DON'T SHOOT! THE IMPACT OF HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN PROTEST ON POLICE KILLINGS OF CIVILIANS

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Introduction:

For decades, African Americans have taken to the streets in both peaceful protest and, at times, violent uprisings to express outrage over police killings of African American citizens. This is currently manifesting itself in the hundreds of peaceful and dozens of, at times, violent uprisings that have occurred in the years after the death of Trayvon Martin and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, it remains a largely unanswered question as to whether these protest events have had any impact on police killings of African American civilians or any other outcome. To answer this question, we turn to the over 700 racial uprisings that occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s as an ideal case study. Although these protests occurred in a different era, they were largely triggered by negative and often violent interactions between the African American community and police (Bauman, 2008).

Historical / Literature Review:

America experienced over 700 racial uprising from 1964 until 1971 in cities of all sizes and in all regions. Dozens weres killed, thousands were injured, tens of thousands were arrested, and hundreds of millions of dollars in property damage occurred (Harris and Wilkins, 1988) Uprisings were relatively rare at the start of the period, but increased gradually until a massive surge in 1967 and 1968 at which point they began to decline after the election of Richard Nixon. The vast majority of cities only had a single uprising, although a handful of county's saw this figure reach double digit. Of direct relevance to this work, the pattern of a county's first uprising generally mirrors the distribution of total riots by year as is displayed in Figure 1.

We know from work by Collins and Smith (2007) and Collins and Margo (2007) that these uprisings were enormously destructive events that harmed African Americans' income, labour market outcomes, and property values over the long run. However, even though these uprisings were rooted in the use of state violence against African Americans, there is no evidence regarding their impact on police killings of civilians. In fact, as far as we are aware, there is currently no work that has empirically evaluated the impact of racial unrest in the United States on police behavior towards the African American community. This is a gap in the literature that we intend to close.

Data & Methods:

In order to determine the impact of racial uprisings on police killings of civilians, we engage in an event-study analysis with a robust set of controls. This approach requires county-level data on uprising occurrence, civilian deaths by legal intervention, and control variables that can be interacted with time.

Data on racial uprisings have been provided by Collins and Margo (2007) and were originally collected by Carter (1986) and Spilerman (1971). This dataset contains all racial uprisings from 1964-1971 and contains both the location and duration of uprisings and various measures of severity including arrests, deaths, injuries, and arson cases. Data on severity are used to generate heterogeneous effects, but the primary results rest upon the date of an occurrence of a country's first uprising regardless of severity. These data are merged with the US County and City Data Book consolidated files for 1944-1977 from ICPSR (1981) to provide control variables to be interacted with time.

Civilian deaths by law enforcement intervention are calculated from the 1959 to 1988 Vital Statistics Multiple-Cause of Death Files (US DHHS and ICPSR 2007). The Vital Statistics data report deaths by cause, age, race, and county of residence which we use to create county-race specific mortality rate for deaths by law

enforcement intervention (excluding deaths due to legal execution). The dependent variable of interest for our analysis 1) number of police homicides by race 2) number of police homicides per 100,000 male residents between the age of 15 to 39 by race. To calculate the proportion of the population that are males age 15 to 24 and 25 to 39 for each county, we interpolate the 1960 Census county age profiles to 1968 and use annual county age profiles from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) from 1968-1988.[1]

Using this data, we take advantage of variation in the location and timing of a county's first uprising to determine the impact of uprisings on police killings of civilians. Our approach controls for cross-sectional differences due to unobserved heterogeneity by using city fixed effects and differences across time by using year fixed effects. We additionally use state-by-year fixed effects to account for potential unobservable changes in state policy over time. To ensure robustness, we also interact various point-in-time county demographics with time. Our primary empirical specification appears as follows:

$$K_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_{u(i)t} + \delta_{u(i)t} + \sum_{-4}^{-1} \pi_y D_i 1(t - T_i^* = y) + \sum_{1}^{9} \pi_y D_i 1(t - T_i^* = y) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where K is the number of civilian deaths by police in county i in year t, α is a set of county fixed effects, γ us a set of urban status-by-year fixed effects, δ is set of year or state-by-year fixed effects, and ε_{it} is an error term. D_i is an indicator variable equal to one if a county ever has an uprising. The effect of an uprisings on police killings of civilians is then captured in a set of event-year dummies $1(t - T_i^* = y)$, which are equal to one in the appropriate year. All regressions are estimated using the 1960 population as weights to correct for heteroskedasticy related to county size.[2] Our identification strategy relies on pre-existing trends in deaths by legal intervention being exogenous from the date of the first uprising in a city. As is shown below in Figure 2, this requirement holds.

Results:
Our primarily results are presented below in table 1. The results show that counties saw a marked increase in both nonwhite and white deaths in the years immediately following an uprising. However, this initial increase is substantially larger for non-whites with an additional 1.2 non-white Americans dying as a result of legal intervention per year versus 0.66 for whites. However, the groups diverge over the medium-to-long run. While non-white deaths resulting from legal intervention remain elevated after nearly a decade deaths of whites revert to their pre-existing trend after a handful of years. These results are robust to the insertion of various covariates interacted with time.

We also consider the role of heterogeneous treatment effects. We find that the largest nonwhite treatment effects occur in counties with an African American population share above the average and in the most urbanized counties. There is not a great deal of regional variation, although treatment effects appear somewhat less severe in the Midwest. Similarly, for white Americans the initial increase in deaths by police intervention is driven by the must urbanized counties. Additional work regarding the impact of uprisings on crime shows that total crime does not increase significantly over the long run, although there are modest increases in violent and property crime and the number of police officers, although these effects are both quite small.

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[1] It is important to note that Vital Statistics recording of deaths by law enforcement contain many shortcomings related to completeness and accuracy due to political pressure and heterogeneity in data collection methods as a result of the voluntary nature of ICD coding (Sherman and Langworthy, 1979; Fyfe, 2002; and Loftin et al., 2003). Despite these shortcomings, Vital Statistics remains the most consistent and complete collection of deaths by law enforcement intervention for the time period of interest and a reliable source of police homicides for regression analysis (Sherman and Langworthy, 1979). Moreover, heterogeneity in the recording of civilian deaths due to law enforcement is captured by county fixed effects assuming data collection efforts vary across counties but are time-invariant.
[2] Weighted least squares is used to make error term homoscedastic. In this analysis WLS regression produced more precise estimates than OLS without drastically changing the coefficients. OLS results are available upon request.

Conclusion

This work presents the first empirical evidence on the relationship between African American protest, in this case the uprisings of the 1960s and early 1970s, and the subsequent police killings of civilians by race. The results clearly show that historical protest resulted in an increase in civilian deaths by legal intervention regardless of race in the short-run and a seemingly permanent increase in killings of non-white over the medium-to-long run.

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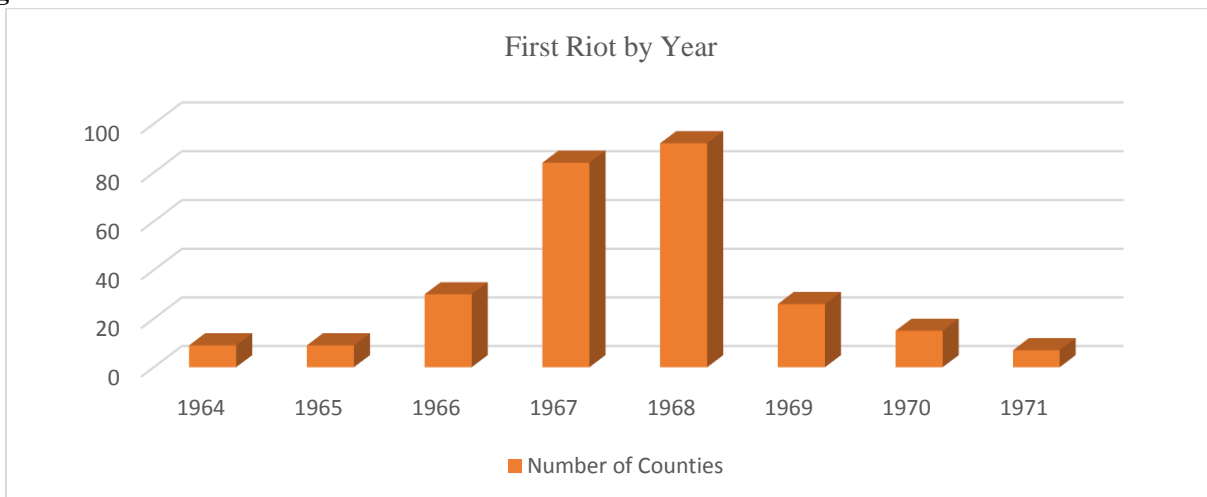
Figure 1

Figure 1: Date of a County's First Uprising. Note: An uprising is defined as a spontaneous event with at least 30 participations resulting in some form of damage or violence. Additionally, at least some participants must be African American. Source: Spilerman (1971) Carter (1986)
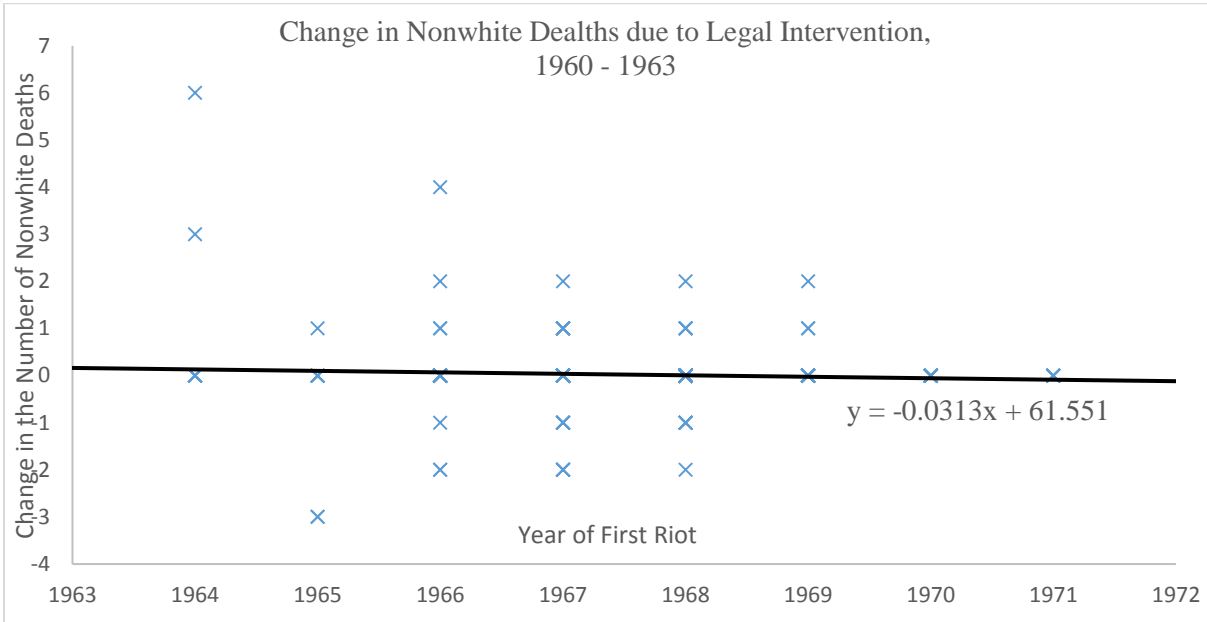
Figure 2.

Figure 2: The relationship between the date-of-first uprisings and the 1960-1963 pre-trend in nonwhite deaths due to police intervention.

Table 1.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		DV: nonwhite deaths			DV: white deaths	
Years -4 to -1	-0.366	-0.480	-0.603	-0.333	-0.157	-0.222
	[0.349]	[0.562]	[0.615]	[0.463]	[0.340]	[0.325]
Years 1 to 3	1.234**	1.080*	1.219**	0.660*	0.548	0.634*
	[0.624]	[0.573]	[0.583]	[0.353]	[0.337]	[0.358]
Years 4 to 6	1.840**	1.817**	2.175***	0.176	0.0850	0.306
	[0.788]	[0.737]	[0.811]	[0.410]	[0.441]	[0.352]
Years 7 to 9	1.019*	1.099**	1.709**	-0.158	-0.0906	0.291
	[0.556]	[0.498]	[0.766]	[0.626]	[0.379]	[0.548]
Observations	88,856	88,856	88,856	88,856	88,856	88,856
R-squared	0.139	0.444	0.499	0.082	0.150	0.245
Number of Counties	3,064	3,064	3,064	3,064	3,064	3,064

Table 1: Primary Empirical Specification Results. Notes: Table display least-squares estimates obtained from estimating by grouping years before and after treatment. The dependent variable is the number of nonwhite deaths due to legal intervention in columns 1 - 3 and nonwhite deaths per 100,000 nonwhite residents in 1960 in columns 4 - 6. All columns include county, C, effects. Column 1 & 4 has year, Y, effects. Columns 2, 3, 5, and 6 add region-by-year, R-Y, effects. Columns 3 & 6 add covariates from the 1960 census interacted with a time trend. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered by city are presented beneath each estimate in brackets. All columns use 1960 population as weights. All columns used non-rioting counties as the comparison group.