

The Politics of Absence: When Police Time Off Is Political

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Abstract

How do protests affect police responsiveness? Local governments delegate power to the police as the primary overseers of domestic law and order, especially during periods of upheaval. The police themselves can be individual or collective political actors, and both their institutions and street-level behaviors have been the targets of protest movements. This paper analyzes variation in employee absenteeism for members of the Minneapolis Police Department as a function of the prevalence and political issues of local protests. Results show that protest waves can both mobilize and demobilize police officers, depending on the window of time considered. In the long run, policing-issue protests in the summer of 2020 generated significant long-term increases in rates of paid absences among sworn MPD personnel. In the short term, the days of and days immediately following policing protests are associated with a significant decrease in officers' paid absence rates, indicating greater mobilization at the margins. Civilian personnel's absence patterns are unchanged by protest occurrences. Of all prominent and recurrent political issues featured at Minneapolis protests between 2017 and 2025, only policing-issue protests persistently cause short-term changes in absenteeism. These results are robust to controlling for "blue centered" protest characteristics such as crowd size, arrests, injuries, and damages, along with COVID-19 case rates. The results help explain how protest-caused demobilization such as the "Blue Flu" and work slowdowns can coexist with prior evidence suggesting protests as mobilization mechanisms, with the same protest events both pushing and pulling officers from the front lines.

Keywords: protests, policing, Black Lives Matter, street-level bureaucracy, discretion

1 Introduction

Despite an emergent pandemic raging through the summer of 2020, tens of millions of Americans mobilized in one of the largest protest movements in U.S. history to express outrage over police killings of Black Americans. The American state’s frequent displays of racially targeted violence, even at a local level, creates concerning outcomes for civilian well-being and trust in security institutions (Mummolo 2018). Street-level government employees, including the police, may exploit information or power asymmetries to engage in politically motivated behaviors (Lipsky 1980; Brehm and Gates 1997). While multidisciplinary research has long focused on the role of race in U.S. police-civilian interactions (e.g., Voigt et al. 2017) less work has conceptualized the police as direct political actors, shaping local politics and citizens’ well-being through politically influenced discretionary behaviors (Soss and Weaver 2017; Mummolo 2018; Schrader 2026; Wirsching 2026).

This article focuses on how local police respond to protests. An active thread of protest-policing scholarship has found that U.S. police do not treat all protests equally, disproportionately using force and arrests at protests centered on left-wing or racial justice issues (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011; Beckett 2021; Said 2025; Schwebel and Johnson 2025). But data on such measures are inherently conditioned on the baseline availability of personnel on any given date—whether officers show up to work in enough force to commit the acts studied. This article takes a step back, analyzing variation in absenteeism as a function of protests to understand how the presence and nature of protests, especially in light of the Black Lives Matter protest wave of 2020, has shaped police availability and responsiveness.

To do so, a most-likely case of politically influenced protest policing is selected. Minneapolis, Minnesota was at the center of Black Lives Matter, a protest movement focusing on violence committed by members of law enforcement. Local police responded to widespread civil unrest following the murder of a Black citizen by one of their own officers. With absence and protest data stretching well before 2020, this article analyses both how the presence and

political issues of protests affect local police employee absenteeism and how this relationship has changed over time with the murder of George Floyd and the 2020 Black Lives Matter protest wave. Minneapolis’ ability to screen and anticipate future protests is well-documented, allowing for analyses of both preparative and reactionary changes in absences. The city agencies’ openness to policing data provision allows for precise analysis of absenteeism not just for the department as a whole, but for relevant subsets of employees as well.

To understand how variation in the presence and political issue of political protests drives police availability, absence records provided by the Minneapolis Police Department were merged with a Crowd Counting Consortium dataset of local protests taking place from January 2017 to September 2025. Different subgroups of police department employees have different incentives, punishments, and procedural capabilities to take absences. To account for differences in this data-generating process, police employee absence records are grouped according to paid or unpaid status and role as a sworn police officer or civilian employee, and regressed with aggregate measures of protest presence in Minneapolis on a given date.

Results show that the murder of George Floyd and the onset of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests significantly changed both long-term and short-term paid absence rates for sworn officers of the Minneapolis Police Department. Throughout the entire eight years of absence records, the effect of each additional daily protest (compared to zero protests) on same-day or day-after absence rates are minimal, amounting to no more than a 2.5 percent reduction in the paid absence rate for each protest occurrence. However, protests occurring in the roughly one-year period of peak Black Lives Matter activity after Floyd’s murder are associated with a significant, 7 percent decrease in absence rates. Protests focused on policing issues are associated with a 9 percent decrease in the absence rate on the same day, and a 7 percent decrease on the day after. Additional interaction models find that the paid, sworn absence rate on the day after policing-issue protests during the BLM era drops even further, roughly 12 to 17 percent compared to the pre-BLM period. Further testing finds that no other political issue consistently displays a significant relationship with absenteeism.

These results hold after controlling policing demand factors such as crowd size, property damage, injuries, and arrests. This finding is robust to the inclusions of temporally focused fixed effects, COVID-19 controls, and various other alternative measurements and model specifications.

At the same time, police officers recorded huge long-term baseline increases in their paid absence rate during the Black Lives Matter period (nearly 75 percent higher than before May 2020), with absences remaining significantly elevated in the post-period (still almost 40 percent higher after June 2021) as well. These results show that the murder of George Floyd and the rush of policing-issue protests induced two different forms of change in Minneapolis police attendance: increasing the rate of officers taking long-term paid leave, but decreasing the ability for officers to take leave at the daily margins when policing-issue protests were occurring. Of all political issues analyzed, only policing-issue protests show a consistent same-day and day-after relationship with absenteeism, suggesting that the Minneapolis police department was especially sensitive to the protest features of this political issue.

That these short-term results hold despite long-run increases in officer paid absences shows the MPD’s perceived need to maintain officer presence on the streets of Minneapolis during policing-issue protests, far beyond the initial days after Floyd’s murder. “Blue centered” models argue that perceived threat by police officers is the most important driver of repression (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Earl and Soule 2006; Earl 2011), while models centered on police and elite perceptions of Black resistance argue that protests led by primarily Black participants will receive the most repression (Rafail, Soule, and McCarthy 2012; Passavant 2021). As Said (2025) argues, Black Lives Matter protests represent the intersection of these two theories: in the scope of Minneapolis’ experience, they were associated with increased property damage, but also represented a political threat to local policing institutions. A change in police behavior in response represents the unique power and threat that the police perceive these types of protests to represent, and introduces concerns over the public’s ability to speak and protest about policing issues without undue repression.

The paper contributes to the understanding of both mobilization and demobilization mechanisms of protests. A phenomenon known as “blue flu,” is a well-documented form of deliberate shirking or counter-protest (Grim 2020; Schrader 2026) but it has rarely been studied as a form of street-level policymaking. Numerous journalistic accounts have documented this coordinated use of sick leave absences as a form of expression of discontent, whether it be for reasons related to labor conditions or changes in local policy. At the same time, research on the policing of protests in the United States has indicated that protests focusing on certain political issues drive an increase in police presence and repression compared to other forms of protests, even though the protests driving the most severe response are often the least likely to produce violence or damage. These two trends plausibly converge on the same events: Black Lives Matter and other related left-wing protests, for example, have produced both mass sick-outs and increased police repression of protesters (Wood 2020).

Secondly, this paper makes a contribution to measuring street-level behaviors by local government employees. Outside of direct statements from police union heads, researching the mindsets of either police executives or of rank-and-file police officers is fraught with methodological and social challenges. The “Blue Wall of Silence” (Chin and Wells 1998) often renders police departments as locations of strict social norms, where organized or individual shirking is often kept insulated from public awareness and scrutiny. Police executive support for community oversight practices is lackluster (Adams et al. 2025), and police administrative records may be constructed in ways that mask the true nature of police discretion (Knox, Lowe, and Mummolo 2020). Some data, such as absence records, are unavoidable for police departments to log. By utilizing this extant data, this article gauges the Minneapolis Police Department’s capacity to engage in repression by estimating the degree to which officers are called in or calling out. Similar methods of using readily available data, combined with known shocks to the policing-political system (e.g., Wirsching (2026)) avoid known data limitations while providing information on behavioral patterns over a multi-year period.

Thirdly, these findings contribute to a growing literature on the causes and effects of the politicization of policing in the United States. Descriptive evidence suggests that large-city police agencies tend to differ from residents not only by race, but also by partisanship (Ba et al. 2025). Research on law enforcement agencies such as sheriff’s departments have found troubling trends of political extremism, staunch resistance to citizen-led oversight initiatives, and structural racism across the country (Nemerever 2021; Farris and Holman 2024; Pishko 2024). As of this writing, the deployment of federal law enforcement agencies—often in conjunction with local police and sheriffs through the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s 287(g) program—has placed police agents at all levels of government in the direct or indirect control of a presidential administration that deliberately targets states and cities perceived as being governed by political enemies. While extensive academic and activist work has focused on the persistence of systemic racism in local policing (DeAngelis 2024), less work has directly studied how modern social movements and growing political polarization might contribute to employment self-selection, institutional norms, and behavioral shifts among local police officers.

2 Policing Protests

The police are local, street-level bureaucrats, but their powers of governance are uniquely constituted. In most domestic contexts, the police serve as the primary agents charged with maintaining the state’s monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. The police have the discretionary power to detain, maim, and kill civilians if deemed necessary to protect law and order. They play many roles beyond criminal justice enforcement: they prevent coups or insurgencies (Arriola et al. 2021; Bayley and Perito 2010; De Bruin 2022, 2024), stifle protest and dissent (Gillham 2011; Greitens 2016), extract illicit payments from citizens (Ivkovich 2014), and perform other coercive actions at the behest (or in defiance) of their operational or political superiors (Magaloni and Rodriguez 2020). A growing subfield of

American politics scholars has pushed for more focus on the domestic utilization of state violence within democracies like the U.S. Gottschalk (2008) and Soss and Weaver (2017) took the subfield to task for a lack of focus on the “second face” of the liberal state, one that infiltrates race-class subjugated communities through policing and carceral violence. The Black Lives Matter movement remains a central motivation for this call for more research.

In return, the American policing subfield has shifted its focus on policing as not just neutral bureaucracy, but as making and shaping politics at all levels of government. Extant research has focused on political frictions to behavioral reform or data availability (Knox, Lowe, and Mummolo 2020; Cook and Fortunato 2023; Adams et al. 2025), differences in on-the-ground force or enforcement between subgroups of U.S. residents (Fryer 2019; Knox and Mummolo 2020; Ba et al. 2025), the political and social culture among officers (Balko 2014; Lynch 2018; Keyes and Keyes 2022), and the effects of police violence on public opinion (Mummolo 2018; Boudreau, MacKenzie, and Simmons 2019). Police unions shape both formal voting behaviors and discretionary on-the-job behaviors, taking advantage of the legal protections enjoyed by officers (Zoorob 2019; DiSalvo 2022; Schrader 2026; Bekemeyer forthcoming). In the context of absences, U.S. police are known to engage in mass sickouts as a form of wildcat strikes or perform work slowdowns to protest new municipal policy (Martin 2015; “Report” 2020; Hansen, n.d.) and police unions can play an important collective action organizing role.

Citizen attitudes toward police behavior and reform policy is polarizing and aligning with nationalized political identities. Recent polling has indicated that the partisan difference in confidence in the police is one of the most divisive of all political institutions.¹ Police in cities often are not racially or politically representative of the residents they patrol, though evidence so far suggests that police officer’s partisanship (unconditional on other demographics) does not directly affect one-on-one interactions with civilians Ba et al. 2025.

1. Megan Brennan, “Democrats’ Confidence in U.S. Institutions Sinks to New Low,” Gallup, July 17, 2025, news.gallup.com/poll/692633/democrats-confidence-institutions-sinks-new-low.aspx

How do police respond when civilians’ political attitudes are collectively displayed? Traditional studies of protest policing emphasize perceived threat as a primary determinant of protest policing. On one hand, political elites may be concerned about the potential threat social movements have to the government, and repression may be the most cost-effective means of quashing any possibility of an uprising (Davenport 2000; Earl 2003). Several factors affect the presence of police and outcomes of protests, such as ethnic similarities between police and protestors (Arriola 2013), the political content of protests themselves (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003), and the credibility of retribution by the regime (Rozenas and Zhukov 2019). On the other hand, variation in the severity of protest policing can arise from the concerns of the police themselves. Rather than threat to political elites, “blue centered” protest policing models focus on what street-level officers perceive to be threatening to their safety, such as counter-protests, projectiles, property damage, and other forms of violence (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Earl and Soule 2006; Soule and Davenport 2009; Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011). Police will increase their surveillance, attendance, and disruption of protest events that more credibly pose a threat to public and officer safety (Vitale 2005).

However, a gap remains in explaining U.S. protest policing. Despite left-wing and right-wing protests in the United States both being overwhelmingly peaceful (94 and 96 percent, respectively)², 21st-century left-wing and racial justice protests are clearly over-policed. According to an ACLED analysis of the 2020 U.S. protest wave, police were 3.5 times more likely to use violence at peaceful left-wing protests compared to peaceful right-wing protests. Police were more than twice as likely to arrest left-wing protesters, and arrests were roughly 16 percentage points more likely to be violent (Beckett 2021). The Thurgood Marshall Institute found that from May 1 to October 31, 2020, local police were twice as likely (state-level police being three times as likely) to show up to racial justice-oriented protests, 1.4 times more likely to make arrests, and 3.8 times more likely to use force compared to protests

2. From ACLED’s analysis of U.S. protests from April 8, 2020 to January 1, 2021. Dr Roudabeh Kishi, ACLED’s director of research and innovation, cautioned that an unknown percentage of “violent” protests may be responses to violence initiated by state agents.

centered on other political issues (Kajeepta and Johnson 2024). Activists have pointed out high-profile instances of the police condoning (and at times, colluding with) right-wing protest groups despite the arguable threat to public safety that those groups may pose based on a “blue centered” model (Levin 2020). Race-oriented theories posit that protester identity and ideological antagonism vis-à-vis the institution of policing drives the severity of police response, beyond threat to officer well-being (Said 2025). Previous research has indicated that the presence of African American protesters has historically predicted violent protest policing, possibly due to racially motivated threat perceptions (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011). More research is needed to systematically analyze these conclusions.

3 Case Study: Minneapolis

This article focuses on Minneapolis, Minnesota to test how police department absences vary as a function of local protests. Minneapolis was a focal point for policing activism after an MPD officer, Derek Chauvin, murdered George Floyd, an unarmed Black resident of the city, during an investigatory stop over alleged counterfeiting. This murder ignited a new wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, and an estimated 15 to 26 million U.S. residents protested throughout the summer of 2020 (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020). Chauvin became a figurehead of 21st-century police brutality, with the Minneapolis Police Department guilty by association. Protesters burned hundreds of properties around the city in late May 2020, including the MPD’s Third Precinct building (Penrod and Sinner 2020).

The centrality of Minneapolis makes it a likely candidate to see politicized discretionary behaviors by police, whether that be a high degree of shirking to avoid subsequent protests, or a high demand for continued police presence to maintain order in the aftermath of Floyd’s murder. The subsequent protest wave was a shock to the system of policing in Minneapolis. Hundreds of Minneapolis police officers called out with claims of PTSD and other protest-related illnesses or injuries, (O’Neal 2022). If in the short-term, Minneapolis police officers

do not fluctuate their absenteeism as a function of the presence or salient political issues of protests, or if the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests had little effect on protest policing as measured by absenteeism, then there should be limited expectations for other city police departments to display similar relationships. Minneapolis thus provides a “most-likely” case to study how protests can generate both short and long-term changes in police department absenteeism.

The surveillance capabilities of the Minneapolis Police Department are well-known, making it a good candidate to gauge both anticipatory and reactionary absence variation. Before the 2020 protest wave, the MPD regularly used Clearview AI, a facial recognition software that scrapes social media. MPD also used ShotSpotter, an audio screening tool to listen for gunshots, and Securonet, which visualizes and maps social media footage to triangulate with public and private CCTV (Haskins and Mac [2020](#)). MPD uses these softwares alongside other technologies such as automated license plate readers to conduct investigative work (Police Conduct Oversight Commission 2019; cited in Haskins and Mac ([2020](#))).

After the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, the protest surveillance capabilities of the MPD have continued to expand. MPD participates in multi-jurisdiction “fusion centers,” which collectivize surveillance data to facilitate information sharing. Around the timing of officer Derek Chauvin’s murder trial, the MPD initiated “Operation Safety Net” to surveil civil rights activists and journalists covering the killing of George Floyd. “Federal agencies would assist in monitoring for threats of violence and activity by out-of-state extremist groups, and that an ‘intel team’ would be established to help share information surrounding these threats,” according to the *MIT Technology Review* (Ryan-Mosely and Richards [2022](#)). Social media surveillance, helicopter overflights, local-federal data sharing, and digitally tailing arrested or detained journalists continued for months after the conclusion of the trial, and the fusion centers continue to operate (Ryan-Mosley and Richard [2022](#)).

4 Expectations

This article seeks to establish whether the presence of local political protests affects absences for police department employees. Regardless of the issue at hand, individual protest events should create demand for more on-the-ground policing: they involve large numbers of civilians often using the streets to mass, rally, or march. If police are aware of scheduled protest activity, then protests should generate negative changes in same-day absenteeism compared to days with zero protest activity. Officers will be discouraged from taking leave, or called in for overtime support, when protests are expected to be significant enough to generate disruptions to the flow of city life. But not all protests are the same: some feature large amounts of violence or property destruction, with large or small crowds, and with different associated actors. Blue centered models suggest that police leaders would scan for and evaluate a future protest's propensity for violence, property destruction, and interruption of law and order when determining the degree of on-the-ground and/or support presence to maintain law and order. If police leadership is aware of an upcoming protest's size, associated groups leading activities, or calls for violent actions, then officers would be less likely to be granted requested absences, should an increased presence be deemed needed. If this is the case, and the MPD has enough information concerning future protests, then same-day absences should decrease on the days of protests, and changes should be more pronounced in anticipation of large, disruptive protests. This logic may apply to reactionary staffing levels as well: if recent protests have generated significant disruption to the police's perceived maintenance of law and order, then protests perceived as having been disorderly may generate decreases in absences in the days that follow, as police departments incentivize or demand staff to call in.

Protest characteristics are not independent of police presence. Protesters may change their on-the-ground behaviors as a function of police presence or capacity to repress, or the mere expectation that police will be present. Conversely, police departments may alter their protest planning if they receive indications of large anticipated crowds, groups known to

engage in violence, or significant disruption to public roadways or commerce. While models in this analysis control for non-political issue protest characteristics such as arrests and crowd size in both same-day and one-day lagged analyses of police officer absences, these factors are expected to more strongly influence reactionary absence changes, rather than on the same day as the protests. These factors would at best be the outcomes of predicted values for police departments as they plan their protest response *ex ante*, or could potentially affect shifts later in the day. Of these recorded protest characteristics, crowd size stands out as one that departments may feasibly have the ability to predict: all else equal, larger protests should be associated with a decrease in absenteeism for day-of response. Since violence-related factors can only be indirectly predicted (an upcoming protest group is known to commit violence in the past) they are more likely to be downstream of police response.

The second question of this article concerns whether protests focusing on specific political issues exhibit different relationships with police absenteeism, aside from their characteristics mentioned above. Protests of thorny political issues, especially those touching on policing, might spur officers or departments to react differently aside from, or in addition to, other protest characteristics. This coincides with a racial or ideological model of protest policing: If certain types of protests are perceived as being more threatening to public order merely because of their issues, then one might expect to see a reduction in absences because of a socialized rally-around-the-flag effect. On the other hand, these same protests may present unideal working conditions to officers, whether it be because of their perceived danger or because they will showcase antagonistic political attitudes *vis-à-vis* policing. Protests representing antagonistic political issues to the police that respond (such as “Abolish the Police” protests) would present a threat to the fabric of police culture that other protests would not. These protests may very well be more physically and verbally antagonistic towards officers, heightening concerns about officer safety, security, and public order (Said 2025).

This potential paradox in pushes and pulls for police attendance can be explained by the temporal structure of protests: if protests are of political issues perceived as antagonistic to

policing and remain at a heightened level for a significant enough duration, then short-term protest effects will align with decreased absenteeism, while long-term absences increase over time. If officers fail to secure time off in the short-term, they might, as MPD officers have been documented to do, opt for long-term forms of absences such as medical leave. Long-term absences may be the result of a variety of mental stressors, such as prolonged exposure to antagonistic social forces or disillusionment with maintaining a policing job in politically hostile conditions. In Minneapolis, it is well documented that nearly 20 percent of MPD police officers filed for disability retirement claims after May and June 2020, with 155 collecting some form of payout. These officers were off work but on payroll for months while their claims were filed, with most claims concluding in mid-2021 (O’Neal [2022](#)). The spike in sworn officer paid absence rates as seen in [1](#) likely comprises much of this surge.

The centrality of certain protest issues and the number of protests in a given city changes over time. As local protests often reflect national political conflicts, larger and extra-local social and political forces may affect when people protest and for what cause. In Minneapolis, policing-issue protests are most concentrated in the year following the death of George Floyd, while later years saw an increased concentration of foreign affairs (predominantly Ukraine, Israel or Gaza-focused) or president/democracy protests (targeting Donald Trump’s second term). **Figure 1** shows a clear break in absenteeism coinciding with the week of George Floyd’s death and the uprising in the days after. At the same time, an increasing number of policing-concentrated protests presented a challenge to a department strained by the destruction of one of its precincts and growing numbers of employees calling out and filing for disability.

In the short-term (day of or day after), the demand for officers towards potentially antagonistic protests is expected to outweigh the ability for officers to avoid them. While the Black Lives Matter protests in Minneapolis have been associated with a spurt of long-term officer absences due to alleged claims of PTSD, policing-issue protests, both before and after the killing of George Floyd, should be associated with a decrease in paid absences

compared to no-protest dates or dates with protests centered on other issues. On the other hand, protests that represent enduring political issues (housing, the environment) should not exhibit significant relationships with absenteeism, as they provide neither short-term nor long-term stressors to policing needs. In other words, policing-issue protests in Minneapolis are expected to contribute to a diverging trend in absences: long term increases in paid absences as employees file for disability, with short term decreases at the protest-day margins.

However, the effect of protests is unlikely to affect all employees of a police department equally. There should not be significant changes in absenteeism, overall or for specifically policing-issue protests, for employees with civilian roles whose job duties do not shift as a result of the presence of protests. Members of administrative or forensics teams, for example, likely face little added work burden or incentive to shirk. On the other hand, variation will be concentrated most strongly on those sworn officers who stand at the front lines of protests: rank-and-file police officers, sergeants and lieutenants.

Absences in the Minneapolis Police Department are classified as either paid or unpaid, with different policies governing their usage. The most recent labor agreement between the City of Minneapolis and the Police Officers' Federation of Minneapolis (governing officers, sergeants, and lieutenants) defines how the bulk of sworn officers may use or receive paid versus unpaid leave. Paid leave is acquired at a base rate of 96 hours per year, incrementally increasing at irregular tenure periods. It may be used as vacation time "in advance and taken at such reasonable times"³, with additional paid leave granted for sick leave if notified at least one hour prior to a shift, injuries on duty, bereavement, jury duty, and other service needs. Unpaid leave may be given for extended military deployments, attending children's school activities, or as cleared by supervisors for other needs.⁴ Unpaid absences are otherwise sparsely mentioned, with specific scenarios predominantly involving disciplinary action or failed drug or medical testing⁵ The Minneapolis Chief of Police ultimately has the authority

3. Labor Agreement - Police Unit §22.02

4. Ibid. §25.02

5. Ibid.

to place sworn employees on “standby,” such as for special events, and “The Employer” (city of Minneapolis) can cancel vacation time at the level of “shift, precinct, unit or division.”⁶. Therefore, variation in absenteeism should predominately be expressed through changes in the usage of paid absence hours, which would reflect employees losing time off to special events or standby status. Similarly, health- or disability-related long-term leave will be paid, as demonstrated in the spike in month-level baselines for paid leave starting in June 2020 in **Figure 1**.

5 Data

The author filed a public records request with the City of Minneapolis for Minneapolis Police Department employee absence records. The city returned absence entries covering the period of January 1, 2014, to September 6, 2025. These records contained the name, identification number, job assignment, job title (or sworn rank), absence type (paid or unpaid), shift date, and number of absence hours recorded for each entry. The structure of these records allows for analyses that subset based on sworn police officer versus civilian status or paid versus unpaid leave, all of which have different data-generating processes. With the Crowd Counting Consortium’s protest data beginning on January 1, 2017, the subsetted absence entries comprise 304,692 absences across 3,171 days.

5.1 Dependent Variable

To measure day-to-day variation in absences among employees of the Minneapolis Police Department, the author constructed day-level absence rates, measured as the total number of hours logged divided by an estimate of the number of employees on that date.⁷ In the raw absence records, all absences are recorded as either paid or unpaid. Job title and rank

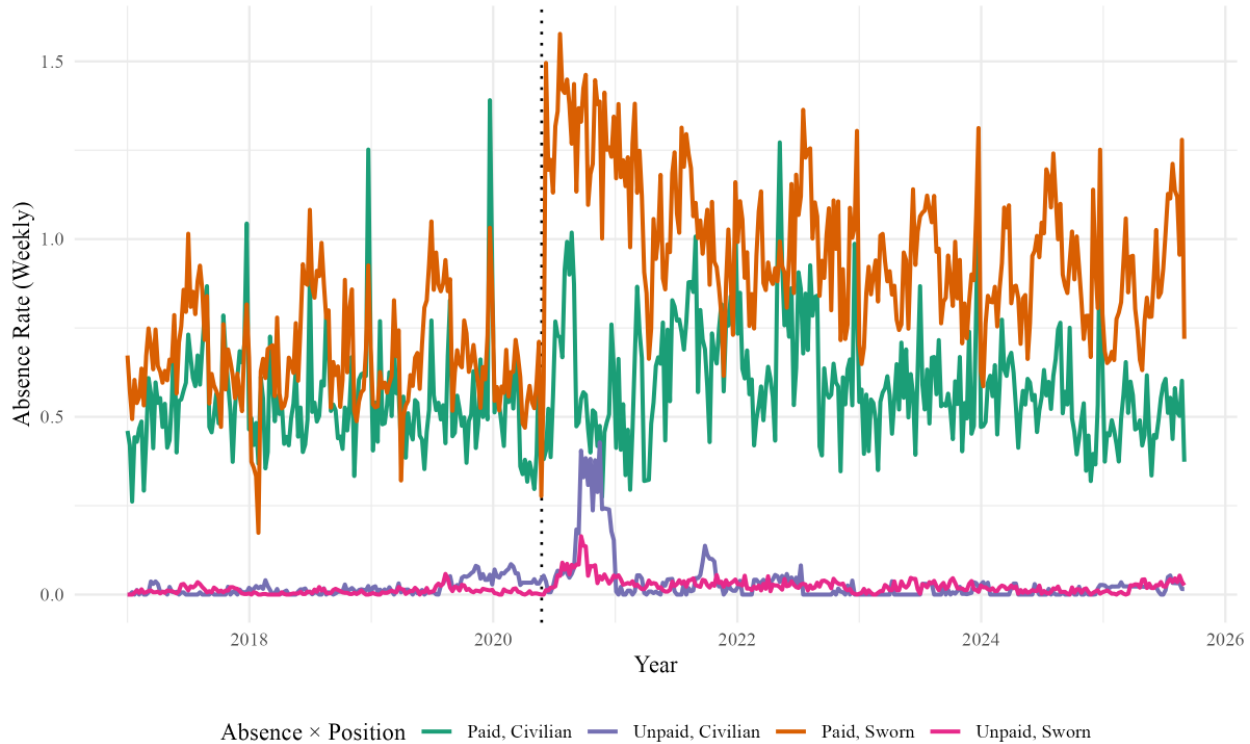
6. §20.02

7. A second records request pulled first-of-the-month headcounts for sworn and civilian personnel, with linear interpolation used to estimate employment on days between.

identifiers allow for sworn or civilian subgroup aggregation.⁸ R’s *complete* function was used to fill in 0s for dates in which no absences were recorded for these four groups (paid sworn, paid civilian, unpaid sworn, unpaid civilian).

Figure 1 shows the weekly absence rates for both sworn officers and civilian employees, for paid and unpaid absences. Absence rates for all groups appear to take on a cyclical pattern corresponding with holidays (such as large spikes around July 4 and end-of-year holidays). A large spike for police officers in mid-2020 (the week ending June 7, 2020) corresponds with known instances of mental-health leave and an eruption of attempted PTSD claims, corroborated by news reporting from the time (O’Neal 2022). More modest spikes of unpaid leave, both for officers and civilian employees, are also observable in the second half of 2020.

Figure 1: Minneapolis PD Absences Over Time



Note: Lines are weekly means of absence rates, measured as hours per employee. Dotted line placed on 5/25/20, the date of George Floyd’s death and start of Minneapolis BLM protests.

8. A 2023 copy of the MPD’s Policy and Procedure Manual was used to match employee’s job titles or ranks to sworn or civilian categories

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for MPD Absence Rates

Type	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Range	Days w/ Entries	Pct. Days
Civilians							
Paid	0.5752	0.4328	0.0000	2.9077	2.9077	3,023	95.3%
Unpaid	0.0283	0.0903	0.0000	1.8156	1.8156	1,109	35.0%
Sworn Personnel							
Paid	0.8636	0.3889	0.0663	2.2244	2.1581	3,171	100.0%
Unpaid	0.0198	0.0255	0.0000	0.2426	0.2426	2,049	64.6%

The dependent variable is the absence rate for an employee subgroup, measured as the total number of absence hours recorded on day t divided by the total number of employees in the subgroup: $Absence\ Rate_t$. Paid, sworn police officer absences are the primary focus of the analysis, given that paid leave is the most flexibly used form of leave according to department policy, and sworn personnel are most likely to have the nature of their work changed as a result of protests. Civilian paid absence rates are similarly measured. Since any positive number of unpaid sworn and unpaid civilian absences are rare, a binary measure is constructed to indicate of whether any absences of these types were recorded on a given date.⁹ **Table 1** provides descriptive statistics of day-level absence rates.

5.2 Explanatory Variables

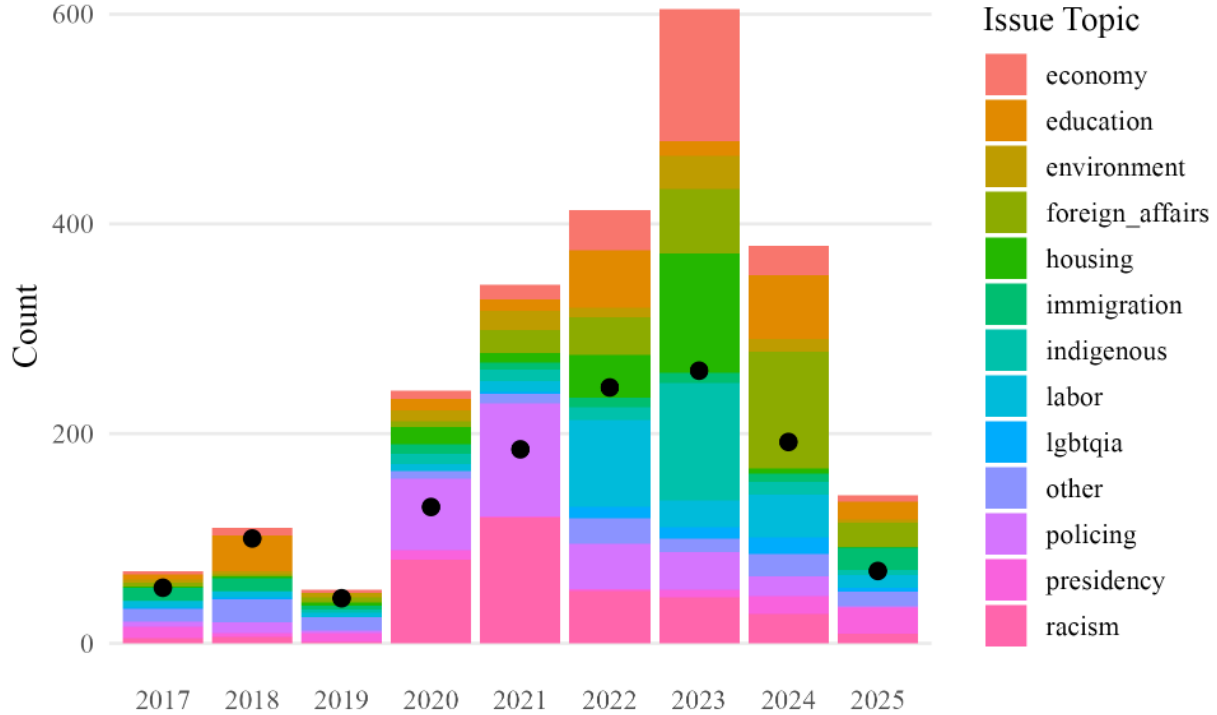
Explanatory variables come from the Harvard Ash Center’s Crowd Counting Consortium’s (CCC) database of U.S. protests, which started collection on January 1, 2017. The CCC crowd sources entries from news articles and social media, collecting data such as estimated crowd sizes, property damages, injuries, and arrests. It also categorizes protests by their main political issues.

Protests were filtered to include those located in Minneapolis, MN. The CCC attaches one or more political issues to each protest by running a series of expressions over description texts collected from associated news reports or verbatim participant claims. Using R’s *grep*

9. Unpaid civilian absences are so rare that they are excluded from further analysis.

function, top political issues were extracted from these columns and used to create dummy variables indicating whether a protest was focused on each political issue. Many protests were tagged with multiple issues, and **Figure 2** shows that many protests were coded as focusing on multiple political issues, especially starting in 2020.¹⁰

Figure 2: Frequency of Issue Topics at Minneapolis Protests



Note: Colored bars show the frequency of each protest issue as coded per year. As many protests had > 1 coded issue, black dots represent the actual number of protests per year.

Since multiple protests may occur on the same date, $Protests_t$ is a count variable that records the number of unique protests that occur on each date. Issue dummies are then summed by date to create the aggregate number of protests focused on each political issue. For example, $Protests_{policing, t}$ measures the number of protests that occurred on a specific date t that were focused on policing issues.

10. To the author's knowledge, no significant change in data coding guidelines occurred in 2020 to indicate a change in the coding of protest issues between 2019 and 2020. The first wave of the CCC's data collection efforts concluded on December 31, 2020.

5.3 Control Variables

Using CCC measures, additional count variables are created to sum the number of protests that occur on each date that featured arrests, crowd injuries, or property damage. These protest attributes are rare: comprising 2.8, 0.5, and 2.6 percent of Minneapolis protests, respectively. Finally, the largest recorded protest size that occurred on that date is recorded as a categorical variable ranging from 0 (no protests with any recorded size) to 4 (tens of thousands of protesters). The CCC codes a categorical protest size variable, *size_cat*, from which a maximum value is pulled. However, 48 percent of protests have no recorded protest size, and are coded as 0. Appendix Table A1 provides frequencies for all these characteristics.

Given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its timing with the BLM movement, case rates for the state of Minnesota are included and estimated by day using a linear interpolation of the state’s weekly rate estimates.¹¹ Finally, a factor variable, *BLM*, accounts for the unique protest environment that occurred after the murder of George Floyd. The *pre-BLM* level includes any date prior to May 25, 2020, the day of Floyd’s death. The *BLM* level is coded for any date between May 25, 2020 and June 20, 2021, which is the date that city officials reopened the protest occupation of George Floyd Square (“George Floyd Square, Uptown Intersection Reopen To Traffic - CBS Minnesota” 2021). *Post-BLM* is coded for any date after June 20, 2021, through the end of the data set.

6 Methods

To estimate the effect of protests and their respective political issues, a fixed-effects Poisson regression was chosen to accommodate the moderate right skew and universal positive values of day-level absence rates for paid absences among sworn police officers. OLS models and Gamma absence count models can be found in the Appendix. Year fixed effects capture broad political trends, such as elections and changeovers in government administrations. Fixed

11. Accessed via <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stats/case.html>

effects by month capture the seasonality of illnesses, with sickness absences more likely to occur during winter. Month fixed effects also capture variation in absences as a function of holidays. Finally, day-of-the-week fixed effects to capture variation in scheduling, as some officers may work more regular Monday-Friday schedules than others, altering day-to-day variation in absences. While officers register absences every day of the week (meaning officers are regularly scheduled to work weekends) later analyses show that civilian employees rarely input absence hours on weekends, indicating that they are normally scheduled to work standard Monday-Friday hours.

The regression formula can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Absence Rate}_t &\sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_t) \\ \log(\mu_t) &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Protests}_t + \beta_2 \text{Protests}_{\text{injuries},t} + \beta_3 \text{Protests}_{\text{arrests},t} \\ &\quad + \beta_4 \text{Protests}_{\text{property},t} + \beta_5 \text{Protests}_{\text{maxsize},t} + \beta_6 \text{BLM}_t + \beta_7 \text{COVID}_t \\ &\quad + \gamma_d + \gamma_m + \gamma_y \end{aligned}$$

where $\log(\mu_t)$ is the log absence rate for the group of sworn police officers at MPD on date t , $\beta_1 \text{Protests}_t$ is the count of protests that occurred in Minneapolis on that date, $\beta_2 \text{Protests}_{\text{injuries},t}$ is the number of protests with any number of reported crowd injuries, $\beta_3 \text{Protests}_{\text{arrests},t}$ is the number of protests with reported arrests, $\beta_4 \text{Protests}_{\text{property},t}$ is the number of protests with reported property damage, and $\beta_5 \text{Protests}_{\text{maxsize},t}$ is the maximum reported protest size on that date. $\beta_7 \text{COVID}_t$ is the COVID-19 case rate for Minnesota, and $\beta_6 \text{BLM}_t$ takes on one of three values for whichever time period the date falls in relation to the Black Lives Matter protest wave in Minneapolis. γ_d , γ_m , γ_y denote day, month, and year fixed effects, respectively. Heteroskedastic-robust standard errors (HC1) are used in all models.

7 Results

Table 2 shows the results of modeling the effects of an additional protest on the paid absence rate for MPD police officers on the same day. Models 1 through 3 include Black Lives Matter time periods as control variables to capture structural changes in absences during and after the peak of BLM protests in the city. Additional controls for injuries, damages, arrests and maximum crowd size are progressively added. Models 4 through 6 interact the *BLM* variable with $Protests_t$ to show how the effect of each additional protest changes between the three time periods.

In the first three models, each same-day protest is associated with a small drop in the paid absence rate for officers. With all controls (Model 3), this amounts to a mere 2.14 percent decrease in the absence rate. Models 4, 5, and 6 include the *BLM* as a multiplicative term interacted with the protest count to explore heterogenous treatment effects. While the $Protest \times BLM$ effects are insignificant in the pre- and post-BLM periods, the BLM period sees each protest associated with a more substantive 7.6 percent drop in the absence rate. The occurrence of protests with property damage is significant in the additive models and marginally significant in the interaction models, dropping the same-day paid absence rate by 12 to 14 percent. Notably, the Black Lives Matter period is associated with a large baseline increase in the paid absence rate for officers—more than a 75 percent shift. In the years following, the absence rate remained elevated at about 37 to 40 percent higher than the pre-BLM baseline. **Figure 3** displays the marginal heterogenous treatment effects of protests on the absence rate by time period, showing how protests during the Black Lives Matter era uniquely affected the same-day absence rate compared to the time periods before or after.

Table 3 shows the same model with absence rates lagged by one day. The effect of protests in the additive models dissipates in both magnitude and significance, amounting to a 1 percent drop in the absence rate. During the BLM period, protests are still associated with a 6 percent drop in the absence rate. The coefficients for protests with property damage

Table 2: Effect of Protests on Same-Day Paid Officer Absence Rates

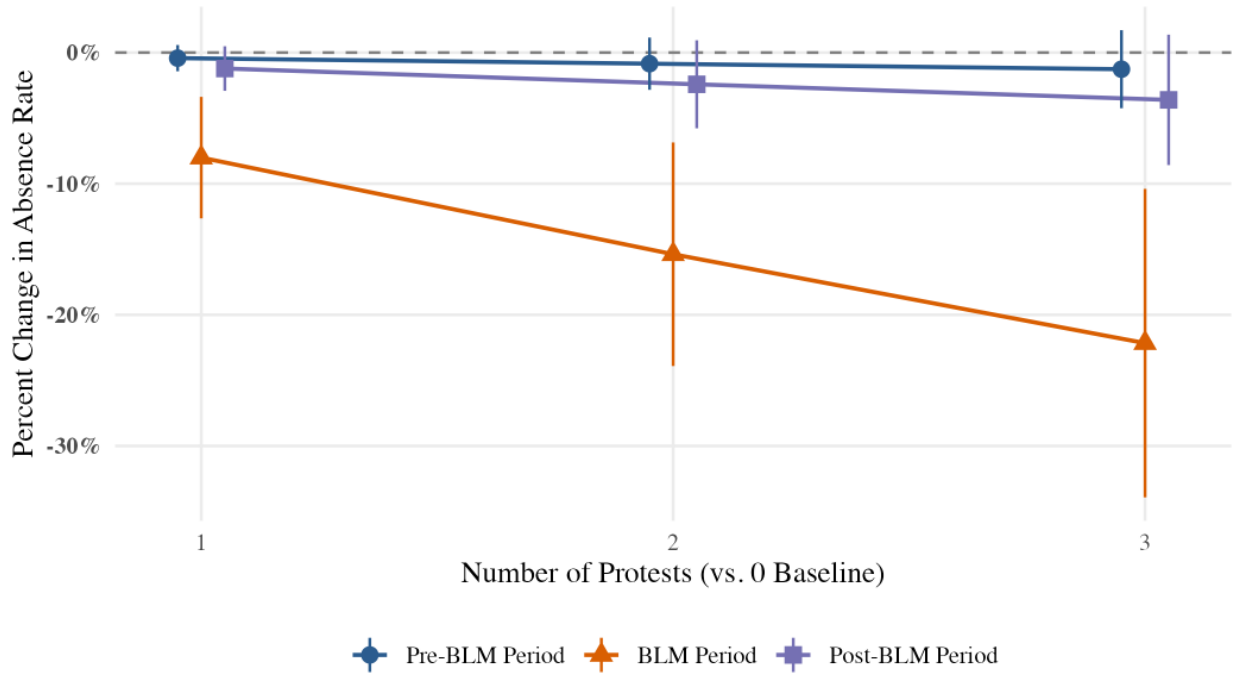
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
Count Protests	-0.0274** (0.0088)	-0.0252** (0.0085)	-0.0217* (0.0103)	-0.0056 (0.0056)	-0.0062 (0.0061)	-0.0043 (0.0051)
Count Protests $\times$ BLM Period				-0.0804** (0.0251)	-0.0777** (0.0253)	-0.0792** (0.0255)
Count Protests $\times$ Post-BLM Period				-0.0100 (0.0092)	-0.0083 (0.0096)	-0.0080 (0.0092)
BLM Period	0.5626*** (0.0315)	0.5674*** (0.0311)	0.5681*** (0.0312)	0.5858*** (0.0313)	0.5880*** (0.0311)	0.5878*** (0.0310)
Post-BLM Period	0.3408*** (0.0485)	0.3440*** (0.0483)	0.3456*** (0.0483)	0.3209*** (0.0488)	0.3240*** (0.0487)	0.3238*** (0.0487)
COVID-19 Rate	0.0003*** (5.6×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.56×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.54×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.69×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.65×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.63×10^{-5})
Protests w/ Crowd Injuries		-0.0242 (0.1469)	-0.0215 (0.1478)		-0.0086 (0.1449)	-0.0059 (0.1471)
Protests w/ Property Damage		-0.1474* (0.0722)	-0.1489* (0.0721)		-0.1274 [†] (0.0721)	-0.1305 [†] (0.0717)
Protest w/ Any Arrests		0.0369 (0.0618)	0.0402 (0.0616)		0.0709 (0.0616)	0.0734 (0.0609)
Max Crowd: 10s			-0.0174 (0.0198)			-0.0169 (0.0183)
Max Crowd: 100s			-0.0041 (0.0242)			0.0072 (0.0225)
Max Crowd: 1,000s			-0.0174 (0.0432)			-0.0090 (0.0411)
Max Crowd: 10,000s			-0.1533 (0.1340)			-0.2021 (0.1423)
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171
Squared Correlation	0.66498	0.66649	0.66665	0.66808	0.66915	0.66950
Pseudo R ²	0.05833	0.05842	0.05844	0.05860	0.05867	0.05869
BIC	6,157.7	6,181.3	6,213.4	6,172.1	6,195.9	6,228.0

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1*

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include day-of-week, month, and year FEs. Sample restricted to Minneapolis police officers. BLM period lasts from May 25, 2020 to June 20, 2021, and post-BLM period lasts from June 21, 2020 to September 6, 2025; both use pre-BLM period (January 1, 2017 to May 24, 2020) as baseline. Estimated via fixed effects Poisson.

Figure 3: Marginal Changes in Officer Paid Absence Rate by Same-Day Protest Volume



grow larger, suggesting that damaging protests affect day-after absence rates more strongly than the day of. Finally, the coefficient for dates with very large protests (in the tens of thousands) is associated with a large day-after increase in the paid absence rate, suggesting that large events demobilize officers in the day after.

These results show that overall, the occurrence of protests mildly affects the paid absence rate for officers on the day of and day after, but that this relationship is strengthened during the peak of the Black Lives Matter era in Minneapolis. From May 2020 to June 2021, protests are associated with a significant drop in the absence rate, showing how this era’s protest activity was mobilizing compared to times previous and subsequent. At the same time, baseline absence rates increased after the death of George Floyd, even after controlling for COVID-19 rates being higher in 2020 and 2021. This corresponds with news reporting of well over 100 officers taking long-term paid absences as a result of the tumultuous time period after Floyd’s death. This change persisted into 2021 and onward at lower levels. Civilian paid

Table 3: Effect of Protests on One-Day Lagged Paid Sworn Officer Leave

Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
Count Protests	-0.0144* (0.0069)	-0.0111 [†] (0.0063)	-0.0127 (0.0087)	0.0020 (0.0032)	0.0018 (0.0032)	0.0001 (0.0040)
Count Protests $\times$ BLM Period				-0.0696*** (0.0191)	-0.0618*** (0.0173)	-0.0648*** (0.0177)
Count Protests $\times$ Post-BLM Period				-0.0056 (0.0074)	-0.0031 (0.0075)	-0.0035 (0.0083)
BLM Period	0.5682*** (0.0319)	0.5751*** (0.0311)	0.5755*** (0.0309)	0.5885*** (0.0314)	0.5919*** (0.0310)	0.5918*** (0.0309)
Post-BLM Period	0.3502*** (0.0487)	0.3509*** (0.0478)	0.3537*** (0.0475)	0.3305*** (0.0492)	0.3327*** (0.0484)	0.3341*** (0.0481)
COVID-19 Rate	0.0003*** (5.47×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.42×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.42×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.57×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.5×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.49×10^{-5})
Protests w/ Crowd Injuries		-0.2787 (0.2225)	-0.2812 (0.2216)		-0.2657 (0.2205)	-0.2703 (0.2190)
Protests w/ Property Damage		-0.1895* (0.0746)	-0.1892* (0.0736)		-0.1724* (0.0734)	-0.1733* (0.0722)
Protest w/ Any Arrests		0.0302 (0.0652)	0.0176 (0.0649)		0.0554 (0.0651)	0.0411 (0.0650)
Max Size: 10s			-0.0190 (0.0196)			-0.0198 (0.0187)
Max Size: 100s			0.0287 (0.0211)			0.0405* (0.0199)
Max Size: 1,000s			-0.0141 (0.0437)			-0.0108 (0.0416)
Max Size: 10,000s			0.2053** (0.0641)			0.1721** (0.0591)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
Day of Week	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Month	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170
Squared Correlation	0.66439	0.66785	0.66883	0.66684	0.66950	0.67062
Pseudo R ²	0.05831	0.05854	0.05861	0.05854	0.05872	0.05880
BIC	6,156.3	6,179.0	6,210.8	6,171.0	6,194.0	6,225.7

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1*

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include day-of-week, month, and year FEs. Sample restricted to Minneapolis police officers. BLM period lasts from May 25, 2020 to June 20, 2021, and post-BLM period lasts from June 21, 2020 to September 6, 2025; both use pre-BLM period (January 1, 2017 to May 24, 2020) as baseline. Estimated via fixed effects Poisson.

absence rates (see Appendix Table A8) are unchanged as a result of protests, and moderately fluctuate during the Black Lives Matter era (increasing by about 12 percent, compared to a 75 percent jump for officers), showing the unique effects that the Black Lives Matter protest environment had on those police department employees most confronted by public upheaval. The fact that results are significant both on the day of and day after protests provides evidence of both anticipatory and reactionary police mobilization, but concentrated on protests occurring during the BLM era.

However, the issues at focus in Minneapolis protests shifted in 2020, with policing and racial justice coming to the forefront of protest activity. The heterogeneous treatment effects of an *all* protests count variable may be a byproduct of the overall nature of protests changing during the Black Lives Matter era, with policing-focused protests dominating. **Tables 4 and 5** show same-day and one-day lagged results for the effect of policing-issue protests specifically, with an additional “Other Protests” count variable included to control for all other protest activity.

In additive models, policing-issue protests are associated with a nearly 10 percent drop in the same-day paid absence rate, and a roughly 8 percent drop on the day after. Policing issue protests do not show significant heterogeneous treatment effects for same-day absence rates, though lagged absence rates drop for policing protests occurring during the BLM era by 12 percent. Significant additive effects combined with mostly insignificant interaction effects suggest a lack of variation of policing protests between the three BLM-respective eras, as most policing-issue protests occur during the Black Lives Matter period. These results suggest that policing-issue protests drive police mobilization. To better compare policing-issue protests to protests of other political issues, **Figure 4** plots the coefficients and confidence intervals of a model including all studied political issue protest counts together. Policing-issue protests stand out for their association with a drop in the absence rate, with foreign affairs (dominated by anti-war, pro-Ukraine and pro-Palestine demonstrations) seeing lower mobilizing trends.

Table 4: Effect of Policing Protests on Same-Day Paid Sworn Officer Leave

Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
Policing Protests	-0.0976*** (0.0226)	-0.0954*** (0.0240)	-0.0927*** (0.0253)	-0.0993 (0.0617)	-0.1053 (0.0647)	-0.0797 (0.0633)
Other Protests	-0.0082 (0.0057)	-0.0085 (0.0057)	-0.0067 (0.0064)	-0.0038 (0.0042)	-0.0044 (0.0047)	-0.0040 (0.0048)
Policing $\times$ BLM Pd.				-0.0367 (0.0761)	-0.0326 (0.0811)	-0.0598 (0.0786)
Policing $\times$ Post-BLM Pd.				0.0635 (0.0650)	0.0741 (0.0681)	0.0525 (0.0651)
Other $\times$ BLM Pd.				0.0041 (0.0346)	0.0039 (0.0341)	0.0041 (0.0340)
Other $\times$ Post-BLM Pd.				-0.0086 (0.0087)	-0.0082 (0.0089)	-0.0080 (0.0093)
BLM Pd.	0.5808*** (0.0307)	0.5822*** (0.0305)	0.5822*** (0.0306)	0.5881*** (0.0318)	0.5894*** (0.0316)	0.5884*** (0.0313)
Post-BLM Pd.	0.3465*** (0.0473)	0.3488*** (0.0472)	0.3498*** (0.0472)	0.3343*** (0.0475)	0.3356*** (0.0474)	0.3335*** (0.0476)
COVID-19 Rate	0.0002*** (5.51×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.45×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.46×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.42×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.37×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.38×10^{-5})
Protests w/ Crowd Inj.		-0.0078 (0.1434)	-0.0055 (0.1451)		0.0333 (0.1449)	0.0401 (0.1480)
Protests w/ Prop. Damage		-0.1042 (0.0753)	-0.1061 (0.0751)		-0.1099 (0.0757)	-0.1132 (0.0754)
Protests w/ Arrests		0.0740 (0.0594)	0.0741 (0.0593)		0.0933 (0.0623)	0.0919 (0.0616)
Max Crowd: 10s			-0.0145 (0.0186)			-0.0169 (0.0190)
Max Crowd: 100s			0.0022 (0.0222)			0.0102 (0.0237)
Max Crowd: 1,000s			-0.0118 (0.0400)			0.0063 (0.0420)
Max Crowd: 10,000s			-0.0913 (0.1509)			-0.1448 (0.1443)
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171	3,171
Squared Correlation	0.66974	0.67068	0.67082	0.67173	0.67284	0.67319
Pseudo R ²	0.05870	0.05875	0.05876	0.05883	0.05889	0.05891
BIC	6,163.4	6,187.3	6,219.5	6,194.9	6,218.7	6,250.8

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1*

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include day-of-week, month, and year FEs. Sample restricted to Minneapolis police officers. BLM period lasts from May 25, 2020 to June 20, 2021, and post-BLM period lasts from June 21, 2020 to September 6, 2025; both use pre-BLM period (January 1, 2017 to May 24, 2020) as baseline. Estimated via fixed effects Poisson.

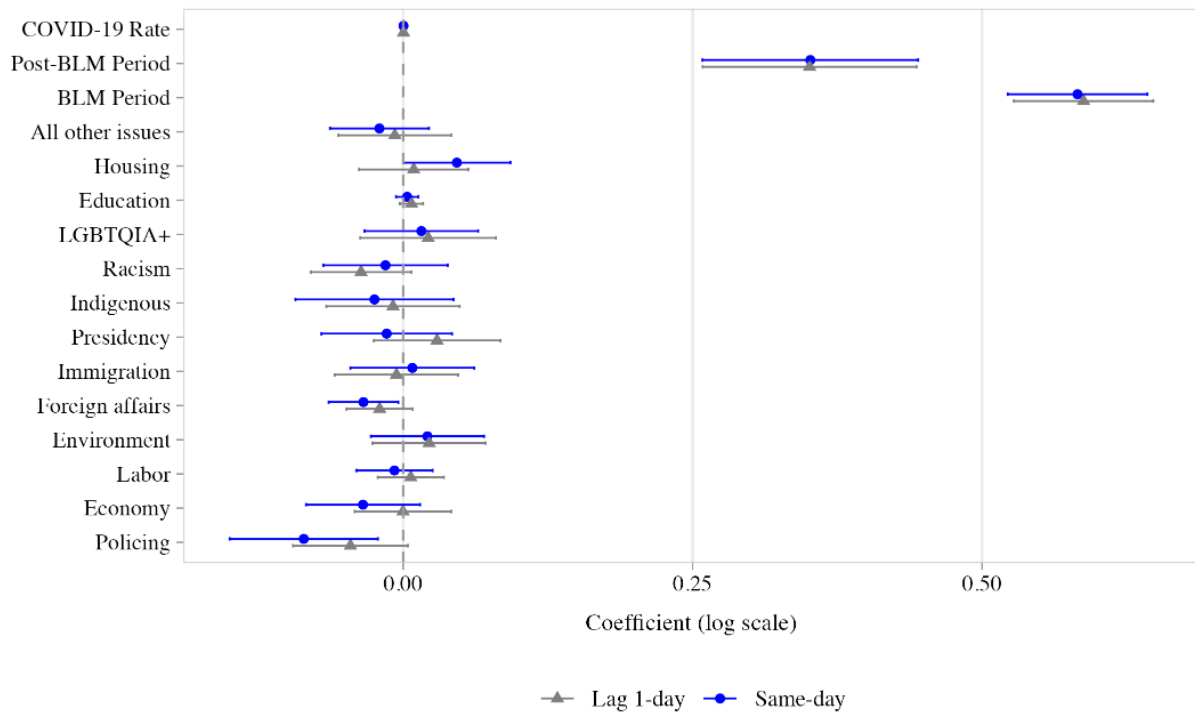
Table 5: Effect of Policing Protests on One-Day Lagged Paid Sworn Officer Leave

Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
Policing Protests	-0.0775*** (0.0175)	-0.0678*** (0.0159)	-0.0755*** (0.0173)	0.0562 (0.0474)	0.0524 (0.0469)	0.0128 (0.0550)
Other Protests	0.0014 (0.0041)	0.0017 (0.0041)	-0.0002 (0.0051)	0.0010 (0.0031)	0.0007 (0.0033)	-0.0004 (0.0041)
Policing $\times$ BLM Pd.				-0.1722** (0.0590)	-0.1577** (0.0573)	-0.1237† (0.0635)
Policing $\times$ Post-BLM Pd.				-0.0825 (0.0512)	-0.0694 (0.0508)	-0.0331 (0.0556)
Other $\times$ BLM Pd.				0.0186 (0.0310)	0.0174 (0.0312)	0.0144 (0.0317)
Other $\times$ Post-BLM Pd.				-0.0012 (0.0076)	-0.0001 (0.0077)	-0.0010 (0.0086)
BLM Pd.	0.5836*** (0.0311)	0.5865*** (0.0306)	0.5874*** (0.0306)	0.5907*** (0.0316)	0.5930*** (0.0311)	0.5916*** (0.0310)
Post-BLM Pd.	0.3515*** (0.0475)	0.3518*** (0.0471)	0.3544*** (0.0469)	0.3438*** (0.0479)	0.3438*** (0.0476)	0.3430*** (0.0475)
COVID-19 Rate	0.0003*** (5.42×10^{-5})	0.0003*** (5.36×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.37×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.38×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.33×10^{-5})	0.0002*** (5.34×10^{-5})
Protests w/ Crowd Injuries		-0.2618 (0.2217)	-0.2643 (0.2211)		-0.2271 (0.2197)	-0.2290 (0.2183)
Protests w/ Prop. Damage		-0.1538* (0.0761)	-0.1501* (0.0753)		-0.1556* (0.0749)	-0.1562* (0.0741)
Protests w/ Arrests		0.0543 (0.0648)	0.0391 (0.0644)		0.0658 (0.0637)	0.0512 (0.0634)
Max Crowd: 10s			-0.0164 (0.0180)			-0.0234 (0.0188)
Max Crowd: 100s			0.0368† (0.0192)			0.0389† (0.0206)
Max Crowd: 1,000s			-0.0093 (0.0412)			0.0010 (0.0418)
Max Crowd: 10,000s			0.2729*** (0.0542)			0.1714* (0.0742)
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170	3,170
Squared Correlation	0.66869	0.67089	0.67227	0.67079	0.67264	0.67371
Pseudo R ²	0.05862	0.05877	0.05887	0.05876	0.05890	0.05898
BIC	6,162.4	6,185.6	6,217.3	6,193.8	6,217.1	6,248.8

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.001, **: 0.01, *: 0.05, †: 0.1*

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include day-of-week, month, and year FEs. Sample restricted to Minneapolis police officers. BLM period lasts from May 25, 2020 to June 20, 2021, and post-BLM period lasts from June 21, 2020 to September 6, 2025; both use pre-BLM period (January 1, 2017 to May 24, 2020) as baseline. Estimated via fixed effects Poisson.

Figure 4: Effects of Protest Issues on Paid Sworn Absence Hours



Note: 95% CIs. The model from which coefficient estimates are derived include day-of-week, month, and year fixed effects. Sample restricted to paid absence rates for sworn Minneapolis officers. BLM period lasts from May 25, 2020 to June 20, 2021, and post-BLM period lasts from June 21, 2020 to September 6, 2025. Estimated via fixed effects Poisson.

These results are robust to a series of checks. Since the independent variable is a count of protests, protests of certain political issues may be associated with larger numbers of coinciding same-day protests, causing a confounding effect on absenteeism. To check this, Appendix Tables [A11](#) and [A12](#) re-estimate the effect of protests restricted to dates with only one or zero protests recorded. Dates with a single policing-issue protest are still significantly associated with a decrease in same-day and lagged absence rates reported compared to days with zero policing protests, while dates with a single protest overall are insignificant unless interacted with the BLM protest period. Results hold as well in fixed-effects OLS models (Appendix Tables [A5](#) and [A6](#)) as well as for models using raw group-level absence hours totals (Appendix Tables [A3](#) and [A4](#)).

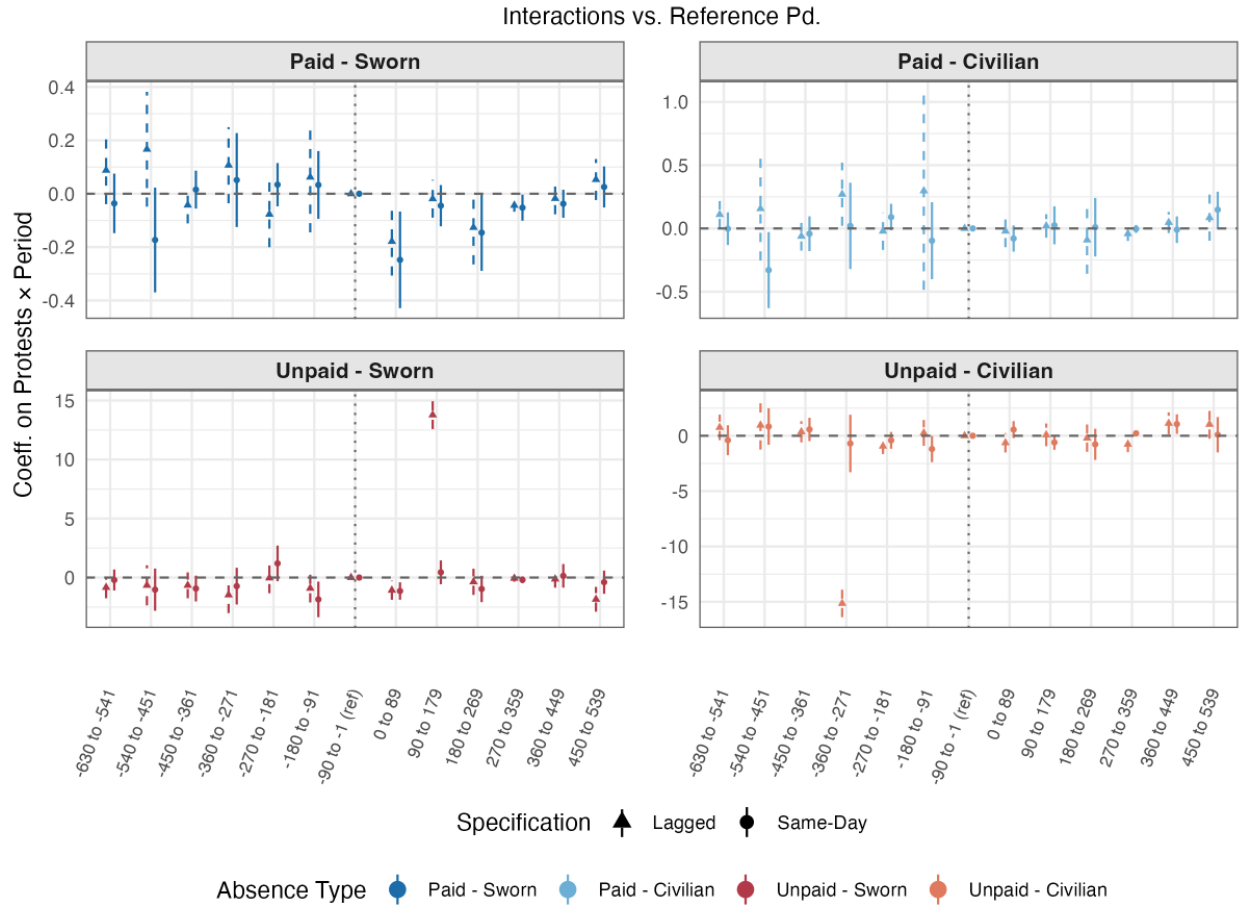
8 Additional Tests

Results so far suggest that the murder of George Floyd had a significant effect on protest policing in terms of absenteeism, but the *BLM* factor variable is specified using an end date (the closing of George Floyd Square) that may not capture more granular changes in protest policing. The *BLM* variable used in prior models are rough estimates taking into account significant events that demarcate three distinct time periods in relation to Floyd’s death and the eruption of protest activity in 2020, but a more precise event analysis provides insights into the duration of any interaction effects.

To further identify whether the summer of 2020 marked a change in how protests affected absenteeism, and to compare the relationship between protests and absence rates for both paid and unpaid absences, and civilian and sworn officer employees, an event study model is constructed and run for all four absence groups. 90 day windows of time are interacted with the $Protests_t$ variable, with the reference time period being the 90 days leading up to May 25, 2020. $Protests_t$ coefficients from other periods are compared to the coefficient for the reference period to evaluate change in protest-absence effects over time. This study mirrors

the regression models for both same-day and one-day lagged absence rates, using separate models for all four groups of absences: paid and unpaid, for sworn police officers and civilian personnel. Given the different underlying data-generating processes, a Poisson model is fitted for paid absence hours, and a logit with a binary indicator for any absences recorded for both sworn officer and civilian unpaid absences, as this is a rare event. **Figure 5** shows the results of this event study.

Figure 5: Protest-Absence Relationships Over Time



Note: Dots and triangles show marginal change of same-day and lagged coefficients for the $[\text{time period} \times \text{Protests}_t]$ interaction. The 90-day reference period corresponds to 2/24/20 through 5/24/20, the three months prior to George Floyd's death. Confidence levels shown at 95 percent. All models keep day, month, and year FEs. Sworn and civilian paid models use a fixed effects Poisson regression, and both unpaid models use a fixed effects logit model with a binary dependent variable indicating a date with a 0 absence rate.

The four boxes in **Figure 5** correspond to the four absence groups previously constructed. Dots denote the time period-specific coefficient for $Protests_t$ regressed on same-day absences, while triangles denote absences lagged to the day after the protest counts. All models include fixed effects, COVID-19 rate controls and protest covariates. For the paid absence rate for sworn officers, all 90-day periods, both for same-day and lag models, are statistically indistinguishable from zero up to the reference period of February 26 to May 25, 2020. In the 90 days following George Floyd’s death, the $Protests_t$ coefficient drops roughly 0.25 in magnitude, or a 28 percent drop in the absence rate for same-day protests occurring from late May 2020 to late August of the same year. While the coefficients for both same-day and lagged absence rate changes rebound to be statistically indistinguishable in the 90 to 179 day post-period, it drops to again be significantly negative in the third and fourth post-periods, ranging from 180 to 359 days after Floyd’s death, or from late November 2020 until late May of 2021.

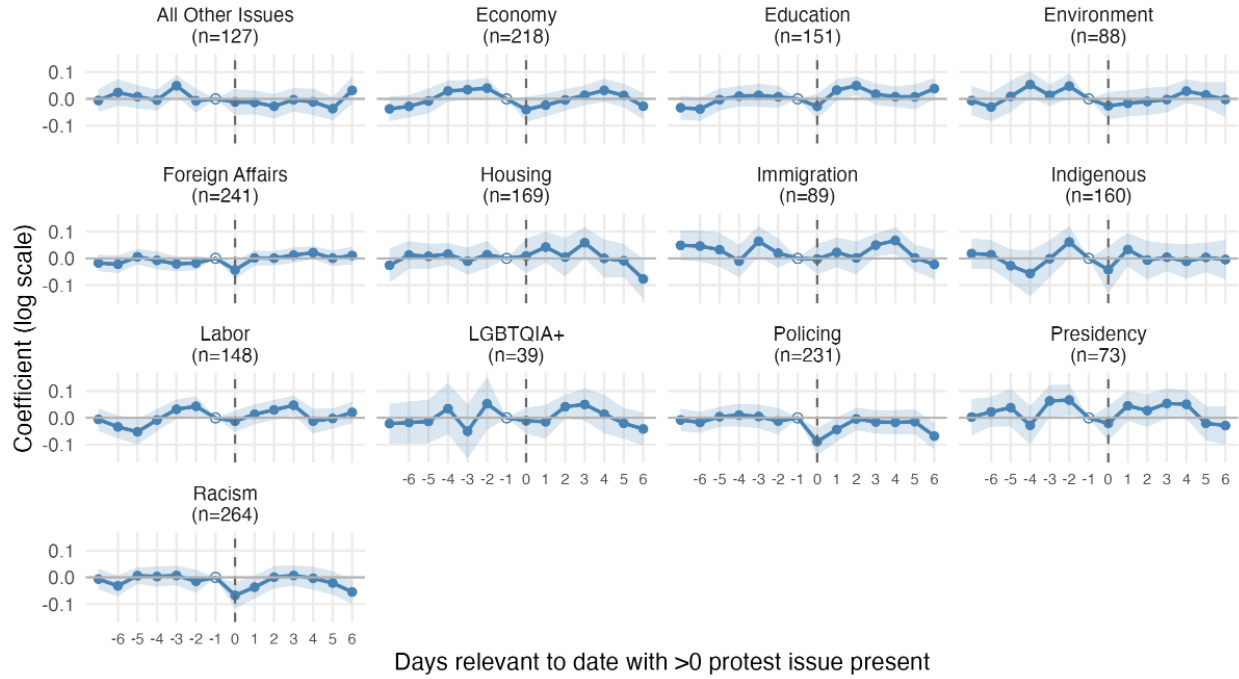
Paid absence rates for civilians does not appear affected by protests split according by time period, with all interaction coefficients being statistically indistinguishable from zero. Unpaid leave for both sworn and civilian personnel do not show stable pre-trends or post-trends. As previously noted, unpaid leave for both employee classifications is rare, averaging to fewer than 2 sworn personnel and 6 civilian personnel per day.

This event study lends weight to the findings that the relationship between protests and absenteeism is unique to sworn officers changing their paid absences, and conditional on the time period during and following the Black Lives Matter protests after the death of George Floyd. As earlier analyses have shown, no other political issues aside from policing generate a significant change in paid absence rates for sworn personnel. As an additional check, **Figure 6** shows the results of a descriptive staggered event study analysis in which the occurrence of any number of protests of political issue X is marked as an event date, and changes in absences hours are analyzed in the six days before and after each event. Each day with at least one protest is treated as an independent event, and a series of 6 lead and lag variables

are included in a fixed effects gamma regression (including day-of-week, month, year, and *BLM* fixed effects. Given the potential for autocorrelation, Driscoll-Kraay standard errors clustered by date are used.

This staggered event study has some limitations: it treats each protest as an independent event, ignoring the occurrence of other protests within the vicinity, cannot distinguish between issues that are highly correlated, such as “policing” and “racism,” and does not include additional controls. As such, it should be treated as descriptive, visualizing the absence trends around each political issue as they appear on the calendar. Rather than using count variables, “events” are any date in which the number of political protests of a certain issue is a positive number.

Figure 6: Day-Level Paid Absence Shifts Around Protests, by Issue, for Sworn Personnel



Note: Confidence levels shown at 95 percent for log changes in sworn officer paid absence rates. Events are defined as dates in which at least one protest occurs under the respective political issue. Model is a fixed effects Poisson model with Driscoll-Kraay standard errors clustered by date, with fixed effects for day of the week, month, year, and *BLM* levels included.

Only three political issues correspond to significant (and negative) changes in absences on the day of protests: policing, racism, and foreign affairs. Policing and racism events are highly correlated (0.75) and display similar changes in absenteeism: a log change of -0.088 and -0.067, respectively, or an 8.4 and 6.5 percent decrease in protest-day paid absence hours recorded by sworn personnel. Foreign affairs protest events correspond to a log change of -0.043, or a 4.2 percent drop in absence hours recorded.

9 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the analyses show that policing-issue protests, dominated by Black Lives Matter protests occurring after the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police Department officer, have a unique and two-part effect on absenteeism for MPD police officers. On one hand, the timing of a rush of persistent and long-term paid leaves of absences, corresponds directly with the protests that started in the days following George Floyd’s death. Whether these absences correspond to sincere medical needs or disillusionment with being on the force, the final week of May 2020 created a large, structural change in the availability of officers to police Minneapolis’s streets. At the same time, the day-to-day marginal effects of policing-issue protests moved officers in the opposite direction, pulling down the ability for police officers to take paid absences for each additional policing-issue protest that occurs on each date. This relationship persists to the day after protests showing that policing-issue protests mobilize officers both on the same days they occur and the days following.

No other political issue, whether pooled as “other” or analyzed separately, approaches a similar relationship with absenteeism to the same degree, save for the possible exception of foreign affairs related protests (dominated by anti-war, pro-Ukraine, and pro-Palestine protests, notable left-wing political issues). This speaks to the two-fold characteristics of the Black Lives Matter era protests that create trouble for police: first, the BLM protests and other policing-issue protests, are usually inspired by sudden shocks to local or national

police-civilian relations, such as news spreading of the killing of a civilian by an officer. Other political issues (housing, economy, education) may be less likely to suddenly appear in rapid bursts, given the ability longer-term buildup of citizen sentiment and claim-making (e.g., growing inflation, a rise in rent prices over time, or planned legislation to change curriculum). Foreign affairs protests may similarly be planned under rapidly changing conditions, forcing police departments to coalesce manpower in a similar fashion. Future analyses would benefit from creating methods to track the announcements of protests and possible planning time for police to determine whether absence changes are a function of a sudden need for more officers. Secondly, the relationship between policing-issue protests and absenteeism lends weight to the “racial animus” theory of protest policing, one that argues that local police are sensitive to civilian demonstrations that directly target their departments or make claims that seek to alter the institution of local policing. As Said (2025) argues, Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S. may present an example of both “blue centered” and “racial animus” protest policing models working together: while the BLM protests were sudden and interfered with day-to-day life for both officers and local civilians, they also presented a political threat to local policing’s *status quo*.

Future analyses should evaluate whether these types of relationships persist in other cities and across time. If certain political issues correspond with changes in absences while controlling for “blue centered” attributes such as violence and larger crowds, then police departments may be systematically treating protests of certain political issues with more intensity than their attributes prescribe. Minneapolis was a “most likely” case, one in which disproportionate police attention to policing-issue protests should be expected, given the enormous and persistent set of demonstrations that occurred in 2020. Does this change in potential presence matter for protest outcomes or protester well-being? Are right-wing protests responded to with the same intensity as left-wing protests, controlling for violence and crowds? Existing research (Wood 2020) suggests not, creating concerns about the impartiality of police executives in allocating resources (and violence) to civilian demonstrations. Disproportionate

attention paid to policing-issue protests creates ramifications for the freedom of speech for citizens, who may seek to confront police violence in the future yet may attract more presence from those same departments.

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