Unfair Detention: How Protests Activated Racial Group Empathy to Shift Attitudes on Child Detention

Loren Collingwood¹
Jason Morin²
Edward Vargas³

October 24, 2018

¹University of California Riverside
²California State University, Northridge
³Arizona State University
General Research Questions and Agenda

• Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
• Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors' goals?
• If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
• Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors' goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
- Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
- But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
- Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
- But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
- Three possible aggregate opinion outcomes due to protest event:
General Research Questions and Agenda

• Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
• If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
• Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
• But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
• Three possible aggregate opinion outcomes due to protest event:
  • No opinion change
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
- Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
- But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
- Three possible aggregate opinion outcomes due to protest event:
  - No opinion change
  - Opinion change consonant with actors’ goals
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
- Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
- But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
- Three possible aggregate opinion outcomes due to protest event:
  - No opinion change
  - Opinion change consonant with actors’ goals
  - Opinion change discordant with actors’ goals
General Research Questions and Agenda

- Do protest events influence public opinion in the direction of movement actors’ goals?
- If yes, can we isolate what underlying attitudes or belief systems drive public opinion change?
- Extant research suggests yes (McAdam 1982; Wallace, Zepeda-Milán, Jones-Correa 2014)
- But protest media coverage might be biased (McCarthy and McPhail 1996; Smith et al. 2001)
- Three possible aggregate opinion outcomes due to protest event:
  - No opinion change
  - Opinion change consonant with actors’ goals
  - Opinion change discordant with actors’ goals
Administration Implements “Zero Tolerance”, Resulting in Extensive Media Coverage...
Administration Implements “Zero Tolerance”, Resulting in Extensive Media Coverage...
Case Study Research Questions

• Did #FamiliesBelongTogether protest event drive attitude change against support for child detention?
Case Study Research Questions

- Did #FamiliesBelongTogether protest event drive attitude change against support for child detention?
- If yes, what crystallized attitude drove this shift?
Case Study Research Questions

• Did #FamiliesBelongTogether protest event drive attitude change against support for child detention?
• If yes, what crystallized attitude drove this shift?
• Do people who live closer to the events exhibit greater attitude change?
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
- Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
- Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
- American Identity
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
- Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
- American Identity
- Authoritarianism
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

• Racial resentment/modern racism
• Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
• American Identity
• Authoritarianism
• Rule of Law
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
- Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
- American Identity
- Authoritarianism
- Rule of Law
- Racial group Empathy
Plausible Explanations for Detention Attitude Change

- Racial resentment/modern racism
- Latino Affect (Latino thermometer)
- American Identity
- Authoritarianism
- Rule of Law
- Racial group Empathy
Racial Group Empathy

- Ability to empathize and put oneself in others’ shoes, especially those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds
Racial Group Empathy

- Ability to empathize and put oneself in others’ shoes, especially those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds
- Battery Examples (7 item index):
Racial Group Empathy

- Ability to empathize and put oneself in others’ shoes, especially those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds
- Battery Examples (7 item index):
  - I sometimes try to better understand people of other racial or ethnic groups by imagining how things look from their perspective.
Racial Group Empathy

• Ability to empathize and put oneself in others’ shoes, especially those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds

• Battery Examples (7 item index):
  • I sometimes try to better understand people of other racial or ethnic groups by imagining how things look from their perspective.
  • If I’m sure I’m right about something, I don’t waste much time listening to the arguments of people, particularly those of other racial or ethnic groups.
Racial Group Empathy

- Ability to empathize and put oneself in others’ shoes, especially those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Battery Examples (7 item index):
  - I sometimes try to better understand people of other racial or ethnic groups by imagining how things look from their perspective.
  - If I’m sure I’m right about something, I don’t waste much time listening to the arguments of people, particularly those of other racial or ethnic groups.
  - Before criticizing somebody from another racial or ethnic group, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.
CNN Broadcast Segment
Reference to #FamiliesBelongTogether

Theme in Text
- Blue: Protest
- Dashed Red: Sadness/Empathy
- Dashed Purple: Separation

Protest Date

Date
- Jun 01
- Jun 15
- Jul 01
- Jul 15
- Aug 01

Count of Theme in News Segments
- 0
- 20
- 40
- 60
- 80
- 100

Why Racial Group Empathy?
Why Racial Group Empathy?

Daily 'Zero Tolerance Policy' Newspaper Stories
(NYT, WAPO, USAToday, CSM)

- Article Count
- Empathy Headline (46.6%)
- Not Empathy Headline

Protest Date Announced
Expectations/Hypotheses

• **H1, Attitude Change**: Respondents interviewed after the protest will be more likely to oppose detaining children in lock-up than they were before the protest.
Expectations/Hypotheses

- **H1, Attitude Change**: Respondents interviewed after the protest will be more likely to oppose detaining children in lock-up than they were before the protest.

- **H2, Empathy (“Moderator”)**: “Lock-up” attitude change will be driven primarily by racial group empathy, not other crystallized racial or group-related attitudes.
Expectations/Hypotheses

- **H1, Attitude Change**: Respondents interviewed after the protest will be more likely to oppose detaining children in lock-up than they were before the protest.

- **H2, Empathy ("Moderator")**: “Lock-up” attitude change will be driven primarily by racial group empathy, not other crystallized racial or group-related attitudes.

- **H3, Protest Density**: Respondents living in Census tracts with protests will be disproportionately likely to connect racial empathy to opposition to detaining children.
Data and Method

• Two wave panel survey of same respondents bookending protests

4 Ordered logits produce substantively and statistically similar results.
Data and Method

- Two wave panel survey of same respondents bookending protests
- Source: Amazon’s Mechanical Turk

\(^4\) Ordered logits produce substantively and statistically similar results.
Data and Method

- Two wave panel survey of same respondents bookending protests
- Source: Amazon’s Mechanical Turk
- Wave 1 (before protest day): June 27-28, 2018, n=2014 respondents

\[4\] Ordered logits produce substantively and statistically similar results.
Data and Method

- Two wave panel survey of same respondents bookending protests
- Source: Amazon’s Mechanical Turk
- Wave 1 (before protest day): June 27-28, 2018, n=2014 respondents
- Wave 2 (after protest day): July 2-9, 2018, n=1464 respondents

\[\text{Ordered logits produce substantively and statistically similar results.}\]
Data and Method

- Two wave panel survey of same respondents bookending protests
- Source: Amazon’s Mechanical Turk
- Wave 1 (before protest day): June 27-28, 2018, n=2014 respondents
- Wave 2 (after protest day): July 2-9, 2018, n=1464 respondents
- Two wave moderated OLS regression analysis with controls

\[^4\text{Ordered logits produce substantively and statistically similar results.}\]
Data and Method

- Dependent Variable: Immigrant detention facilities are places where the government holds unauthorized immigrants awaiting deportation or immigration court. Unauthorized immigrants can be detained by the government or stay with family members as they wait for their court hearing. Please indicate whether you strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the policy: *Process and charge all unauthorized immigrants, but do not detain in lock-up, any immigrant children for more than a few hours.*
Data and Method

• Dependent Variable: Immigrant detention facilities are places where the government holds unauthorized immigrants awaiting deportation or immigration court. Unauthorized immigrants can be detained by the government or stay with family members as they wait for their court hearing. Please indicate whether you strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the policy: *Process and charge all unauthorized immigrants, but do not detain in lock-up, any immigrant children for more than a few hours.*

• Treatment: Actual protest event
Data and Method

• Dependent Variable: Immigrant detention facilities are places where the government holds unauthorized immigrants awaiting deportation or immigration court. Unauthorized immigrants can be detained by the government or stay with family members as they wait for their court hearing. Please indicate whether you strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the policy: *Process and charge all unauthorized immigrants, but do not detain in lock-up, any immigrant children for more than a few hours.*

• Treatment: Actual protest event

• Moderator: Racial Group Empathy 7-item scale
Data and Method

- Dependent Variable: Immigrant detention facilities are places where the government holds unauthorized immigrants awaiting deportation or immigration court. Unauthorized immigrants can be detained by the government or stay with family members as they wait for their court hearing. Please indicate whether you strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the policy: *Process and charge all unauthorized immigrants, but do not detain in lock-up, any immigrant children for more than a few hours.*

- Treatment: Actual protest event

- Moderator: Racial Group Empathy 7-item scale

- Alternative Hypotheses: Racial resentment; American Identity; Latino Affect; Rule of Law; Authoritarianism
Placebos

- Generalized immigration attitudes (increase, stay the same, decrease)
- Keystone Pipeline
Is Protest Legitimate “Treatment”? 

Interest over time

Search hits

Date

Jun 01 Jun 15 Jul 01

child detention (US)
child separation (US)
families belong together (US)
zero tolerance (US)
Protest Locations

#FamiliesBelongTogether Protest Locations
Wave 2 Respondent Locations
Results: Main Effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W1_Mean</th>
<th>W2_Mean</th>
<th>Abs_Diff</th>
<th>T_Stat</th>
<th>P_Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1 all respondents; wave 2</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.99</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1 who take Wave 2</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: T-tests wave 1 and wave 2: Process and charge all unauthorized immigrants, but do not detain in lock-up, any immigrant children for more than a few hours. (oppose to support)
Results: Moderation

**Figure:** Regression model controls for wave 1 covariates: American identity, racial resentment, Latino affect, authoritarianism, rule of law, Trump approval, and demographic controls.
Results: Moderation X Protest Density

Figure: Regression model controls for wave 1 covariates: American identity, racial resentment, Latino affect, authoritarianism, rule of law, Trump approval, and demographic controls.
In Conclusion...

- #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers
In Conclusion...

- #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers
- The effects are greatest in high protest-density areas
In Conclusion...

- #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers.
- The effects are greatest in high protest-density areas.
- Suggests possible treatment heterogeneity; requires more investigation with more controlled design.
In Conclusion...

• 
  
  #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers

• The effects are greatest in high protest-density areas

• Suggests possible treatment heterogeneity; requires more investigation with more controlled design

• New methodology for evaluating protest efficacy leading to new theories of event-based public opinion
In Conclusion...

- #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers
- The effects are greatest in high protest-density areas
- Suggests possible treatment heterogeneity; requires more investigation with more controlled design
- New methodology for evaluating protest efficacy leading to new theories of event-based public opinion
- Essential to work with real-world actors to access necessary data
In Conclusion...

- #FamiliesBelongTogether generated short-term opposition against locking children in detention centers
- The effects are greatest in high protest-density areas
- Suggests possible treatment heterogeneity; requires more investigation with more controlled design
- New methodology for evaluating protest efficacy leading to new theories of event-based public opinion
- Essential to work with real-world actors to access necessary data
- Add observational data component (i.e., look at turnout in high-protest areas; generalizable survey)
Appendix: External Validity Mechanism Check

• Convenience Sample of 100 undergraduates:
• On a scale between 1 and 7, where 1 means you did NOT feel this way and 7 means you felt VERY STRONGLY this way – how much did the image make you empathize with families affected by zero tolerance immigration policy, which led to the indefinite detainment of undocumented children?
  • Girl crying image empathy rating: 6.1/7; Emotions most connected: Sadness and Anger
  • Children in cages empathy rating: 6.2/7; Emotions most connected: Sadness, Anger, Disgust
Appendix: Empathy Battery

• I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both, including for issues involving other racial or ethnic groups.

• I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the “other person’s” point of view, particularly someone from another race or ethnicity.

• When I am upset at someone from another racial or ethnic group, I usually try to “put myself in their shoes” for a while.

• I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement (including those of other racial or ethnic groups) before I make a decision.
Appendix: Empathy Battery

• I sometimes try to better understand people of other racial or ethnic groups by imagining how things look from their perspective.

• If I’m sure I’m right about something, I don’t waste much time listening to the arguments of people, particularly those of other racial or ethnic groups.

• Before criticizing somebody from another racial or ethnic group, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.