make them good candidates for comparison. First, four cities appeared in both studies (Pittsburgh, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Boston). By limiting our analyses to

these four cities, we are able to draw more straightforward conclusions without problems related to regional differences and mismatched sample populations.<sup>3</sup> Second, there was substantial overlap in much of the questioning. Third, the Roper survey was conducted in early 1967 prior to the massive riots of that summer and the Campbell and Schuman study was conducted in early 1968—prior to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. This pattern of data collection, therefore, provides us with a *de facto* pretest-treatment-posttest methodological strategy that we can exploit to examine opinion change.

The four cities included, while offering a range of locations, are still a small sample of US urban areas, limiting generalizability. Within the cities studied, the surveys were independent cross-sectional samples; they do not track the same individuals before and after the riots. In addition, there were also minor differences in some questions. Nevertheless, there are enough overlaps for us to match variables and then pool the samples to test for differences between 1967 and 1968.

## **Measures**

### ***Dependent Variables***

We examine two dependent variables capturing opinions about legitimate grievances and effectiveness. The grievance variable was constructed from open-ended questions asking respondents what they thought caused the riots. Responses were coded into thematic categories such as ‘Education/Low Quality of Schools,’ ‘Police Attitude/Harassment/Brutality,’ and ‘Undesirables.’ Each category was then classified as

indicating a legitimate grievance (discrimination, poverty, police brutality, etc.) or an illegitimate cause (agitators, lawlessness, etc.). Following Long and Freese (2014), ‘Don’t know’ and other ambiguous opinions (e.g. “Other emotional and psychological factors’) were coded as missing (Appendix Table A1 includes all reported reasons and codes), resulting in 29.8% of cases dropped from the Roper data and 12.9% from the Campbell and Schuman data. We calculated the proportion of legitimate causes reported by each respondent. Respondents who indicated all legitimate causes would score 1, while respondents with no legitimate causes would score 0. Most respondents were likely to see the riots a driven by entirely legitimate or entirely illegitimate causes, although some respondents do fall within the range between these poles (see Appendix Table A2).

Riot effectiveness is assessed using a single item from each survey that asked respondents whether recent rioting would help the situation of Blacks (coded 1), hurt the situation of Blacks (coded 0), or ‘don’t know’ (coded missing), leaving a dichotomous variable. Campbell and Schuman response possibilities also included ‘haven’t made much of a difference’ and ‘help and hurt about equally’ which we recoded as ‘don’t know’ to match Roper coding (see Appendix Table A2).

Figure 1 shows the trends in both dependent variables from 1967 to 1968 for the entire sample weighted for relative white and Black population size in each city—the opinion pattern of the ‘mass public’ (Zaller, 1992). The left vertical axis indicates the weighted average of *legitimate grievance* responses; .5 indicates the average respondent saw riots arising from an equal number of legitimate and illegitimate causes. The actual average respondent saw riots as illegitimate before the ‘long hot summer’ (1967=.27) and

slightly, but significantly, more legitimate after (1968=.32;  $t=-3.78$ ,  $p=.00$ ). The right vertical axis indicates the weighted proportion of respondents saying riots would be *effective* protest tactics; .5 indicates equal numbers of respondents feeling riots would help the cause of Blacks and respondents who felt they would hurt. In 1967, 26 percent of respondents thought riots would help, but by 1968, the proportion had dropped significantly ( $t=7.12$ ,  $p=.00$ ) to only 17 percent. After the riots, legitimate causes rose in the mass public's perception, but effectiveness declined.

[Figure 1]

### ***Independent Variables***

Independent variables for race, gender, and education are all dichotomous dummies with 1 indicating Black, female, and education greater than high school (see Appendix Table A3 for descriptive statistics).<sup>4</sup>

### ***Controls***

Age is related to radical political behaviour (Mason & Murtagh, 1985; Schussman & Soule, 2005). We measure age categorically: under 25, 25-34, 35-54, and 55 or older. Homeownership captures longer-term investment in a community (McCabe, 2013) and a rough proxy for wealth, which correlate with conservative views on social change (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Homeownership is a dummy variable (homeowner=1). Employment, which controls for other discussion networks, is a dummy variable where employment outside the home (1) is contrasted with all other employment

statuses (0). We include city fixed effects to control for all unmeasured differences between the cities. Pittsburgh, the smallest city in 1960, is the reference category (see Appendix Table A3 for descriptive statistics).

## Results

Our analytic strategy addresses our paired cross-sectional research design. We pool the two surveys and use multivariate analyses with interaction terms to test for differences by subgroup and year—a common approach in the absence of panel data (Brickman & Peterson, 2006; Johnson & Martin, 1998). Gender and education are interacted with race to test for intersectional subgroup differences and with year to test for differences over time. Sample size limitations prevent us from conducting a fully intersectional analysis (i.e., simultaneous interactions of race, gender, education, and year). Instead, we separately model interactions between year, race, and each of the other two statuses. We then derive predicted values for subgroups by year and test for differences between groups within year and within groups across time (net of controls and city fixed effects).

Tables 1 and 2 present results from analyses of the pooled dataset. Table 1 includes OLS regressions for perceived causes. Table 2 includes logistic regressions for effectiveness. Each table shows four related models. Model 1 tests for changes from 1967 to 1968, conditional on explanatory variables and controls (H1 and H2). Model 2 extends Lee's thesis by including an interaction between year and race (H3). Model 3 tests our hypothesis for Black women (H4) and model 4 tests our hypothesis for college-educated whites (H5) using three-way interactions between year, race, and either gender or

education. Main effects and two-way interactions of all interacted variables are also included in the models.

[Table 1]

[Table 2]

Model 1 in Table 1 supports our first hypothesis. The statistically significant coefficient for year in Model 1 of Table 1 confirms that attributions of legitimate causes were more prominent in 1968. The statistically significant coefficient for year in Model 1 of Table 2 supports our second hypothesis. Respondents in 1968 saw riots as less effective than in 1967.

Hypothesis 3 is supported as well. The significant race variables in Model 1 of both tables indicates that the opinions of whites and Blacks differed, as the race-group hypothesis anticipated. The significant interaction term between race and year in Model 2 of both tables suggests that opinion trends differed by race-group across years. The trends are visualized in Figure 2 showing the predicted legitimate/illegitimate and effectiveness values by race for each year. Opinion levels differed by race in both years. For legitimate grievances, opinions changed in similar ways for both groups across years (small predicted increases). For effectiveness, opinions diverged sharply, with modest increases among Blacks and sharp drops among whites. As Lee (2002) expected, interpretations followed different trajectories for the two groups after new events.

[Figure 2]

Testing hypotheses 4 and 5 results in many interaction terms between race, gender, and year. To aid interpretation, Figure 3 graphs predicted values on each

dependent variable for each intersectional subgroup, conditional on other variables in the model, including 95% confidence intervals for tests of differences in group values within and across years. It visualizes our hypothesized subgroups relative to all others in the interactions.

[Figure 3]

Model 3 in Tables 1 and 2 and the top panel of Figure 3 provide limited support for hypothesis 4 about the opinions of Black women. Their legitimate-cause levels and trends are similar to Black men, but their effectiveness trajectory differs. While Black men had higher predicted effectiveness in 1968, Black women's predicted effectiveness is lower. The estimates lack enough precision to discern if this is a true decline or no change, but the contrast to Black men in the point estimates is substantial. Relative to the increase in effectiveness opinions of Black men, Black women's trends appear distinctive.

In addition to our test of hypothesis 4, we note one statistically significant finding from the race and gender interaction that we did not hypothesize. The interaction of race and gender for legitimate/illegitimate opinions shows that white women were more likely than white men to see violence as having legitimate sources before the riots of 1967. By 1968, white men saw more legitimate reasons, changing similarly to Black women and men. White women, however, held steady in their opinions, producing convergence among white women and men. White women may have been a budding set of opinion allies of protestors before the summer of 1967, but after it they showed no more sympathy than white men.

Model 4 in Tables 1 and 2 and the bottom panel of Figure 3 provide support for hypothesis 5. College-educated whites had the largest predicted increase in legitimate causes from 1967 to 1968, distinguishing them statistically from non-college whites. College-educated whites may also be distinctive in their effectiveness opinions. While on average they trend downward substantially, like non-college whites, they have higher estimated levels of effectiveness opinions in both years, and that gap increases by 1968. The point estimates, however, are not precise enough to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

In summary, we found that opinions were changing in different ways over the ‘long hot summer.’ Blacks generally differed from whites. Black women appeared to be distinct from Black men on effectiveness. College-educated whites broke from other whites in assessing causes, and white women and white men converged over the period.

## **Discussion**

The alterations in the structure of opinion we have documented suggest that the Civil Rights Movement gained and lost opinion allies from the riots of 1967. Broadly speaking, people continued to see riots as expressing legitimate grievances while substantially losing the sense that violence might help—but this ‘mass public’ understanding hides important counterpublic patterns. Consistent with Lee (2002), opinions differed by race. Black respondents attributed more legitimate causes for the violence than whites, both before and after the riots. Opinions on effectiveness were close before the riots, then diverged after. Race was a master frame guiding interpretation and

became more so as the riots progressed. It shaped where people turned for information, how violence was depicted in those sources, and the conversation networks where reports were interpreted (Davenport, 2010).

Within that primary public-counterpublic divide (race), other interpretive processes appear to have been at work in subgroups, reshaping the movement's array of opinion allies. The movement enhanced existing support among some core constituents—Black men in particular—but it also gained opinion allies among college educated whites. On the other hand, the violence did nothing to spur—and may have lost—some Black women's optimism about impact. White women may have been potential opinion allies before the riots, seeming more sympathetic than white men, but they held firm against a rising tide of legitimate attributions after.

The story here, then, is not only that violence moved opinions, but that it also realigned subgroups. Realignment like this forced the hand of Civil Rights Movement leaders to reorient the demands they expressed and the publics and counterpublics to which they appealed. Policymakers, attuned to shifts in movement direction and public opinion, similarly redirected their public statements and policy responses (Blumberg, 1991).

### ***Limitations***

Using data from the past to study the impact of collective violence on public opinion is valuable, but the approach has limitations. Pairing these surveys provides an unusual opportunity to assess the impact of extraordinary historical events. The half-

century old data, however, were not collected for our present purposes, which raises challenges. For one, the study design is based on two cross-sectional surveys—not a panel study, and therefore differences in the surveys and samples may impact the results. While the samples are drawn from the same cities and correspond substantially on demographic factors, unobserved factors may be distorting the results.<sup>5</sup> While it is impossible to go back in time to correct these limitations, scholars should be on the lookout for opportunities to connect datasets from before and after critical events, and to construct surveys and samples after critical events that can best exploit data that was collected before it. Sometimes this can be done by leveraging surveys already in the field (Bobo et al., 1994; Legewie, 2013). Other strategies such as quickly fielding standardized surveys in non-riot locations (like suburbs or nearby cities) immediately after a violent event begins, and then following up with post-violence surveys in affected communities, could prove to be valuable as well.

Second, the study's logic is that rioting between the two surveys caused the differences we find. It is possible that influences other than rioting may have impacted respondents between the surveys. Fortunately, both surveys were conducted with explicit questioning about the riots, thereby focusing attention on a specific phenomenon. Furthermore, the 'long hot summer' was extraordinarily dominant in the news cycles of 1967, and public attention to the crisis was beyond keen. The Kerner Commission report became an instant best-seller, suggesting how broadly and intensely the American public was focused on these events.

Third, the uniqueness of the events, the attention they received, and the particular contexts of American racism from which they emerged suggest caution in generalizing our findings to episodes of collective violence surrounding other issues, in other countries, or under other state regimes (cf. Saunders & Klandermans, 2020). On the other hand, conditions in the US for Black Americans, and the subsequent emergence of protest around inequity and police brutality, have remained strikingly similar for decades. Findings about the effects of riots and protest on public opinion in the 1960s have implications for scholars, policy-makers, and movement leaders in the US today.

### ***Implications***

Violence of various kinds—instigated by police and protestors, targeting people and property—has been appearing in and around Black Lives Matter movement events since the movement’s emergence after the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. Our findings from the 1960s imply that as that violence is represented by various media and interpreted by various publics, contemporary opinions are changing in ways that can shape policy responses, state-sponsored repressive violence, and the trajectory of further protest. Studying those opinion changes, therefore, will be essential to understanding the movement and its impacts.

For example, in April of 2015, riots swept through West Baltimore on the evening of the burial of Freddie Gray, a Black man who had recently died in police custody. Afterwards, poll results emerged suggesting that members of the general public more commonly attributed the riots to ‘people seeking an excuse to engage in looting and violence’ rather than ‘longstanding frustration about police mistreatment of African-

Americans’—and the patterns were predictably divided by race (Hook, 2015). What we did not see in those statistics was the structure of opinion before the violence and, therefore, any subsequent shifts in opinion alignments as subgroups interpreted media portrayals and elite statements. How did those processes align—or divide—possible opinion allies of the Black Lives Matter movement? And how did those understandings feed into and alter subsequent waves of BLM protest, such as those that followed the police killing of George Floyd in 2020?<sup>6</sup>

Answering questions like these will be essential for understanding what happens when violence emerges in movements generally (Bell & Murdie, 2018; Braithwaite et al., 2014; Wasow, 2020) and what happens next for the Black Lives Matter movement in particular. Opinion dynamics among population subgroups—especially trajectories that cut against general trends—may provide leverage for movement actors and policy entrepreneurs (Andrews et al., 2016). Trends in other publics, however, may bolster conservative, or even reactionary, responses from authorities (Wasow, 2020). Movement leaders operating in this dynamic environment will need to manage interpretations in an attempt to strategically attract particular subgroups as opinion allies (Wang & Piazza, 2016).

In Schattschneider’s (1975 [1960]:2) classic terms, ‘the audience determines the outcomes of the fight.’ Because movements have audiences, and policymakers listen to those audiences, the policy impacts of movements will be partly shaped by the presence or absence of opinion allies in the general population—the audiences watching social movement fights. A movement with many opinion allies—within and beyond their core

constituencies—may garner a substantive policy response; a movement without such allies may be neglected or repressed. Identifying the structure of opinion by subgroup, and tracking the way movements gain and lose opinion allies as events fracture and realign those groups, should improve our understanding of the movement-policy relationship and, perhaps, allow movement actors to attract more audiences to their cause.

## Notes

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- 1 As Spilerman's (1970, 1976) studies definitively established, local conditions did not drive riot occurrence; it was a national wave. As a result, we do not posit an independent effect of local rioting—which was experienced as part of the larger national condition. Furthermore, the four cities in our study are not differentiable in terms of experiencing riots—all had multiple riots during the 1960s and all had riots during 1967. Therefore, we adopt a city fixed-effects analysis to focus our test on the pooled data patterns.
- 2 Another brief but severe spike followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, but the summer of 1967 was unquestionably the most severe and sustained sequence of the era (Myers, 1997).
- 3 We examined the samples across cities and years finding no significant differences on race, age, gender, religion, homeownership, employment, occupation, and education.
- 4 The original surveys only differentiate between those currently working outside the home and those who are not. Thus, the 'not employed' category includes unemployed, retired, students, and homemakers. While varied, none of these involves regular interactions in employment settings where interpretive conversations might occur.
- 5 For additional detail regarding the sample, survey content, and methods, see the online appendices.
- 6 Early polls suggest an omnibus shift toward believing violent protest was justified—with substantial gaps between races (CNN, 2020).

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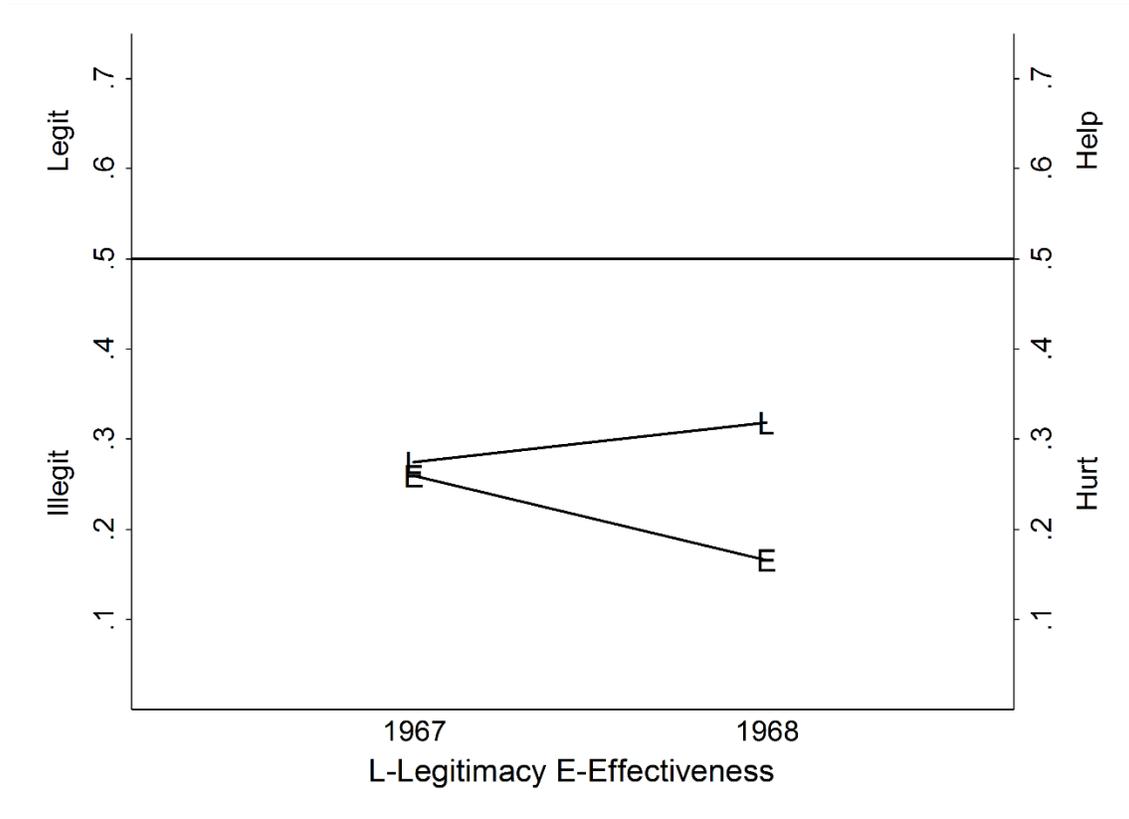
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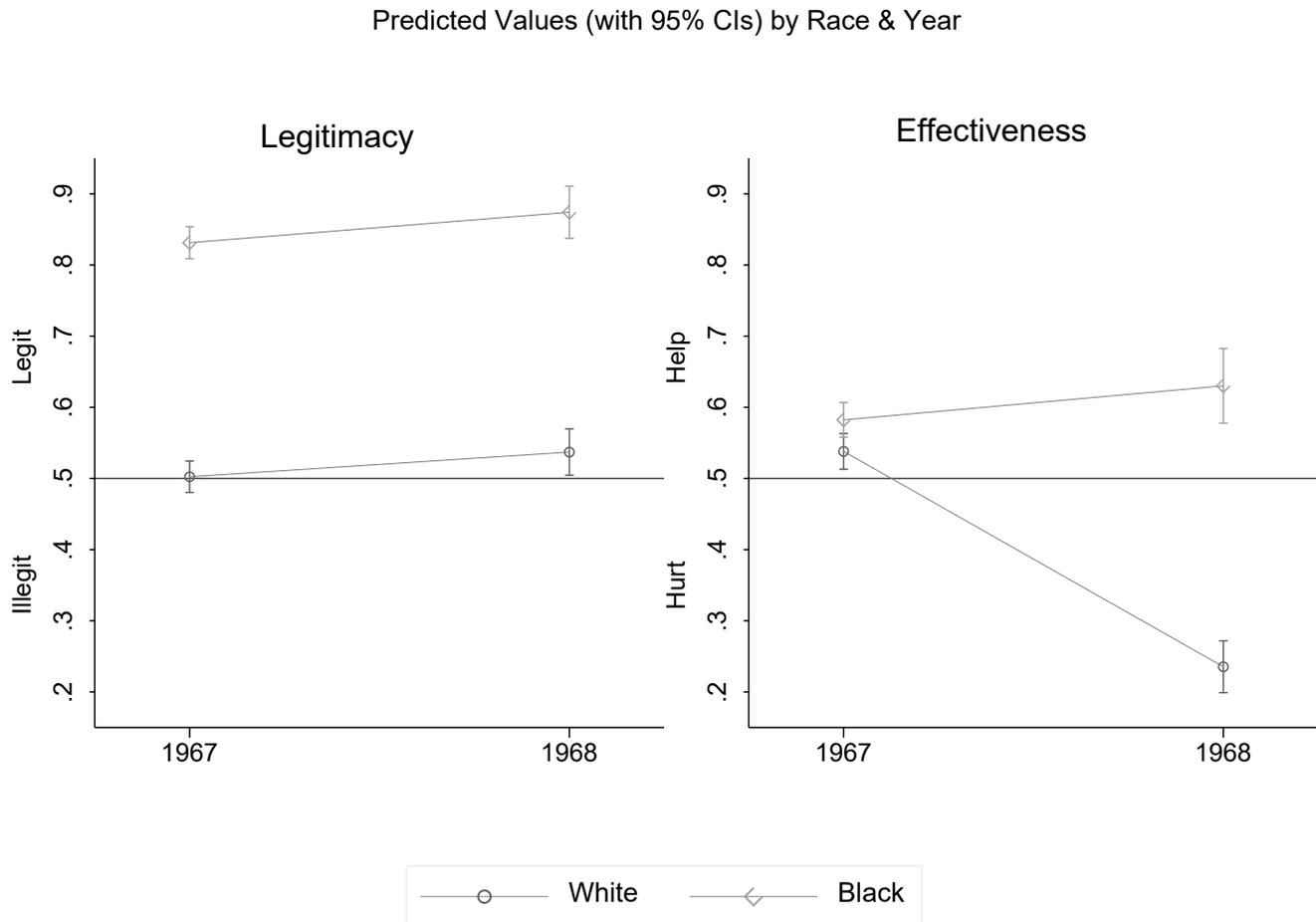
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**Figure 1.** Overall Opinions on Legitimate/Illegitimate Causes and Effectiveness, 1967-1968

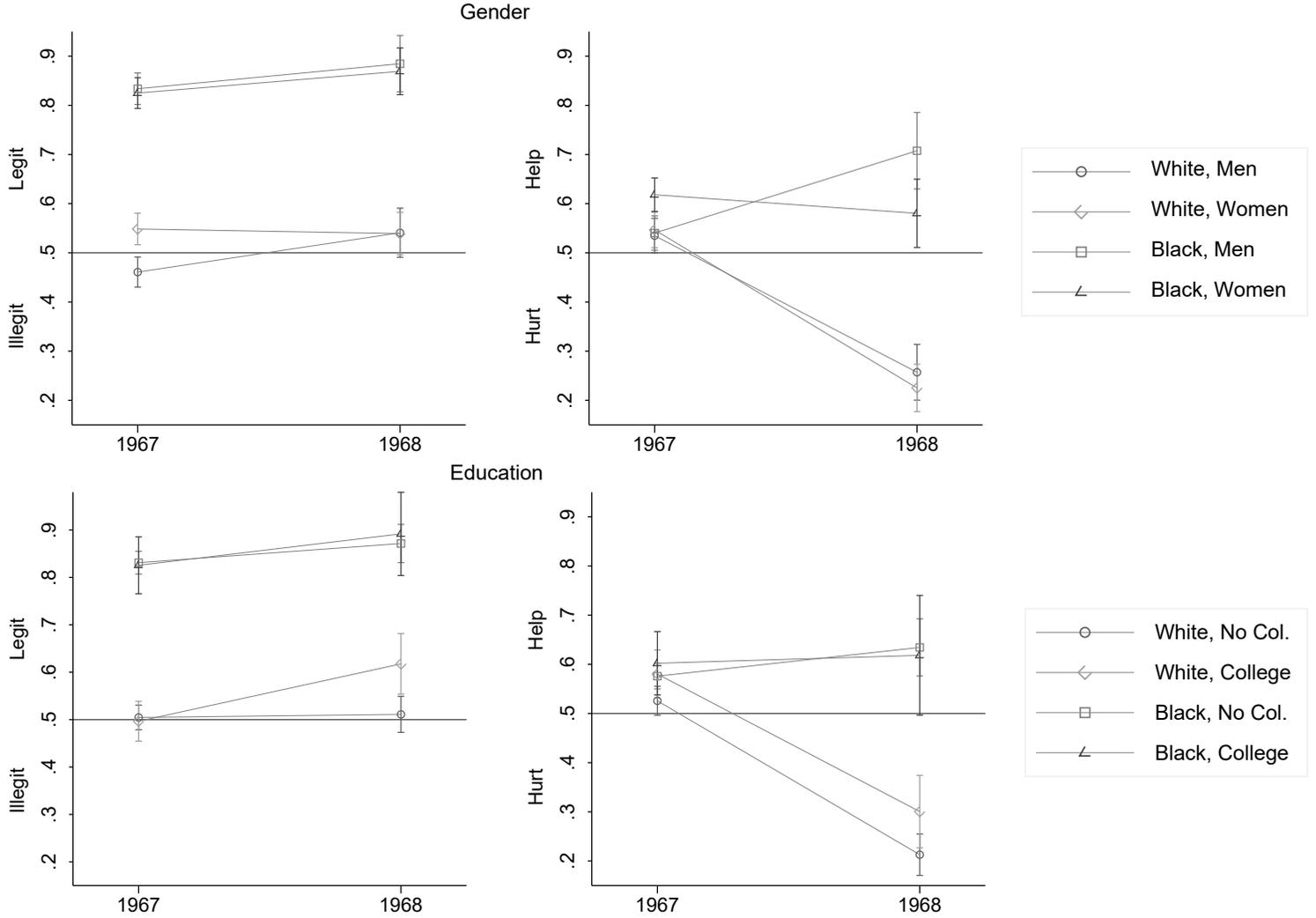


**Figure 2.** Opinions on Legitimate/Illegitimate Causes and Effectiveness by Race, 1967-1968



**Figure 3.** Opinions on Legitimate/Illegitimate Causes and Effectiveness by Intersectional Subgroups, 1967-1968

Predicted Values (with 95% CIs) by Year, Race, & Gender/Education



**Table 1.** Determinants of Opinions on Riot Legitimacy, 1967-1968 (OLS)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Main Effects</b>				
Year (1968=1)	0.0384*** (0.0148)	0.0347 (0.0200)	0.0806*** (0.0297)	0.00488 (0.0232)
Race (Black=1)	0.331*** (0.0139)	0.329*** (0.0164)	0.376*** (0.0225)	0.326*** (0.0183)
Gender (Female=1)	0.0266 (0.0143)	0.0266 (0.0143)	0.0887*** (0.0227)	0.0265 (0.0143)
Education (College=1)	0.0184 (0.0170)	0.0183 (0.0170)	0.0200 (0.0170)	-0.00611 (0.0253)
<b>Interactions</b>				
Race*Year		0.372*** (0.0220)	-0.0304 (0.0445)	0.0343 (0.0331)
Gender*Race			-0.0973*** (0.0314)	
Gender*Year			-0.0904*** (0.0401)	
Gender*Race*Year			0.0833 (0.0594)	
Education*Race				0.000383 (0.0412)
Education*Year				0.114*** (0.0451)
Education*Race*Year				-0.0886 (0.0742)
<b>Controls</b>				
Age	-0.0343*** (0.00676)	-0.0343*** (0.00676)	-0.0347*** (0.00676)	-0.0346*** (0.00676)
Homeowner	-0.0333*** (0.0144)	-0.0334*** (0.0144)	-0.0336*** (0.0144)	-0.0320*** (0.0145)
Employed	-0.0516*** (0.0148)	-0.0515*** (0.0148)	-0.0504*** (0.0148)	-0.0508*** (0.0148)
Boston	0.0768*** (0.0192)	0.0767*** (0.0192)	0.0757*** (0.0192)	0.0763*** (0.0192)
Cleveland	0.0379*** (0.0190)	0.0377*** (0.0190)	0.0352 (0.0190)	0.0378*** (0.0190)
San Francisco	0.137*** (0.0188)	0.137*** (0.0188)	0.135*** (0.0188)	0.135*** (0.0188)
Constant	0.557*** (0.0287)	0.559*** (0.0290)	0.530*** (0.0301)	0.565*** (0.0298)
Observations	3,779	3,779	3,779	3,779
R-squared	0.176	0.176	0.179	0.178
F	80.69	73.34	58.65	58.20

Sources: Roper Research Associates (1967), Campbell &amp; Schumann (1968)

Notes: \*\*\* p&lt;.001, \*\* p&lt;.01, \* p&lt;.05, (two-tailed tests). Standard errors in parentheses.

**Table 2.** Determinants of Opinions on Riot Effectiveness, 1967-1968 (Logit)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Main Effects</b>				
Year (1968=1)	-0.671*** (0.0821)	-1.364*** (0.118)	-1.230*** (0.171)	-1.444*** (0.143)
Race (Black=1)	0.489*** (0.0686)	0.185*** (0.0760)	0.0515 (0.104)	0.206*** (0.0844)
Gender (Female=1)	0.102 (0.0706)	0.0999 (0.0714)	0.0572 (0.107)	0.102 (0.0714)
Education (College=1)	0.215*** (0.0846)	0.205*** (0.0860)	0.209*** (0.0861)	0.232 (0.122)
<b>Interactions</b>				
Race*Year		0.390*** (0.130)	1.962*** (0.269)	1.689*** (0.201)
Gender*Race			0.276 (0.146)	
Gender*Year			-0.236 (0.235)	
Gender*Race*Year			-0.672 (0.355)	
Education*Race				-0.118 (0.193)
Education*Year				0.243 (0.253)
Education*Race*Year				-0.433 (0.419)
<b>Controls</b>				
Age	-0.0793*** (0.0337)	-0.0814*** (0.0342)	-0.0822*** (0.0343)	-0.0806*** (0.0342)
Homeowner	0.0416 (0.0710)	0.0268 (0.0719)	0.0270 (0.0720)	0.0365 (0.0724)
Employed	-0.0532 (0.0742)	-0.0372 (0.0751)	-0.0331 (0.0754)	-0.0323 (0.0752)
Boston	0.154 (0.0941)	0.162 (0.0952)	0.155 (0.0954)	0.165 (0.0953)
Cleveland	-0.316*** (0.0912)	-0.340*** (0.0920)	-0.348*** (0.0923)	-0.340*** (0.0922)
San Francisco	0.455*** (0.0957)	0.467*** (0.0969)	0.458*** (0.0972)	0.462*** (0.0970)
Constant	0.0673 (0.143)	0.226 (0.145)	0.252 (0.150)	0.209 (0.148)
Observations	3,981	3,981	3,981	3,981
Log-Likelihood	-2643	-2600	-2593	-2599
Chi-squared	223.3	309.3	324.2	312.0
Pseudo R-squared	0.0405	0.0561	0.0588	0.0566

Sources: Roper Research Associates (1967), Campbell &amp; Schumann (1968)

Notes: \*\*\* p&lt;.001, \*\* p&lt;.01, \* p&lt;.05, (two-tailed tests). Standard errors in parentheses.

## **APPENDICES**

**Table A1.** Riot Cause Responses by Legitimacy Code with Original Codebook Listings

Reason	Roper (1967) Codebook Listings	Campbell & Schuman (1968) Codebook Listings
<b>Coded Legitimate</b>		
Discrimination/ Mistreatment	Lack of equal rights, opportunities; discrimination, segregation, prejudice; Mistreatment of Negroes; exploitation, oppression	Discrimination, want civil rights/other treatment: want to be treated equally/like a human being; rebelled against oppression; Negroes have been pushed too much; lack of integration/cause was segregation; want equal/civil rights; want to be treated with respect
Unemployment	Unemployment, lack of job opportunities	Unemployment/lack of jobs: not enough work; not enough job opportunity (area unspecified); because unions were closed to Negroes; want equal rights to jobs
Wages		Job quality or pay: wanted better jobs/wages; discouraged about the jobs they have; Negroes can't get as good jobs as whites; get less money for same job
Housing	Poor housing, segregated housing, living conditions, overcrowding	Housing: slums; crowded living conditions; sanitary places to live; ghettos, whites won't rent to negroes; want "open/fair occupancy" legislation
Poverty		Poverty/"poor living conditions": because they're poor; born poor; lack the basic necessities of life
Schools	School conditions, integration, segregation in the schools	Education/low quality of schools: want equality in education; insufficient education; overcrowded schools; insufficient school facilities; dropouts
Facilities	Lack of recreational facilities, parks, swimming pools	Lack of/poor quality of recreation facilities
Economics	High prices, overcharging by merchant; Other social & economic conditions	Other economic conditions: high price (rents); cost of living is too high; high taxes; wanted cars like everyone else; poor welfare funds
White Violence	Shooting, killing, beating of Negroes by Whites	
Government	Ineffectual government; promises made and never kept	
Police	Police brutality; police behavior	Police attitude/harrassment/brutality: police pick up any Negro they see; they're insulting/rough you up
Communication	Lack of understanding, misunderstanding between the races	Failure to communicate: lack of understanding; because of misunderstanding between the races
Attention	To gain attention, create awareness of their problems	Because nobody listened/in order to make people listen: problems were not being solved; promises weren't kept; other ways didn't bring results; we had to awaken the community
Aspirations		Better life (aspirations for/inability to attain): because they want something more out of life; wanted a better way of living; people with no hope for the future
<b>Coded Illegitimate</b>		
Undesirables	Hoodlums, juvenile delinquents, ignorant people looking for trouble, excitement	"Undesirables": people wanting something for nothing; no respect for law; troublemakers; looters; mean people; people who wanted to create a disturbance; no home training; don't think for themselves; want more than they deserve; dropouts
Communists	Communists, radicals	Communists: Communist agitators; Russians; Maoists
Agitators	Outsiders, agitators, Negro leaders, organizations	Agitators/radicals/leaders: "black power"; Rap Brown; rabblersusers; revolutionaries; outsiders; a few of the big shots got this going; Negro leaders did it
Black Violence	Fighting, other violence started by Negroes	
Weather	The heat; the weather	
Impatience	Impatience; Negroes want too much too fast without working for it	
Power	Desire for more power, authority	
Contagion	Riots elsewhere	
Lawlessness	Lawlessness, disregard for the law	Lack of law enforcement: people know they can get away with anything; because the law is too easy on people; inability to control crime
Aimlessness	Unemployed Negroes with nothing to do	
No Cause		Respondent only says there was "no cause"
<b>Coded Missing</b>		
Emotions	Tension, frustration, resentments, pent-emotions, built up over the years; Other emotional & psychological factors	Respondent only mentions emotional feelings: repressed feelings erupted; unrest; anger; frustration; dissatisfaction; revenge; racial tensions; hatred
Other Violence	Other violent incidents, attacks, fights	
Youth		Young people/teenagers/children
Media		New media; too much publicity
Other	All other	Other: lack of God's love; whites did it to justify harsh treatment of Negro; etc.
Don't Know	Don't know	Don't Know

**Table A2: Dependent Variable Distributions**

	1967		1968	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Legitimacy</b>				
1 (All Legitimate)	1,777	62.7	689	62.1
.51-.99	40	1.4	60	5.4
.50	156	5.5	63	5.7
.01-.49	15	0.5	10	0.9
0 (All Illegitimate)	845	29.8	287	25.9
Total	2,833	100.0	1109	100.0
<b>Effectiveness</b>				
Helped <sup>a</sup>	1,838	48.4	331	26.0
Hurt <sup>a</sup>	1,464	38.5	514	40.4
Not Much Difference <sup>b</sup>			272	21.4
Helped & Hurt Equally <sup>b</sup>			101	8.0
Don't Know	497	13.1	53	4.2
Total	3,799	100.0	1271	100.0

Sources: Roper Research Associates (1967), Campbell & Schumann (1968)

Notes: <sup>a</sup>In the Roper survey, respondents were asked if they "agreed" or "disagreed" that riots would help the cause of blacks. <sup>b</sup>These options were only included in Campbell & Schumann survey. They are coded as missing (along with the Don't Know responses) in analysis.

**Table A3.** Descriptive Statistics for Items in Analyses

Variable	1967			1968			Difference in DV Means
	Item N	Mean	S.D.	Item N	Mean	S.D.	
<b>All Respondents</b>							
Legitimacy	2833	0.67	0.45	1109	0.69	0.43	0.02
Effectiveness	3302	0.56	0.50	845	0.39	0.49	-0.17
Race (Black=1)	3987	0.51	0.50	1258	0.46	0.50	
Gender (Female=1)	4037	0.52	0.50	1273	0.60	0.49	
Education (College=1)	4037	0.19	0.39	1273	0.22	0.41	
Employment (Employed=1)	3865	0.63	0.48	1273	0.55	0.50	
Age	4037	2.77	0.99	1271	2.54	1.06	
Homeowner	3977	0.41	0.49	1272	0.43	0.50	
Boston	4037	0.25	0.43	1273	0.20	0.40	
Cleveland	4037	0.25	0.43	1273	0.25	0.43	
San Francisco	4037	0.25	0.43	1273	0.25	0.43	
Pittsburgh	4037	0.25	0.43	1273	0.30	0.46	
<b>White Respondents</b>							
Legitimacy	1410	0.50	0.47	610	0.54	0.46	0.04
Effectiveness	1576	0.53	0.50	511	0.24	0.43	-0.29
Gender (Female=1)	1970	0.52	0.50	680	0.59	0.49	
Education (College=1)	1970	0.25	0.43	680	0.25	0.44	
Employment (Employed=1)	1905	0.59	0.49	680	0.54	0.50	
Age	1970	2.90	1.01	679	2.64	1.05	
Homeowner	1945	0.53	0.50	680	0.51	0.50	
Boston	1970	0.26	0.44	680	0.22	0.41	
Cleveland	1970	0.26	0.44	680	0.25	0.43	
San Francisco	1970	0.23	0.42	680	0.24	0.42	
Pittsburgh	1970	0.25	0.43	680	0.30	0.46	
<b>Black Respondents</b>							
Legitimacy	1390	0.84	0.36	485	0.88	0.30	0.04
Effectiveness	1691	0.58	0.49	322	0.63	0.48	0.05
Gender (Female=1)	2017	0.51	0.50	578	0.62	0.49	
Education (College=1)	2017	0.14	0.34	578	0.17	0.38	
Employment (Employed=1)	1912	0.67	0.47	578	0.57	0.50	
Age	2017	2.65	0.96	577	2.44	1.06	
Homeowner	1983	0.29	0.45	577	0.34	0.47	
Boston	2017	0.25	0.43	578	0.19	0.39	
Cleveland	2017	0.25	0.43	578	0.26	0.44	
San Francisco	2017	0.25	0.43	578	0.25	0.43	
Pittsburgh	2017	0.25	0.43	578	0.31	0.46	

Sources: Roper Research Associates (1967), Campbell &amp; Schumann (1968)

## Appendix A4: Information on Surveys and Samples

### Roper, 1967

The Roper survey was conducted with residents 18 and older of six paired cities (Pittsburgh and Cleveland; Dayton and Akron; Boston and San Francisco) based on shared characteristics including geographic location, size, industrialization, household incomes, education levels, occupational distribution, and history of race relations. Each pair included one city that had experienced rioting by the end of 1966 and one that had not, however all six cities experienced rioting in 1967 and multiple riots across the decade. In each city, approximately 500 Black and 500 white respondents were surveyed by an interviewer of his or her own race about race relations, rioting, and conditions in their cities. The sample was constructed using multi-stage sampling: Census tract and block within tract. Controls were also included to insure for proper representation of groups in the sample for gender, age and female employment (see <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/catalog/abstract.cfm?type=&start=&id=&archno=USLEMB1967-SIXCITY&abstract>).

### Campbell and Schuman, 1968

The sampling design for Campbell and Schuman used the non-institutionalized population between 16 and 69 years of age living in the city limits for each municipality. A three-stage sampling method (city blocks, then dwelling, then individuals) was used and city blocks were sampled proportionally relative to the number of dwelling and stratified by race. Individuals were stratified by age in the case of more than one person in a dwelling being selected. Further information is available in documentation held at ICPSR (<https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR03500.v2>).