

# Spatial and Temporal Proximity: Examining the Effects of Protests on Political Attitudes

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*This article utilizes data from the Latino National Survey (2006) to analyze temporal and spatial variation in the effects of the immigrant rights marches in 2006 on Latino attitudes towards trust in government and self-efficacy. Using a unique protest dataset, we examine the effects of proximity and scale by mapping respondents' specific geographic location against the location of the marches as well as size of the protests using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). We find that local proximity to small marches had a positive impact on feelings of efficacy, whereas large-scale protests led to lower feelings of efficacy. The results shed light on the role localized political events can play in shaping feelings towards government, the importance of conceptions of space and time to the study of social movements, and the positive outcomes that can result from contentious politics.*

Early explanations of social movements portrayed them as irrational acts by disgruntled individuals that could easily spread to alienated segments of society and threaten democracy (Buechler 2000, 30). By the 1970s, a new generation of theorists asserted that large-scale collective action was not symptomatic of societal alienation, but the manifestation of political efficacy through “politics by other means.” These scholars contended that those engaging in activism were actually among the most socially integrated members of society, motivated by their beliefs in social justice (McAdam 1982). According to Tarrow, it is precisely in periods of increased contention that challengers have the best opportunities to make the types of broad social changes they desire (2011, 201). A key factor that affects the ability of activists to achieve their goals is whether they are able to gain the support of spectators during episodes of heightened contention (199). As Gamson notes, in the midst of a protest wave, “bystanders don’t necessarily stay bystanders but can become engaged as new players in ways

that alter the power dynamics among the existing players” (2004, 242). But for members of the general public to support and/or participate in social movements, they must first believe that their actions can make a difference (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2004, 421). Thus, the question of whether protests make potential actors feel more efficacious or alienated is of utmost importance.

While more optimistic portrayals of social movements have come to dominate the literature, there exists little systematic evidence of the cognitive impacts of protests. As such, the primary research question driving our study is, do social movements trigger a sense of political efficacy or political alienation? We hypothesize that large-scale collective action can have varying (both positive and negative) effects on public attitudes about politics.

The primarily Latino 2006 protest wave provides an excellent opportunity for us to test this hypothesis. In the spring of 2006, up to five million people took part in more than 350 demonstrations across the country in

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response to proposed federal anti-immigrant legislation, H.R. 4437, also known as the Sensenbrenner bill. The 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS; Fraga et al. 2006) provides a unique vehicle for observing individual-level political attitudes and behavior as this wave of national protest occurred. The LNS, combined with our *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset*, allows for the consideration of measures of both spatial and temporal proximity to explain differential results in attitudes towards efficacy of, trust in, and alienation from government. We find that proximity to greater numbers of small marches had a positive impact on feelings of political efficacy, whereas exposure to larger protests led to a greater sense of political alienation. A second unique dataset of qualitative interviews reinforces our results and fleshes out the findings in the models. We argue that the differing effects protests have on attitudes hinge on the types of frames deployed in large versus small marches.

## Political Alienation, Efficacy, and Trust

Since their introduction to the American National Election Studies (ANES) in 1962 (Stokes 1962), measures of political alienation, which reflect the degree of efficacy and trust individuals place in the political system, have played a central role in the study of political behavior. The theoretical argument behind this attention has been that political alienation is central to democratic conceptions of legitimacy (Aberbach 1969; Finifter 1970; Miller 1971). There is a considerable literature that indicates that feelings of political alienation in turn shape other political attitudes and behaviors, with people who feel alienated less likely to participate in voting and other political activities (Gilliam and Kaufman 1988; Kuklinski 2001; Tate 2003). For their part, trust and efficacy have been positively linked to political participation (Hetherington 1999; Plane and Gershtenson 2004) and political attitudes (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Mabry and Kiecolt 2005; but see Seligson 1983). In short, people who feel a sense of efficacy and trust are more likely to participate in politics, while those who feel alienated from politics are unlikely to make political participation their preferred avenue to address grievances.

While their findings vary somewhat by individuals' national origin, citizenship, and place of birth, studies that focus specifically on Latino political alienation, efficacy, and trust show similar results. The evidence suggests, however, that Latinos feel even less efficacious than other ethnic and racial groups, although the amplitude

of these findings varies depending on whether scholars use internal versus external measures of political efficacy (Michelson 2000; Pantoja and Segura 2003). Research on foreign-born Latinos also indicates that their feelings of political alienation increase over time in the United States and are correlated with perceptions of discrimination (Michelson 2001, 2003), though these effects can be mitigated by pan-ethnic self-identification (Schildkraut 2005). Moreover, several scholars of Latino politics have found that descriptive representation may also lessen feelings of political alienation (Pantoja and Segura 2003), especially when Latinos are represented by elected officials who share their same national origin (Sanchez and Morin 2011).

While the literature on feelings of political efficacy and alienation among Latinos points to the importance of context and experience, it is less clear in general how political efficacy, trust, and alienation are themselves shaped or what mechanisms drive changes in levels of these variables. This lacuna was pointed out early on by Miller (1971), who noted a general absence of models with trust or alienation as outcomes rather than as independent variables and the failure to account for the temporal aspect of these causal arguments. Levi and Stoker (2000) summarized the various explanations that have been put forward over the years for the levels (falling over time) of political alienation, efficacy, and trust in American politics. These include the spread of television and its "critical or cynical measures of and about politicians and government" (Capella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1992), perceptions of crime and family decline (Hetherington 1998; Mansbridge 1997), and increasing disenchantment with politicians as a group (Craig 1993; Lawrence 1997). There is also evidence that individuals' responses to ANES items on trust reflect their support or dislike for administration-specific policies (see Citrin and Green 1986; Hetherington 1999; Levi and Stoker 2000, 488), but the broader trajectory of public attitudes around alienation, efficacy, and trust is at least in part independent of short-term considerations of public policy.

The problem each of these scholars has encountered is that their ability to make claims about the impact of policies, contexts, and behaviors on feelings of trust and alienation are limited by the nature of the available data. Like the Miller (1971) study, almost all research linking political variables to measures of alienation, efficacy, and trust is based on evidence of changes in aggregate public opinion over time. However, the causal argument that these scholars have sought to make between various independent variables and their effects on measures of alienation remains largely suggestive. As Levi and Stoker point out, the primarily behavioral approach to broader questions of

alienation leaves “many questions about individual-level causes and consequences of political trust judgments, and their over time dynamics” still unresolved (2000, 500).<sup>1</sup> While there is considerable evidence of linkages between alienation/efficacy/trust measures and behavioral outcomes among the general population, and for Latinos particularly, the research on influences shaping these measures is considerably hazier.

## **Time, Space, and the Effects of Protests on Public Opinion**

In his review of several national surveys that touched on issues of immigration and the immigrant marches, DeSipio found that “public opinion, with the exception of Latino public opinion, was not moved dramatically by the 2006 immigrant rights protests” (2011, 221). Other scholars have found that the rallies did have important agenda-setting effects that shifted voters’ attitudes, particularly towards the foreign-born. For example, Dunaway, Abrajano, and Branton’s (2007) research showed that the protests increased the media’s attention to, and heightened the general public’s perception of, the issue of immigration. Using exit-poll data from three different states, Cohen-Marks, Nuno, and Sanchez (2008, 708) found that the marchers’ efforts to include pro-American messages did not improve perceptions of Mexican immigrants, particularly among whites, conservatives, and Republicans.

With regard to Latino public opinion specifically, examinations of the rallies have focused on questions such as who participated and why, and how Latinos—the ethnic group that made up the majority of the marchers—viewed the demonstrations (Barreto et al. 2009; Pallares and Flores-Gonzalez 2010; Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011). Silber Mohamed (2013) takes a different tack, examining the protests’ impact on Latino pan-ethnicity, but the data she uses only allow her to make claims about the temporal and not spatial effects of the demonstrations on Latino public opinion.

Scholars who have examined the specific impact of the rallies on the political efficacy of Latinos and their trust in government have found the demonstrations had positive effects on these two variables (Barreto et al. 2009; Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011). Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler argue that rather than viewing the 2006 marches as acts of defiance, they should be understood as evidence of Latinos’ and immigrants’ faith in the U.S. political system

(2011, 235), and that attitudes towards the marches are positive predictors of future Latino voter mobilization. However, these studies are limited in that the data they utilize are drawn from a single point in time, either from surveys undertaken during the demonstrations (Barreto et al. 2009) or after the protest wave had subsided (Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011; Suro and Escobar 2006), thus failing to capture potentially important temporal effects of the marches. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned research examines the possible spatial dimensions of the 2006 demonstrations, such as whether proximity to marches and rallies influences public opinion. This is not surprising given that both space (Sewell 2001) and time (McAdam and Sewell 2001) are among the “silent voices” in the study of contentious politics.

While movements can have widespread cultural consequences (Earl 2004; Goodwin and Jasper 2003), most research on the effects of political activism focuses on its contributions to changes in public policy rather than its impact on public opinion (Burstein 1999; Kriesi and Wisler 1999; Soule and Olzak 2004). This is despite the fact that movements often seek to influence people’s attitudes as well as public policy. One reason the effects of social movements on public opinion may be understudied is that scholars cannot predict when social movements will occur (Lee 2002, 42), and thus the timing of protests and the administration of surveys do not usually coincide (Banaszak and Ondercin 2009, 12). As a result, studies that do examine the relationship between contentious politics and public attitudes usually look at how public opinion influences social movements (see Burstein 1999; Guigni and Yamasaki 2009; Uba 2009). Social movement scholars rarely study the reverse: how mass mobilizations impact public opinion. The few studies taking this latter approach have found a range of effects, with movement activities having little (Guigni 2004) to modest (Banaszak and Ondercin 2009, 27) influence on public attitudes.

## **Theory: How the Scale and Scope of Protests Impact Political Attitudes**

While the literature suggests that collective action can have a range of impacts on political attitudes, students of contentious politics have undertheorized how and when the scope (i.e., the number of protests) and scale (i.e., the size of rallies) of mobilizations can produce different kinds of effects on public opinion. We hypothesize that it is the frequency of exposure to, rather than the size of, contention that is most likely to bring about the empowering cognitive effects that activists aim to produce when staging political demonstrations.

<sup>1</sup>Experimental approaches might allow some purchase on this problem. Levi and Stoker (2000) cite Sigelman, Sigelman, and Walkosz (1992); Brehm and Rehm (1997); and Hetherington (1998) as examples.

With regard to the *size* of protests, social movement scholars have found that large turnouts at demonstrations can be a double-edged sword for activists. On the one hand, larger protests increase the likelihood of attracting the media attention that organizers seek. But on the other hand, larger rallies also present greater challenges for activists, especially when it comes to projecting a unified message (Kriesi 2004, 86; Meyer 2007, 96), because media outlets often highlight internal movement divisions during their coverage of protests (Gitlin 2003; see also Smith et al. 2001, 1398). This is important to note because, according to Benford, contradictory or divergent movement frames hinder the degree to which activists' messages resonate with their targeted populations (1993, 692). As such, we theorize that larger mobilizations are *more* likely to enhance feelings of political alienation because they increase the risk that individuals are exposed to *intra*-movement frame disputes. During a protest wave, when the social movement claiming to speak on behalf of a specific segment of society is seen as fractious or divided, we find it reasonable to expect that potential movement sympathizers will express a greater pessimism in their own capacity to effect political change.

Yet while they can sometimes enhance feelings of alienation, we believe that protests also have the power to increase feelings of political efficacy. In his classic text, *Power in Movement*, Tarrow highlights the diffusion of activism to new and less organized sectors of societies as one of the defining features of "cycles of contention" (2011, 192, 199). Accordingly, we believe that it is the frequency of exposure to protests that helps create feelings of political empowerment and the ability to bring about political change. Because activists are better able to maintain a unified message when protests are smaller, we expect that as the number of protests that occur within the vicinity of individuals grows, so will feelings of political efficacy among those exposed. Overall, our argument is that people experience the power of movements spatially. When they witness, hear about, or become aware of an increase in protests near them, we posit that this can trigger a greater sense of political efficacy. The following section describes how we use the case of the (primarily Latino) 2006 protest wave to test our theoretical assertions.

## Data and Methods

To analyze the impact of spatial, temporal, and magnitude components of social movements on political attitudes, we examine the 2006 immigrant rights protest wave by using a large behavioral survey of Latino respondents that

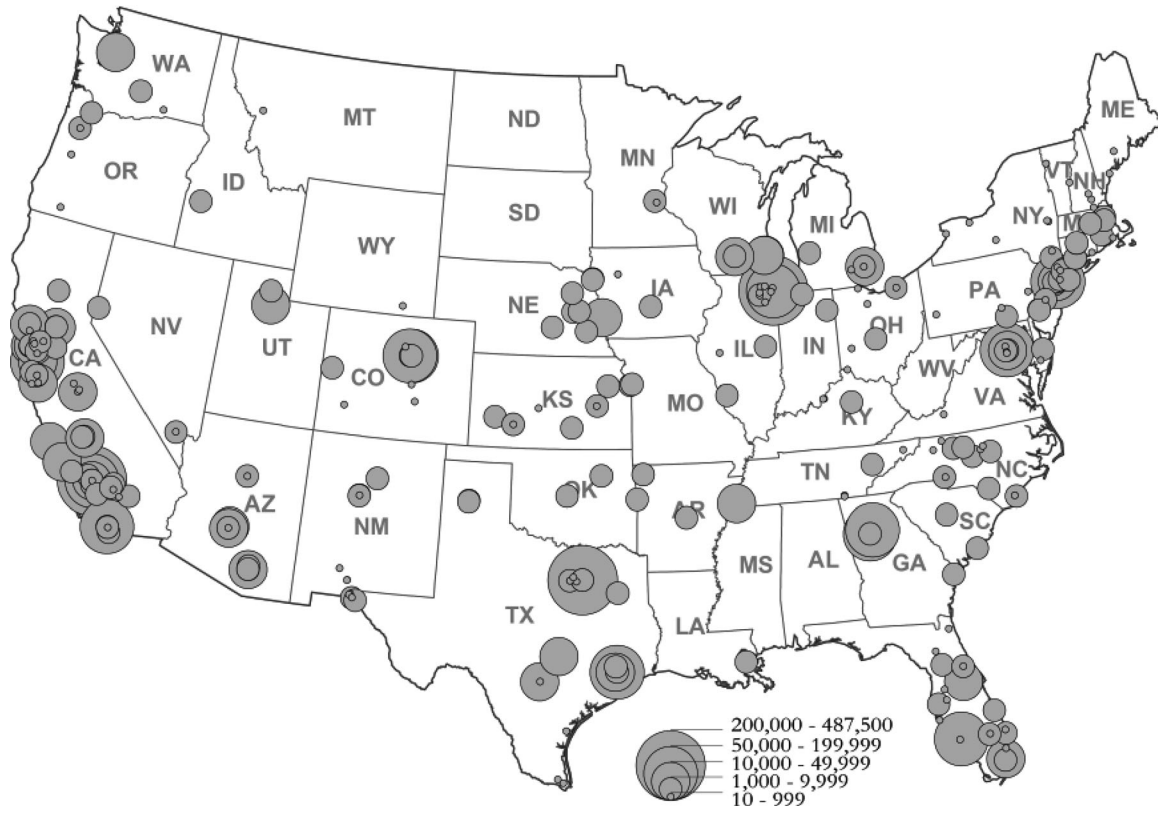
included a wide range of questions, our newly created *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset*, and over 120 interviews with protest organizers. One distinct advantage of this analysis over other work examining social movements and political attitudes is that the survey we rely on for our analysis, the LNS, was in the field before, during, and after the protest cycle. This allows us to assess how the protests affected political attitudes over the course of the movement.

The LNS was conducted in 17 states between November 2005 and August 2006. Interviews were conducted by phone, and respondents were given the option to take the survey in Spanish or English. We focus on five variables relating to attitudes towards government and capture political alienation more broadly speaking. Our first dependent variable is based on a question that asks respondents to evaluate the role of big interests in government and whether big interests represent people like them. This question is often used as a proxy for political alienation (see Pantoja and Segura 2003; Sanchez and Morin 2011). Secondly, we examine political efficacy directly by utilizing a question asking respondents whether they believe they have a say in government. Our third dependent variable is a measure of whether people find the political process complicated and hard to understand. This indicator also serves as a proxy for political alienation since, if people find the political process difficult to understand, they are less likely to participate or believe they can meaningfully contribute to a public dialogue on politics. Our fourth measure reflects engagement with government; the item asks whether respondents believe it is better to have no contact with government. Finally, our last avenue of inquiry is an item indicating respondents' attitudes towards trust in government.<sup>2</sup> The LNS instrument contained an exact date of interview as well as the specific address of each respondent. Critically, this information allowed us to measure respondents' distance to protests in terms of time and space.

Our *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset* builds on a previous collection of the 2006 protest events (Bada et al. 2006, sometimes referred to as the Fox dataset) by substantially expanding the number of protest observations and the specific information regarding each demonstration using data the authors collected both during and after the 2006 protest wave. To be confident in the validity of our dataset, we utilized newspaper archives to find at least one article to substantiate the details of each protest observation (both in the original Bada et al. dataset and our additional observations). For each protest event, we

<sup>2</sup>For a full list of survey items, see the online supplementary information.

**FIGURE 1 Immigrant Rights Marches by Location and Number of Participants during Spring 2006**



also identified the specific geographical street address, city, zip code, and state information, as well as the number of participants<sup>3</sup> and the date of the event. In all, we verified and collected data on a total of 357 immigrant protest events that took place in 2006 in response to the proposed federal immigration legislation.<sup>4</sup>

The first protest in our dataset occurred on February 14, 2006, and the final series of demonstrations culminated on May 1, 2006. The protests were widely dispersed across the country, taking place in both urban and rural places. Their locations were not restricted to typical immigrant-gateway areas in California, Texas, or New York, but also included new immigrant-receiving destinations throughout the South and Midwest. The number of participants in these protests varied from 10 to over 750,000. Despite the variance, the majority of the

marches involved fewer than 10,000 people: of the 357 protests, in only 44 were there over 10,000 participants. Figure 1 maps the geographic locations of the protests, with the size of the circles reflecting the number of participants. Figure 2 depicts the distribution of the protest cycle in terms of both the number of protests and the number of participants. The graph illustrates three peak points in the number of protest events around March 25, April 10, and May 1.

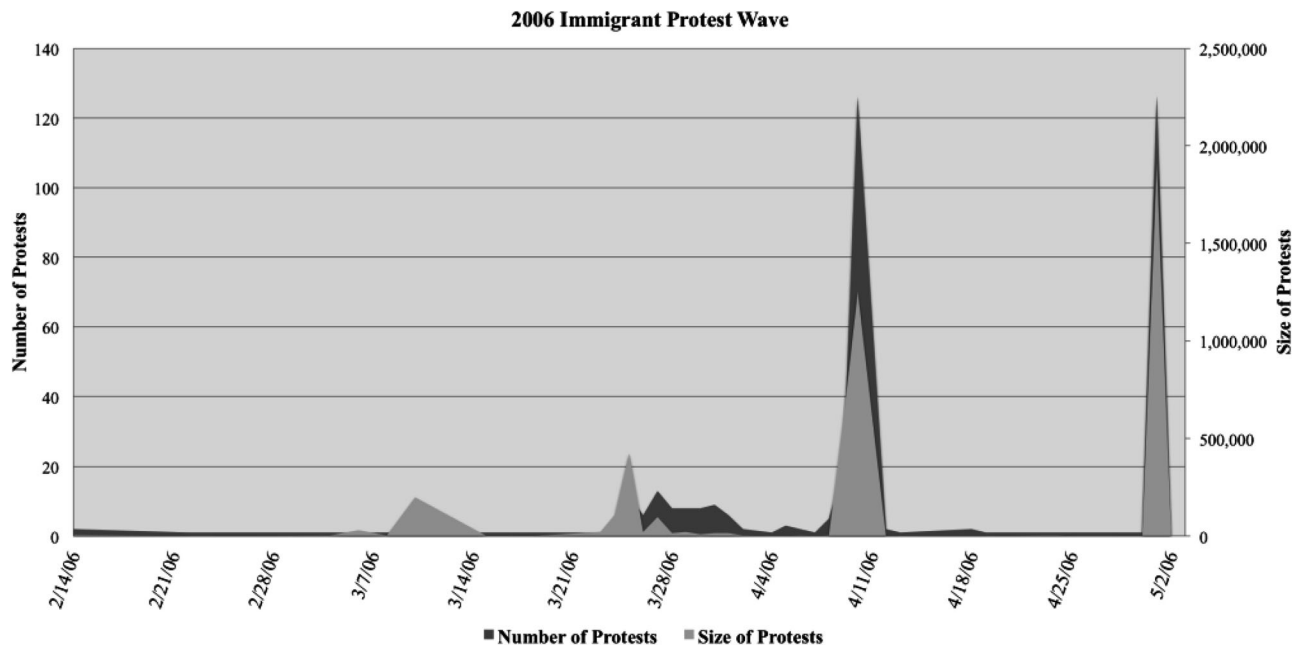
To examine the effects of protests on political attitudes, we merged the LNS and the protest dataset<sup>5</sup> to calculate the distance between respondents and the demonstration using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

<sup>3</sup>For discussion of protest-size estimates in terms of variance and accuracy, see McPhail and McCarthy (2004), Watson and Yip (2011), and McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith (1996). See as well the supplementary information section "Protest Size Estimates."

<sup>4</sup>Our protest data include 106 more events than the earlier Bada et al. (2006) table of protest events. Similar to Bada et al., our dataset does not include counter (anti-immigrant) protests which might have taken place at the time.

<sup>5</sup>Analysis is run on the entire LNS sample with results in Table 1. We contend that since the protest variables measure the effect of exposure to protest, it is theoretically appropriate to include those interviewed from before the marches begin since their value of exposure is zero. However, some may argue that the analysis should be limited to only those interviewed after the protests began on February 14, 2006. The models were rerun with the sample limited to those interviewed after February 14, 2006, and the results are contained in Table S5 of the supplementary information. The results indicate the strength of the protest variables on Models 1–3 are slightly attenuated; however, they mostly remain significant and in the same direction.

FIGURE 2 Number and Size of Protests over the Immigrant Rights Protest Wave



Scholars have increasingly utilized GIS to estimate the effect of space on political behavior (Enos 2010), accessibility to the ballot (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003), and voter turnout (Dyck and Gimpel 2005; Haspel and Knotts 2005). We used the address information of LNS respondents to calculate their exact distance to every protest location. The calculations were performed after the respondent and protest addresses were geocoded. Respondents from the LNS were geocoded to the exact parcel 88% of the time, and 0.4% of respondents were matched at the block level (e.g., the 100 block of Main Street). Thirteen percent of respondents were matched to the center of their zip code due to lack of address reported by the respondent or an inability of the mapping program to identify the address because respondents reported a post office box or trailer park as their address. The protests were geocoded to an exact parcel match in 90% of cases, with the remaining 10% matched at the block level. Distance was calculated by GIS as the bird flies, not as travel distance on roads.<sup>6</sup> This level of specificity in the space

<sup>6</sup>“As the bird flies” refers to the aerial distance between two geographical points, not the driving distance. Calculating distance as the bird flies is standard practice in GIS programs because distance is calculated between two geographical points identified by longitude and latitude. While only an approximation of how individuals experience distance, this measure of distance between each respondent’s address and the location of each protest event provides a substantial level of specificity in geographical proximity that is beyond what is customary in most spatial data analysis.

measures is a significant strength of this project because it allows us to precisely assess the impact of proximity of the protest events on respondents’ political attitudes.

The raw distance measures for each respondent were then used to create summary measures to capture time, space, and magnitude—that is, the timing of the protest event, its distance from each respondent, and the size of the event. We generated two protest measures for use in the statistical analysis. The first measure, *Large Protest*, captures whether a large protest with over 10,000 participants occurred before the date of interview of the respondent. The second, *Number of Small Protests*, counts the number of protests that occurred in the 30 days preceding each respondent’s interview within a 100-mile radius. In studies of public opinion that try to capture temporal effects of events, respondents are often asked about events taking place over the last week, two weeks, or month (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000). In this study, to capture temporal effect, we set a limit of protest events taking place within 30 days of the respondent’s interview to allow for meaningful variation in the variable as well as to set a duration of time recent enough that respondents could plausibly remember, be influenced by, and/or be aware a protest occurred.

To distinguish between the effect of large protests and the cumulative effect of small protests close in proximity and time, the second protest measure includes only those protest events that were under 10,000 participants

in size.<sup>7</sup> Since our theory hinges on the difference between the effects of large versus small protests because of possible differences in messages received, it is necessary to have two protest measures that categorize exposure to protests in this manner. Moreover, we use the cut-point of 10,000 participants because this represents a significant number of people at a protest event. Because previous research suggests that protests over 1,000 people are actually quite rare (Schweingruber and McPhail 1999), we feel comfortable in conceptualizing the 10,000 figure as large. This is also a natural cut-point in the protest dataset since there is no clustering in observations around 10,000, allowing us to feel confident that despite problems with estimates of participants, we can have a reasonably high degree of certainty that we have not categorized protest erroneously in one of the two groups. For example, of the 357 protests, 276 had under 5,000 estimated participants, while 155 of the 257 involved under 1,000 estimated participants.<sup>8</sup>

To capture the effects of geographical proximity to a protest event, we calculated all protest events taking place within 100 miles of each respondent's address. In deciding the appropriate range, we targeted the maximum feasible social-geographical space that we felt most respondents would travel in their daily and regular lives. We expect 100 miles to represent the equivalent of a two-hour drive, or the maximum likely distance that an average protest participant would travel to an event, visit regularly in their social life to engage in recreational activities and visit family friends, and possibly the maximum distance people would be willing to commute for work.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, we expect information about protests to be diffused within the local context via friends, family, individual, and news experiences. These two measures of respondents' spatial and temporal proximity to protest events capture respondents' relative exposure to protests and are central to our statistical analysis.

In addition to our two protest-specific variables, we also included three sets of additional covariates that could affect attitudes towards government. The first set is gen-

eral demographic control variables.<sup>10</sup> We include age because older respondents may be more likely to hold more negative views of government.<sup>11</sup> Education is controlled for because the literature suggests that as levels of education increase, respondents may possess a higher sense of efficacy and trust in government. We also include gender to examine differences between Latinos and Latinas.

The second set of variables is related to generational status, time in the United States, and national origin groups. The models include a dummy variable for whether respondents are first generation, since they are less likely to be politically acculturated and may be more likely to find politics confusing. Given differences in Latino political attitudes based on national origin groups (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Alvarez and García-Bedolla 2003), we also include dichotomous measures for whether respondents are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, or El Salvadoran decent.<sup>12</sup> For example, Cubans are usually the most conservative among national origin groups, whereas Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are typically the most liberal. We also include a dummy variable for respondents who completed the instrument in Spanish, *Spanish Pref*, in the event that Spanish-dominant speakers vary in their attitudes. Similarly, we utilize a variable that measures the percent of a respondent's life spent in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we also include three variables related to media consumption because the source of news on politics could shape how respondents viewed the marches and their relationship with government. We include a measure for how frequently respondents watch the news on television. Second, we utilize a question asking how often respondents read a daily newspaper. We created a dichotomous variable indicating whether people rely

<sup>7</sup>We also created a *Number of Small Protests* measure that did not exclude the large marches. There was no substantive difference in the effects because only a small number of participants were exposed to a protest of more than 10,000 people within 30 days of their interview and within 100 miles of their address.

<sup>8</sup>A detailed discussion of protest estimates, 10,000 estimated participants as a cut-point, and concerns about using participants as a continuous measure is contained in the supplementary information under "Protest Size Estimates."

<sup>9</sup>See, as a reference, "Journey to Work," Table QT-P23, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. Summary File 3, Matrices, P30, P31, P33, P34 and P35. See also McKenzie and Rapino (2011).

<sup>10</sup>We do not include income in our models because 21% of respondents refused to answer this question. In the supplementary information, we present the results of the models with income included with "Refused" coded as missing in Table S1 and imputed in Table S2. The protest variables become insignificant in Model 3 on "Politics is Complicated" but hold across Models 1 and 2. In Table S2, the results for the effects of the protest variables hold across Models 1–3.

<sup>11</sup>We did not include party affiliation because we did not expect attitudes towards efficacy in government to vary substantially by party or affect the role of protests on attitudes. The models were also run to include party, and it did not change the effects of the protests on attitudes. See Table S3 in the supplementary information.

<sup>12</sup>LNS respondents could choose from 20 different countries in identifying their ancestry. We control for the five largest groups. Recent work published using the LNS use similar national origin control variables. See Barreto and Pedraza (2009), Perez (2011), Sanchez and Masuoka (2010), Stokes-Brown (2012), and Wallace (Forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup>This measure is not restricted to immigrants.

primarily on English media because we suspect English media coverage of the marches likely exhibited significant differences from Spanish-language media coverage. We now turn to a discussion of the results from the models and the substantive effects of the findings.

## Results

We estimated the models using ordered logistic regression due to the ordinal nature of the dependent variables. We used the same set of covariates to examine in separate models the effects of protests on each of the five questions dealing with attitudes towards government. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.<sup>14</sup>

The two primary variables of interest in this analysis are the protest measures labeled *Large Protest* and *Number of Small Protests*. Recall *Large Protest* measures whether a protest of over 10,000 people occurred before the date of interview. *Number of Small Protests* counts the number of protests under 10,000 people that occurred in a 30-day period before the interview and within a 100-mile distance of the respondent. *Number of Small Protests* was significant at the .05 level in Models 1 and 2 and at the .10 level in Model 3 ( $p = .08$ ). The three models with significant results on this measure use the questions based on “big interests in government,” “no say in government,” and “politics is complicated.” The results indicate that as the number of protests increases near respondents, they are more likely to have higher feelings of efficacy and more positive views of government.

The effect of a large march operated in the opposite direction. Similar to our other protest variable, the effect of a large march was significant in Models 1–3 at the .01 level. If a large protest occurred before the respondents’ interview, respondents were more likely to strongly agree that big interests rule government, they have a limited voice in government, and that politics is complicated. In essence, respondents displayed a lower sense of efficacy and higher degree of political alienation.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, neither of the protest measures was significant in Models 4 and 5, which focus on contact with government and trust in government.

<sup>14</sup>All analysis was performed using Stata 12.

<sup>15</sup>We also created a large protest variable that measured protests over 10,000 people before the date of interview and within 100 miles of the respondent’s address. The results were not substantively different from the measure we used, thus indicating that proximity to big marches in terms of space was not the key determinant of the impact. Rather, the timing of the march and the different characteristics of large marches compared to small marches appear to be the driving factors.

Turning to the controls, only a few significant variables emerge. Education is significant across Models 1–4; however, its impact in terms of directionality is inconsistent. For different national origin groups, whether a respondent is Cuban<sup>16</sup> is significant on attitudes towards government. Cuban respondents were less likely to believe that government is ruled by big interests, were less likely to believe people are better off not contacting the government, and expressed higher feelings of trust in government. For the media variables, relying primarily on English media and reading the newspaper often were statistically significant; however, the effects were not consistent in directionality across the models.<sup>17</sup>

Given the difficulties in interpreting coefficients in ordered logit models, Figures 3–5 provide a better sense of the substantive significance of each variable on attitudes towards government. The values report the difference in probability a respondent will answer the highest answer choice on the survey questions after changing the value of a given variable while holding all other variables constant.<sup>18</sup> For continuous variables, the estimate shows the first difference moving from the minimum to maximum values for each variable. For dichotomous variables, the first difference represents a change from 0 to 1. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are indicated by the lines in the figure and in brackets.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 3 examines the dependent variable of attitudes towards the influence of big interests on government. The change in the predicted probability of exposing respondents to a large protest results in an increase of 4 percentage points in the likelihood they will strongly agree that government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves. By contrast, increases in the number of protests that occurred close in time and space to respondents resulted in a 9% decrease in answering that big interests rule government. While the effects of the protests may appear modest, the effects are sizable when considering many of the substantive effects of the other

<sup>16</sup>An alternate specification of national origin groups was also created by controlling for Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central American. Central American was not significant, and it did not change the effects of protest. The results are in Table S8 of the supporting information.

<sup>17</sup>For additional model specifications, robustness checks, and exploration of various interaction terms, see the supporting information.

<sup>18</sup>Continuous variables held fixed at their means, while dichotomous variables are set to their median value. Protest variables were only statistically significant in Models 1–3, and they are the primary point of investigation; thus, we do not report substantive effects for Models 4 and 5.

<sup>19</sup>All simulations were performed using the Clarify software package (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000).

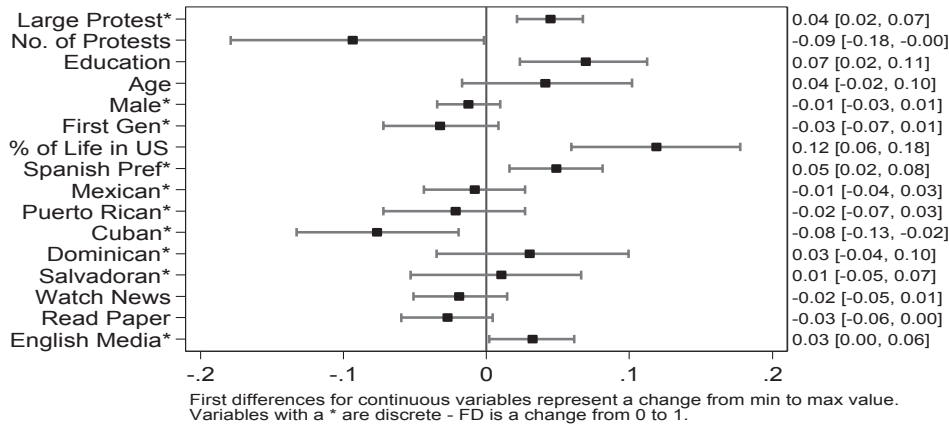


**TABLE 1 Analysis of the Effects of Immigrant Rights Marches on Attitudes towards Government**

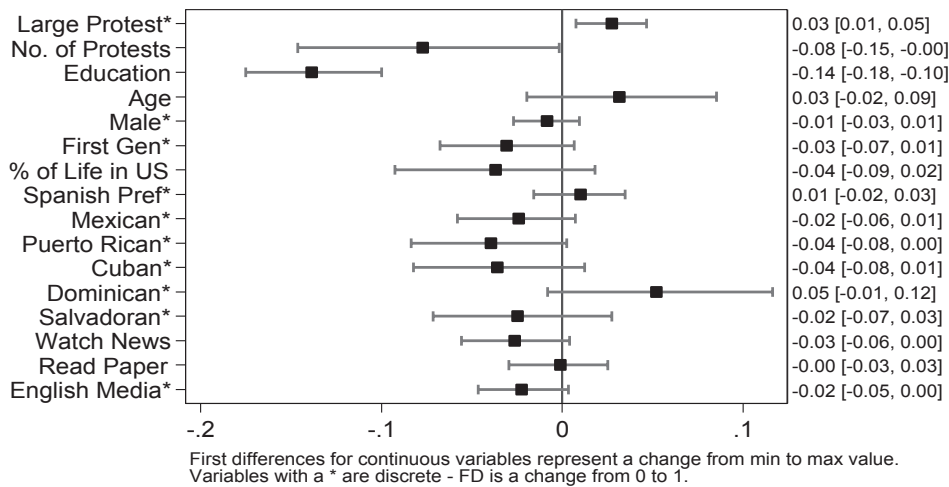
	(1) Big Interests Dominate	(2) No Say in Govt.	(3) Politics Is Complicated	(4) Avoid Contact with Govt.	(5) Trust in Govt.
Large protest	0.182** (0.049)	0.126** (0.047)	0.123** (0.047)	-0.026 (0.049)	0.061 (0.047)
Number of protests	-0.021* (0.010)	-0.020* (0.010)	-0.017+ (0.010)	-0.003 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)
Education	0.041** (0.013)	-0.088** (0.013)	-0.135** (0.013)	-0.190** (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)
Age	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.001)
Male	-0.053 (0.045)	-0.041 (0.043)	-0.257** (0.043)	0.073 (0.045)	0.055 (0.043)
First generation	-0.135 (0.088)	-0.135 (0.085)	-0.011 (0.085)	0.027 (0.089)	0.041 (0.084)
Percent of life in U.S.	0.005** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
Spanish preference	0.201** (0.065)	0.050 (0.063)	0.069 (0.063)	-0.160* (0.066)	-0.034 (0.062)
Mexican	-0.031 (0.075)	-0.105 (0.073)	0.107 (0.072)	0.003 (0.074)	0.046 (0.073)
Puerto Rican	-0.087 (0.106)	-0.188+ (0.102)	0.109 (0.102)	0.003 (0.108)	-0.016 (0.102)
Cuban	-0.320** (0.122)	-0.172 (0.120)	-0.055 (0.119)	-0.233+ (0.125)	0.390** (0.116)
Dominican	0.128 (0.137)	0.225+ (0.132)	0.196 (0.130)	0.162 (0.133)	0.018 (0.130)
Salvadoran	0.043 (0.127)	-0.112 (0.122)	-0.013 (0.122)	-0.052 (0.123)	0.048 (0.121)
Watch news	-0.025 (0.023)	-0.041+ (0.023)	-0.035 (0.023)	0.018 (0.023)	0.020 (0.022)
Read paper	-0.037+ (0.021)	-0.001 (0.021)	0.055** (0.021)	0.047* (0.022)	-0.044* (0.020)
English media	0.130* (0.062)	-0.103+ (0.060)	-0.269** (0.060)	-0.382** (0.063)	0.076 (0.059)
First cut-point ( $\tau_1$ )	-1.276** (0.194)	-1.802** (0.191)	-1.601** (0.190)	-1.240** (0.194)	-1.558** (0.187)
Second cut-point ( $\tau_2$ )	-0.348+ (0.193)	-0.864** (0.190)	-0.776** (0.189)	-0.268 (0.194)	0.719** (0.186)
Third cut-point ( $\tau_3$ )	0.833** (0.194)	0.167 (0.190)	0.434* (0.189)	0.753** (0.194)	1.940** (0.188)
Observations	7,004	7,085	7,273	7,147	7,760
Log-likelihood	-8950	-9652	-9531	-8982	-9557
Chi <sup>2</sup>	175.0	113.4	365.7	551.6	36.99
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.00968	0.00584	0.0188	0.0298	0.00193

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.  
 \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05, +p < 0.1

**FIGURE 3 Substantive Effects of Explanatory Variables on “Strongly Agree” That “Big Interests Dominate”**



**FIGURE 4 Substantive Effects of Explanatory Variables on “Strongly Agree” That “No Say in Government”**



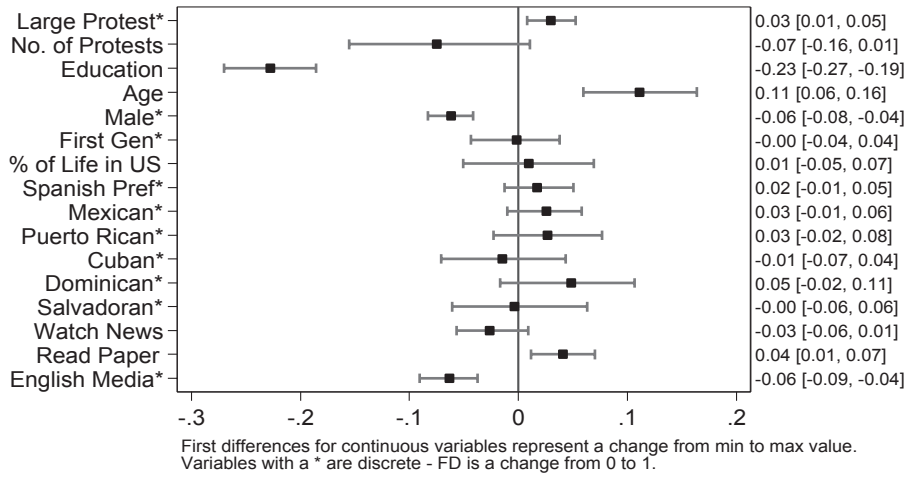
covariates are considerably smaller. Moreover, many of the other control variables have confidence intervals that include zero or no apparent effect.

Turning to the substantive effects of “no say in government” in Figure 4, the protest measures have a similar effect as they did in beliefs about big interests in government. Large marches resulted in a 3% increase in the likelihood of people believing they have a limited ability to have a say in government. Conversely, as the number of small marches near a person increased, this was associated with an 8% decrease in respondents answering they have little effect on government. This result translates into higher feelings of political efficacy. In Figure 5, the substantive effects of the explanatory variables on answering

“strongly agree” that “politics is complicated” and hard to understand reveal a similar pattern as in the previous two figures. The effect of a large protest is a 3% increase in answering “politics is complicated,” while the effect of more protests near a respondent decreases the likelihood of that response by 7%.

The results from our analysis indicate that the number, proximity, and magnitude of protest events individuals are exposed to have important attitudinal effects on their sense of political efficacy. More generally, the results have broader implications for our understanding of the effects of social movements on political attitudes. We now turn to a more in-depth discussion of the results and their implications.

**FIGURE 5 Substantive Effects of Explanatory Variables on “Strongly Agree” That “Politics Is Complicated”**



### Discussion

This study has several important research findings. Our models indicate that the number of small protests nearby respondents had a strong impact on their positive attitudes towards government. Second, and somewhat counterintuitively, we find large protests are correlated with lower feelings of efficacy. Why are there differences in the effects of smaller versus larger protest events? Supplementing our quantitative data with over 120 in-depth interviews conducted with Washington, DC-based leaders of national immigrant rights organizations and local protest organizers in selected cities on the West Coast, East Coast, and southern United States, we theorize that a possible reason for the differing impacts of the protest measures may be explained by the contrasting movement frames people were exposed to by small versus large protests.

The “master frame” (Snow and Benford 1992) immigrant rights activists attempted to use during the 2006 protest wave was a patriotic/integrationist frame. Demonstrating both a desire to be recognized as part of the nation and having faith in its political institutions, the two most common slogans used by the movement were “We Are America” and “Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote” (Barreto et al. 2009, 738; Zepeda-Millán 2011). According to Maria Echaveste, lead policy strategist and founder of the national Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR), “In January 2006 [we] . . . had a retreat in which we discussed the need to put a human face on the effort for immigration reform. We had to show that . . . immigrants aren’t an ‘us-them’ thing . . . so we came up with the slogan, ‘We are America’” (Los Angeles,

CA, June 26, 2009). Deepak Bhargava of the Center for Community Change added, “Nationally, the great thing about the effort around the marches was that there was really an effort to coordinate message, tone, and demands. Wherever you went there were American flags and I think that was, politically, a very important thing. There was the ‘We are America’ message [and] there was the message about electoral power [‘Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote’]. . . . It was almost flawless message discipline from top to bottom” (Washington, DC, May 16, 2009).

While this “pro-America” frame was the one adopted by most of the movement across the country, we believe that one possible explanation for our findings is that larger protests occurred in places where intra-movement divisions were more salient and manifested themselves in public frame disputes. In major cities, such as Los Angeles and New York, local movements were often split into two factions: a mainstream side that promoted the “We Are America” frame, and a radical flank which adopted a more internationalist frame, critical of the U.S. government. The former faction of the movement had faith in the possibility for change through institutional means, while the latter segment seemed to question the very legitimacy of mainstream channels of political representation.

Javier Gonzalez of the Los Angeles We Are American Coalition (WAAC) represented the more mainstream position, explaining, “That’s what people want, they want to be part of America. . . . So we said look, if you’re gonna bring a flag, bring the American flag . . . [to show] that we want to be part of America, [that] we want full citizenship” (Los Angeles, CA, June 20, 2009). Similarly, Angelica Salas, a key leader of both WAAC and CCIR, noted, “We’ve decided to embrace . . . the legislative process. The

democratic process is what the United States is [all about], it's the way we get things changed and done here. . . . We want reform. That's very different than wanting revolution" (Los Angeles, CA, March 16, 2007). An alternative view was expressed by Sarah Knopp of the radical L.A. March 25<sup>th</sup> Coalition. She stated, "Groups that are more in the mainstream . . . want to try to make changes, but stay within the bounds of acceptability. . . . A lot of the groups that moved into voter registration were groups that were more tied to the system." Knopp asserted, "I would have been for voter registration if I felt that there was something to vote for, but there wasn't" (Los Angeles, CA, March 22, 2007).

These same types of divisions also played out in New York. For instance, according to Ana Liza Caballes of the Damayan Workers Association, a Filipino domestic worker organization, "I think one of the important things . . . was to be able to put out a message that was progressive . . . and not just like, 'Oh, I love America and I should have the same rights as you.'" Instead, her group's messages were, "'I'm a human being. My rights have been violated. I've been forced to migrate and I deserve dignity and I deserve rights. . . . So as much as possible we didn't encourage the American flag in our contingent . . . because for many people the American flag is a bad symbol of [things] like invasion and colonization" (New York, March 9, 2009). In contrast, as one of the lead organizers of the more mainstream New York Immigration Coalition explained, "It's all about how you present it. This is America. It's a PR [public relations] nation. . . . We wanted to not have the open borders [rhetoric] . . . because then we'd be dismissed as radical lefties. What we wanted was a consistent message, something that presented our view and spoke to the wider scope of equality and justice and opportunity. That was what we were pushing" (New York, NY, February 26, 2009).

Protest organizers in locations where smaller demonstrations occurred seemed to have adopted the more mainstream/integrationist frame. Marisol Jimenez of *El Pueblo*, an immigrant advocacy group in Raleigh, North Carolina, remembered that in larger cities, "There was a radical element to the marches . . . sort of anti-establishment. . . . The radical element was not willing to accept any compromise. . . . They wanted amnesty for everyone, period. An open borders kind of thing." In contrast, her local group believed that "We have to compromise. That's the nature of politics. You can't get everything you want, it's not realistic." Jimenez contended that "We were the farthest thing from radical as an organization," and so her group embraced the advice of national leaders not to "carry Mexican flags . . . only American flags" (Raleigh, NC, June 2, 2008).

Organizers in the small city of Fort Myers, Florida, also adopted the patriotic master frame promoted by the mainstream faction of the national movement. Jim Delgado, a local coalition leader, recalled, "[We] put the word out, 'American flags only.' . . . We even purchased American flags. We convinced other business owners and collected something like \$15,000 to buy flags and we passed them out, they were gone fast!" (Concilio Mexicano de La Florida, Sarasota, FL, January 10, 2009). Describing the Fort Myers rally, another protest organizer recounted, "More than anything we were just expressing our desire to have an opportunity to be here. I didn't see one sign or poster that was offensive to the government. All of them were about wanting to be here. I didn't see or hear anyone saying anything obscene or offensive. . . . Everything showed people's desires" to be part of the United States (Bradenton, FL, January 7, 2009).

Thus, we believe that via the mass media, Latinos in locations with big protests were likely exposed to not just the patriotic messaging of the mainstream movement but also to the antisystemic frames of radical activists. This exposure to a counternarrative of the marches may have made Latinos more skeptical of government and their ability to achieve change through mainstream politics. In contrast, Latinos exposed to frequent smaller protests were more likely to adopt a more optimistic view of government and their ability to "have a say" in it because a more unified "pro-America" master frame dominated in these locales.

Another possible factor in explaining our results concerns the language of the media coverage. We believe that the fact that the English-language media consumption of Latinos was sometimes correlated with more negative views of government could be because English news outlets were often much more critical of the protests (from highlighting divisions in the movement to accusing the marchers of being unpatriotic).<sup>20</sup> For instance, according to Frank Sharry of the National Immigration Forum, "There were very few Mexican flags used, even in the early rallies" (Washington, DC, May 16, 2009). Yet, as Clarissa Martinez of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) recalled, if even one foreign flag was found among the

<sup>20</sup>In our models, the effect of English media varies in directionality. To assess the relationship between protests and English media, we ran additional models that included interactions between protest variables and English media consumption. The interactions are significant and in the expected direction; for example, the positive effect of number of protests was conditional on English media usage; however, the substantive effects were fairly small. To further explore potential media effects, one could conduct a content analysis of the differences between media coverage of protests in Spanish and English news media; however, that is beyond the scope of this article.

thousands of American flags, “the thing that the [English] media would zero-in on would be the flags that were not American. Then they’d try to use that to [say] that these were anti-American marches, which couldn’t be further from the truth” (Washington, DC, May 13, 2009). Consequently, when asked what type of role the English-language media played during the protest wave, John Trasviña of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) bluntly stated, “A very negative one. It really poisoned the atmosphere. Particularly the cable shows, but even some regular mainstream programming was not very good” (Los Angeles, CA, December 20, 2008). Thus, our results showing that Latinos who had higher levels of English-language media consumption also displayed higher levels of political alienation could be the result of biased media coverage by English news outlets.

A third and final possible explanation for our findings is that the mass mobilizations against the state produced an intended consequence of activists: the questioning of the legitimacy of government by Latinos. Latinos were precisely the segment of the public that organizers hoped to recruit to take part in collective action efforts against the proposed federal anti-immigrant legislation. Our findings show that when large marches occurred, Latinos were more likely to express lower feelings of political efficacy, perhaps capturing their frustration with their inability to influence government through institutional routes. If Latinos both participated in these marches and came away disappointed in government, then contrary to the implications of Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler’s (2011) findings, our results may indicate that the mass mobilizations were interpreted by Latinos as acts of defiance against a political system in which they felt they had little to no input at the time. This is a possibility given that in several other polls taken during and after the protest wave, Latinos expressed a positive assessment of, and extremely high levels of support for, the demonstrations themselves (Barreto et al. 2009, 756; see also Suro and Escobar 2006).

How can we explain our finding that being close to multiple small-to-medium-sized protests had the opposite effect on Latino political attitudes? Our results showed that as contention increased nearby, Latinos developed more faith in political institutions and higher levels of confidence in their abilities to impact them. One possibility could be that Latinos were thinking “spatially” about their “strength in numbers.” While large protests may have prompted Latinos to have a critical view of government, they may have felt that for change to occur, protests had to go beyond a one-time “mega-march.” Consequently, as contention grew (in terms of the number of protests around them), so did Latinos’ sense of

being able to have an impact on government. Thus, while sometimes seen as a potentially dangerous “politics by other means,” mass protests may actually be healthy for democracy by building faith in mainstream political institutions.

In sum, depending on the scale (i.e., size) and scope (i.e., frequency) of contention, our results suggest that protests can have two major effects on public attitudes. In terms of scale, mass mobilizations can create doubt about the legitimacy of government, perhaps making certain segments of society more sympathetic to the demonstrators’ cause and more likely to join collective action efforts. With regard to scope, as contention grows near one’s own geographic location, so do people’s feelings about their own capacity to change and affect government. Our findings indicate that protests have the ability to increase people’s sense of political empowerment at a mass scale. Thus, spatial and temporal dynamics—measured by individuals’ distance to demonstrations that occurred within a month of being surveyed—shape how people interpret events like the 2006 protest marches, with the frequency of contention increasing feelings of political efficacy.

## Conclusions

Events like the 2006 protest wave can come about quickly and are difficult to predict. Consequently, the nature of social movements creates several logistical difficulties for scholars to field a large survey instrument at the exact timing and in the optimal places where movements coalesce. The fact that the 2006 Latino National Survey was in the field before, during, and after the protest period allows us to examine the temporal, spatial, and magnitude effects of the protests on respondents’ attitudes towards government. Our study demonstrates that actively engaging components of time, space, and magnitude in protests is critical for understanding the full range of the impacts of protest politics. We assessed the link between protests and attitudes towards government and found that in some contexts, protests can heighten feelings of trust and efficacy, while in other contexts they can enhance feelings of political alienation. We believe that the differing impacts protests have on attitudes hinge on the types of frames deployed at large versus small marches.

Future extensions of this research could explore more thoroughly the mechanisms that lead to positive effects of smaller protests and negative effects of larger protests. To evaluate variation in temporal impacts, future analysis could examine more fine-grained temporal measures that include the number of days since a protest to each

respondent. However, this analysis would need to be limited by geographical location due to the number of protest observations and respondents that such a study would entail. Moreover, to explore potential media effects, another natural extension of this project would be to conduct a content analysis of differences in Spanish and English media coverage of the marches, or differences in the media coverage of smaller versus larger protests. These extensions would provide additional traction for understanding more thoroughly the effects of protests on attitudes, but they are beyond the scope of this study.

Nonelectoral participation is often overlooked or undervalued by scholars. Yet as this investigation has demonstrated, the effects of social movements can have far-reaching implications for how people view the state and their own ability to influence outcomes in government. In this light, protest politics can be a positive good that helps contribute to a healthy, functioning democracy.

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## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

List of Survey Questions from the LNS (2006) used to analyze attitudes towards Government  
 Protest Size Estimates Extended Discussion  
 Supplementary Tables