

Friends or Government: What Gets Feet in the Street?

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Introduction

When I was seven years old my mother took me with her to a pro-life protest outside an abortion clinic. I remember seeing police and people in fluorescent jackets. I remember a red piece of duct tape with the word "LIFE" written on it in sharpie being placed over my mouth, and looking around and seeing it on everyone else's mouths too. Fourteen years later, this experience shaped my research question: what motivated people like my mom to go out and participate in a political protest?

This summer had a large impact upon my thesis. With all of the protests over the summer concerning police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, many scholars considered it to be the largest movement in American history. An article in the *New York Times* points out the remarkable nature of these protests, and their impact upon the country further down the road. "These figures would make the recent protests the largest movement in the country's history, according to interviews with scholars and crowd-counting experts" (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020). Not only did the nation witness this new addition to the Civil Rights movement, but also witnessed many people protesting new laws and orders dealing with COVID-19. Overall, the year 2020 was a remarkable one for political protest. .

Political scientists seeking to answer this question of motivation divide into three schools of thought, one focusing on government action, one focusing on social relationships, and one focusing on material incentives. Boiling it down to two main motivations, however, I hypothesized that either government action or incentives motivate people to protest, and I investigated that hypothesis by conducting an online survey of 120 people: forty-nine who had participated in a political protest and seventy

one who had not but were willing to explain what would. I found that of those who had participated in protests, there wasn't enough evidence to support incentives or government. Of those who did not participate, a majority said that incentives would convince them to participate. The most surprising information was that roughly half of those who did not participate in protests mentioned a "cause they could believe in" (or similar phrases) as something that would convince them to join a political protest. Since the political science literature focuses elsewhere—on government action triggering protests, social relationships luring people to join, or material incentives persuading them—this was my most important discovery. People need to believe in what they are protesting for or against.

The Motivational Funnel: Breaking Down the Literature

One of the biggest surprises for political scientists in recent history was the Arab Spring protests that started in 2011. The fact that these protests surprised so many experts piqued my interest. I dug deeper to see what made these protests so special, and saw that these people that had been stuck under a repressive regime finally stood up and changed the country. Protests and their causes are something political scientists are continually looking at and trying to understand. After seeing the impact the Arab Spring had on the world, I wanted to explore why these individuals who act in these protests chose to participate in or start these protests.

Three distinct schools of thought in political science provide answers. The first is the structural approach, which focuses on how actions or inactions by governments can motivate people to protest. The second school focuses on social identities. Historically,

people have joined a movement because it had a distinct identity. Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ, the Pro-life or Pro-choice movements. Individuals believe that they belong to that movement because they identify with the people that are protesting. Third, a classic school of thought focuses on material incentives for individuals as the key motivator for joining protest. I wanted to look at the individual and their motivations. At some point the individual as a rational actor will make the choice to participate or not based on a cost-benefit calculation. To determine if structural-governmental, social-relations, or material incentives are the key to this choice, we need to review the literature on each school.

Structural Theory: Government Action or Inaction as a Trigger

The guiding thought behind the structural school is that government is in control, that their actions dictate social response. It can be active action or passive inaction, whether committing electoral fraud or not allowing protests through legal channels. One leading scholar, Herbert Kitschelt, argues that protests appear only “when aggrieved groups cannot work through established channels to communicate new claims into the political process of authoritative decision making” (Kitschelt 1993: 14). He argues that protests and social movements appear in one of two forms. They appear in what he calls the politics of space or politics of social identity. The politics of space addresses the physical and natural consequences of the physical world. Things like environmental protection, land-use, and transportation are all things that would fall under the politics of space (14). The politics of social identity covers those things that involve the “redefinition and reconstitution of individual and collective identities as well as social relations” (14). Kitschelt then puts forth two hypotheses concerning the relationship between the established government and social movements. First is that challenges to the

representative democracy are seen as individuals expressing dissatisfaction with the system. Second is the idea that the actions of “left and libertarian social movements are hypothesized to alter the democratic process in advanced capitalism” (15). In the end he states that the first challenge holds the most value, that protests are oftentimes expressions of dissatisfaction, but that does not take away the power of liberal democracies and the methods in which they function. “Even within a system of democratic differentiation, the relative impact of social movements and participatory politics will vary over time. Nevertheless, all this should not distract from the qualitative changes in the practice and opportunities for democratic participation evidenced by advanced capitalist democracies since the advent of collective protest mobilization in the 1960s.” (29)

McAdam (1982) similarly contends that democratic governments create spaces that allow protests to take place. He believes that protests are inherently disruptive to the elite’s structure and power imbalance. “*All* social movements pose a threat to existing institutional arrangements in society” (26). In order to minimize this disruption, the elites create a space where protests can exist without much structural interference. Through policy and law, lawmakers are able to minimize the damage to their own positions. He argues that before every social movement starts, its leaders require support from the elite within the political system. Without that support, the social movement cannot gain enough traction to overcome what is called the collective action problem. This is a situation where protests cannot get people to participate because the risk of participation is not worth the reward gained if the protest is successful. The elites make compromises, creating new rules and policies that support social movements, giving support to

collective action and social movements. The elites change the government to allow these things to take place, using it as a method of appeasing the masses and preventing uncontrollable social movements. If the government allows protests, then the collective action problem is easier to overcome since the penalty for action is not as severe. In McAdam's view, governments allow protests to minimize long term damage to their existing power structure.

Much like McAdam and Kitschelt, Medaris believes that there is something unique about democratic governments and their structure that gives them a special relationship with protests. Medaris attempts to approach the role and function of social movements in deliberative democracy in his article. First, he explains deliberative democracy and the conflicts it faces with social movements. He points out that deliberative democracy subscribes to a principle of inclusion that brings all members together in order to make decisions (Medaris 2005: 54). This inclusion, however, only includes those with power or the elites and therefore, social movements are understood to be in direct conflict with this type of democracy since they are challenges and opinions held by a minority or marginalized group and not the collective. He then goes on to argue that in order for the marginal to be heard they must coerce the collective into action. This coercion can take form in mass protests, boycotts or other system disrupting activities. The idea is to bring the other side to the table and to do that the movement must prove that it has some sort of power over the system in which the other side resides.

After looking at the strictly structural approach, I tried to find someone that had a mixed perspective. Joshua Tucker (2007) looks at how rational theory and the structural approach intertwine in the so-called Color Revolutions in former Soviet republics: the

Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Here Tucker argues that the collective action problem was overcome in these political protests, due to the fact that governments began to commit electoral fraud. Up to that point, there was very little collective action against the government. There was a very high opportunity cost for anyone participating so there was very little incentive to be involved in any sort of protests. However, after the blatant electoral fraud, the situation changed. The reward for success was higher since success meant that those who committed the fraud could be removed and replaced by those who deserve the position. This made the cost of involvement more reasonable as the reward was greater as well. This was the last straw for many people. Many decided that it was worth coming together to combat the government. Electoral fraud—action by the government—became the trigger motivating people to go out into the streets and join anti-government protests.

We can expand on the trigger of electoral fraud in the Color Revolutions to include a larger explanation of government action in regimes and democracies. The things that set off the protest might be different in different governments. This idea of government action creating political protests can be enlarged to include any type of government, even in those situations where there isn't a space or legal safety net made to protect protestors.

The Group Identity School

By contrast, other political scientists focus on membership in groups and social-relational motivations for joining protests. Martin van Zomeren (2016) states that there are multiple themes that drive collective action, one of which is group identity and how

social standing will affect your likelihood of joining a protest. He points out three different factors that affect collective action for a cause. The first and second are closely related, stability and legitimacy. “For instance, gender inequality in a society may be perceived as unstable and illegitimate, which suggests that individuals see hope and scope for social change; alternatively, gender inequality may also be perceived as stable and legitimate, which would result in an acceptance and even internalization of the status quo” (100). The third piece is the permeability of the group boundaries. If the permeability is low and an individual cannot escape a bad situation for one that is better, it increases the chances that they will involve themselves in protests in order to create some sort of change in their situation. If a person is being oppressed for being a certain race, the permeability of that social identity is nearly non-existent, so it is more likely that they will react and protest.

Following along this line of group identity, Bert Klandermans and his colleagues (2002) used information from a study done on farmers from Spain and the Netherlands to show that collective identity makes the bonds between the group stronger and makes them more willing to join collective action for the sake of the group. There exists both a direct and indirect relationship between collective identity and protest participation. The indirect tie is that the sense of belonging found from collective identity makes the “free rider” problem less impactful as each member of the collective feels they need to pull their weight. The direct tie is the shortcut drawn between identity and participation. The authors assert that people participate in protest because they identify with the other participants, but since collective identity already gives them that sense of belonging, they are more willing to participate. They argue that the stronger the collective identity of the

group, the more likely they will join together to protest. The collective identity leads to a collective preparedness which then leads to higher chances of collective action which in turn creates a stronger collective identity.

The Arab Spring was another example of this layer of the funnel. While studying Egypt and its actions during the Arab Spring, Clarke (2014) argued that the recent events in nearby Tunisia, relayed quickly through social media, and the popularization of the internet, created a spark in the citizenry, inspiring them to act in their own country and try to create change. However he believes that this couldn't have happened without the work of the "brokers" of the three main social sectors and structures within the country. The three groups were the Cairo-based political opposition, the informal Egyptian labor movement and the Society of Muslim Brotherhood (380). In the past these three social sectors had been unable to work together to elicit any social change and since each of them controlled a large portion of the populace, the country itself was undecided. However, Clarke argues that the mobilization of each of these group's leaders helped topple the Mubarak regime. Once all of the leaders of the different groups had "blessed" the protests, then the members of the different groups were encouraged to participate in different protests and put more pressure on the government.

The Individual and Their Incentives

The narrowest part of the funnel is the rational choice school of thought. This school of thought addresses the motivations and incentives of the individual. One rational choice theorist, Dennis Chong, claims that protests and social movements can be explained from the rational perspective of incentives. He argues, however, contrary to Olson (1965), that these incentives are not always physical or material incentives, but can

often be moral or psychological incentives (Chong 1992: 172) He argues that material incentives cannot be the only incentive, as those who participated in the women's rights movement and civil rights movement obtained no real material gains from their participation. Instead, these actors were able to experience moral and psychological incentives. Chong uses a strong incentive-based argument that essentially boils down to the idea that people will often become involved in large ventures in order to maintain or create social relationships. Chong argues that often the incentive is to create or maintain good standing among one's peers and so people choose to be involved in social movements or protests in order to boost those relationships. He cites the civil rights movement as an example to support his claim. He does not deny the use or existence of material incentives, arguing that the leaders and front-liners will most likely receive some sort of reparation for the increased risk (172). He simply claims that material gains are not the only incentives.

Similar to Chong, William Moore (1995) claims that incentives help explain protests of the free-rider problem that faces rational choice theory. The free-rider problem is a situation where those who do not participate will still receive the benefits of as if they had participated. Olson uses this example.

When a partnership has many members, the individual partner observes that his own effort or contribution will not greatly affect the performance of the enterprise, and expects that he will get his prearranged share of the earnings whether or not he contributes as much as he could have done. The earnings of a partnership, in which each partner gets a prearranged percentage of the return, are a collective good to the partners, and when the number of partners increases, the incentive for each partner to work for the welfare of the enterprise lessens (Olson 1965: 55).

Olson says that since the rewards of any collective action are limited, the more individuals that participate the lower the individual “pay out”. From a rational perspective this discourages participation and gives rise to the free-rider problem.

Moore is quick to use an incentive-based logic to solve this issue. He references nine studies produced from 1970 to 1987 that all studied selective incentive solutions as a means of overcoming the collective action issue. He points out four different solutions to the free-rider problem that found in the literature produced between 1970 and 1987. The first solution he calls selective incentives, which has three separate variants; second is the efficacy argument, which makes the claim that individuals do not accurately estimate how much their involvement will affect the big picture or outcome of the protest, but when that impact is made known to them they then overcome the free rider problem and get involved. The third solution he calls contracts and conventions, suggesting that social organization makes it easier to overcome the free-rider problem as a group instead of as an individual. This social organization could include anything from church groups to Facebook groups, as long as there is an organizational lead involving multiple people. Finally, he points out the tipping phenomena which argues that the more people in the movement will increase the odds of new members. If a movement gains popularity and becomes more successful, those who were concerned about their safety or how much their presences would really contribute, are convinced to join since the risks for them are now significantly lower. He uses the rest of the article to fully explain how each of these solutions works in relation to rebellions.

While many scholars in the rational choice school of thought approach defined participation as one dominated by solely material incentives, Michael Gross (1995) looks

at how some rational choice decisions may be influenced by non-material incentives. He starts this article by stating that abortion politics addresses two sides of the motivational spectrum. It is both an example of rational choice theory and moral development theory, delving into the idea that moral development shows evidence of enlightened moral reasoning (Gross 1995: 507). Gross attempts to answer three questions, first, what is the role of moral development in collective action? Second, what role do incentives, moral and material, play in these activities, and third “which cognitive, organizational, and social factors account for incentive choice” (509)? He says that moral judgments were used to indicate political activism in accordance with cognitive-developmental theory. He also points out that organizational incentives were used to test rational choice theory and how much rational choice really affected political behavior.

Although many writers in the incentive school of thought define incentives for individuals as central, Jane Mansbridge believes otherwise. In her article, “Rational Choice Stand to Gain by Losing,” Mansbridge (1995) dissects the rational choice argument to point out that there are certain gains to the idea of rational choice and certain losses. Robert Axelrod’s computer tournament which was based on a reciprocal rational choice process showed that it was rational to cooperate in certain situations as cooperation brings about more success (Mansbridge 1995: 135) Mansbridge points out later that rational choice will often hide its motivation in self-interest but in reality, rational choice and cooperation is often driven by a sense of altruism. She points to an article written by R. H. Frank in 1995 called “A Theory of Moral Sentiments” that shows that rational choice and cooperation provide an environment in which altruism can “nest.” (Mansbridge 1995: 141) This means that those with altruistic motives will find

others who have the same motivations through rational choice, and therefore meet with greater success through cooperation. Mansbridge warns against treating rational choice as a separation of individuals from society. She points out that it is easy when talking about rational choice, to extract the individual from society and lose the effect that they have in the community in that it no longer sees what that individual is doing that changes the community.

A Breakdown of the Funnel

Based on the research, the structural school of thought seems to believe that protests happen in democratic societies only because they are allowed by the government in charge. McAdam (1982) believes that protests are something allowed by the elite in order to placate the masses instead of bringing about a revolution. Medaris (2005) argues that protests are used when the normal, allowed structures are not successful. It would seem that when a group is frustrated with the normal, allowed pathways in the system used to elicit change, they then resort to protest. The societal school appeals mainly to identity. The rational choice approach points toward incentives. Only one person seemed to believe that rational choice could sometimes be motivated through altruism, but many believe that at some point there has to be some sort of reward for involvement, especially if the odds of success are low.

Takeaway

While the structure may allow or disallow protests or the individual may belong to some sort of collective identity, at the end of the day the individual has to choose whether or not involvement is worth it. This can be for a variety of reasons as the different authors stated, but at some point the individual must choose to be involved. You

can have a system that allows for protests but it might be a case where no one participates. Even in an environment where protests are allowed, you still have to overcome the free-rider problem, and that has to be done through some sort of rational choice. I am curious to see if incentives are the only factors that should be taken into account or if it is possible that there could be other motivations. Mansbridge believes that a possible explanation for rational choice is altruism and I want to see if this idea is an anomaly or maybe a belief that is held in opposition to the purely incentive based answer to the rational choice theory.

Model and Hypothesis

Based on my reading of the literature, I believe that the structural and rational choice schools of thought best explain participation in protests. The actions or inaction of a government can create environments for political protest against those actions or inactions. Police brutality, electoral corruption, attacks on a foreign nation, all of these are things that can spark political protest. Likewise, an individual will experience many different incentives that will motivate them to participate, in addition to what the protest is covering. I think that social incentives are the greatest motivators in this category, things like going to a protest because of social obligation, or being encouraged to go by friends or family. These two different hypotheses can be explained below.

Incentives -----> **Participation in Protests**

Government Action -----> **Participation in Protests**

In other words, incentives--whether physical or non-physical, social, emotional or relational-- motivate participation in protests. Alternatively, government action or inaction trigger participation in protests. Olson shows that incentives drive participation

in protests, and Chong argues that they can have a physical or relational value. He believes that incentives can be emotional, relational and social as well as physical. Joshua Tucker also explains that the actions of a government can motivate individuals to protest, even when there is no incentive to. While his specific case covers election fraud, the idea of government action over any subject causing protest is not unreasonable. It is reasonable to think that government supporting a certain legislative action or even having a representative take a certain action could lead to protests.

How to Explore the Motivations Behind Protests

As we further explore the motivations of protestors, I would like to define the terms I am using. When I use the term “incentives”, I am using Chong’s definition. His definition of incentives includes both physical and non-physical. Physical incentives could include money, guarantee of financial benefits or deals in the future while non-physical references emotional, relational or social incentives that may motivate a person to act differently than they would have otherwise. Things like going with family, or friends or going because another friend is going. Another word that has been used to describe this in the literature review is “motivations”. In the research I do not plan on using “motivations” to describe incentives, but I note it here so that the reader can think of them in the same way.

In the summer of 2020 we saw the Black Lives Matters and anti-mask protests. Alongside these protests we saw others that could not be explained through government action, but instead could be explained through incentives. *Either incentives or government action is more likely to motivate people to protest.*

To test this relationship I conducted a survey of individuals who have, and have not, participated in protests via a Google Forms-based convenience sample distributed to Malone University students, faculty, and staff, alongside a snowball sample of distributed to others via email forwarding and/or social media. The survey contains a mixture of questions, including open ended, yes-or-no, and yes-no-other (see the Appendix for the full list of questions). This allows for answers that I may not have accounted for as well as answering those questions that are simple “yes, no” questions. By offering open-ended questions that have an opportunity for unexpected answers, I am allowing space for other motivations that I may not have considered when creating the survey. For example, my questions ask about incentives and government action, but if the participant had no experience with either of these when going to protest, they would only be able to say no, but provide no other context to their actual experience. The survey creates space for participants to answer in ways I did not expect and uncover other motivations for participating in protests.

Those respondents of the survey who had not participated in any protests were asked, “If you have never attended a political protest, what would convince you to do so?” This allows even those who have not participated in protests to offer an answer. As a result of this approach, we will end up with two sets of data- mostly closed-ended responses from those who have participated in protests and open-ended responses from those who have not participated in protests, but still took the survey.

No demographic data was collected from the sample, although the majority of responses came immediately after emails to the Malone University student body. There were waves of responses later as the survey hit different social media platforms. After

reviewing patterns in the initial wave of responses, I chose to only look at the responses to four different questions instead of the entire survey. I chose questions that I knew had a more direct tie to my hypothesis, questions that would address whether or not my hypothesis was valid.

Table 1 below shows what questions from the survey are being analyzed quantitatively and which hypotheses they affirm. In order for a respondent to be listed as having said “Yes” to the incentive questions, they had to have answered “Yes” to at least two of the three incentive questions that we looked at (see Table 1). For government action, they only had to say “Yes” to the one question in order to be coded as supporting the Government hypothesis.

Table 1. Hypotheses and Associated Questions

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Questions</i>		
<i>Government action or inaction motivate participation in protest</i>	Was the protest triggered by the actions or inaction of a government official? eg. police officer, elected official, or another government employee?		
<i>Incentives motivate participation in protests</i>	Were you asked by any friends or relatives to participate in the protest?	Did you attend the protest with your friends or relatives?	Did you identify with the people who were protesting?

Once the data is retrieved I will isolate the answers in order to plainly show which hypothesis is best supported. I will test these hypotheses by using a Chi Square analysis. The Chi Square would be set up as seen below in **Table 2**. When a respondent says that

they have affirmed at least two of the incentive questions and none of the government action questions, their data would be placed in the **Cell B**. If incentives are more motivating than government, we should find a higher observed number in **Cell B** than the expected number the formula gives us. Similarly, if government action or inaction is more motivating than incentives, then there should be a higher observed number in **Cell C** than the expected number given by the formula.

Table 2. Chi Square

	Incentives YES (at least 2)	NO Incentives
Govt YES	A	C
Govt NO	B	D

The other side of the data is the qualitative answers given by those who did not participate in protests but listed what would motivate them to participate. This data will be treated differently than the quantitative data, and will stand alone. After coding the answers into different categories through discussion, we will compare and contrast the data with the quantitative data.

Results

Quantitative

My analysis found that many of the questions in the survey did not provide evidence of either incentives or government action motivating respondents. In order to better interpret the data, we narrowed down the responses from the survey to only reflect those questions that targeted the hypotheses that we were testing for within the survey. Instead of including the responses to the question, “Were you paid to attend?” we

included, “Did you go with friends or relatives?” By doing this we hoped the data would better reflect those questions which got a lot of diversity, as well as best targeted the hypothesis. We did something similar with the government questions. We focused on only one of our original government survey questions, as the rest didn’t test the hypothesis of government action. Due to this we only analyzed responses to the question, “Was the protest the result of government action or inaction?” We knew that this question most directly tested the hypothesis, as the others did not test it nearly as well.

The data that we collected are displayed here in a Chi Square table.

Table 3. Chi Square with Data

		Incentives YES	Incentives NO	Total	Total
Gov’t YES	Count (vs. expected)	27 (26)	7 (8)	34	34
	Percentage of total (vs. expected)	55% (53%)	14% (16%)	69% (
Gov’t. NO	Count (vs. expected)	11 (12)	4 (3)	15	15
	Percentage of total (vs. expected)	22% (24%)	8% (6%)		
Total		38 (77%)	11 (22%)	49 (100%)	49

Chi-Squared = .99979, with $df = 1$, *p-value* not significant at the .10 level.

We found that 27 respondents said “Yes” to both incentives and government action, which was a majority of 55%. When put through the Chi Square analysis to test how far each category strayed from random chance, it was shown in the table that the

most any category deviated from what would have been given through random response was roughly 1, not nearly enough to show any solid evidence for either hypothesis in a head-to-head. If Government was more decisive than incentives, then you would have to see more than 8 choose it. Instead, 7 respondents did. Conversely, if Incentives were more common, you would have to see more than 12 choose Incentives Yes/Government No. Instead, the actual number was 11.

After analyzing only the quantitative evidence, which was a reflection of those individuals who had participated in protests, there does not seem to be any measure of association suggesting that incentives motivate participants more than government action, or vice versa.

Qualitative

When analyzing the qualitative data, the process started with coding all of the different responses. Overall there were 71 respondents who replied that they had never participated in any protest, and so answered the question, “If you have never gone to a protest, what would convince you to go?” Some statements were coded into multiple categories, as the respondents explained that there were a few things that would have to happen in order to motivate them to participate. That being said, each response was coded through discussion between myself and a second coder, with both parties agreeing on the way that each statement was coded.

Before sifting through the data, we established two different categories, government action and incentives of any form. Since these were the two hypotheses that were being tested, it was important to see how many responses fit within these categories.

Thirty-nine respondents—55% of those who had never protested—mentioned some version of incentives. The vast majority of those incentive statements mentioned safety in some form. Many of these individuals responded that they would attend a protest if there was some assurance of safety for their person, either from physical violence or from arrest. Another incentive that was mentioned with high frequency was social. Many people were passionate about the things being protested, but would only go if a friend went with them. Only eleven individuals convinced by incentives stated that they would attend a protest if their rights were being infringed upon. This individual seemed to capture the theme perfectly,

I think maybe if the reason for protesting affected me on a more personal level, I would definitely go and take part in the protest. I know this seems trivial, but honestly I'm blessed that I don't have to worry about any of the injustices that are present in our country affecting me. My heart aches for the African-American community, but I think since I am not affected, I choose not to go. If my family members or close friends were African-American and were the victims of this ruthless injustice, I would definitely take part in raising my voice.

I found this response interesting because the core of incentive-based thinking is the idea that an individual would be motivated to action if their own person was infringed upon, either their rights or their safety, but many only eleven of thirty-nine respondents coded in incentives replied in this manner. It also points out how important it was that there exist relational-incentives. This individual would participate if their family or friends were being affected, but had very little motivation aside from that to participate.

Another interesting result was the number of responses mentioning government being surprisingly low, with only four individuals stating that they would attend a protest based off of government action or inaction. Something that was even more interesting is

that all four of them cited something in addition to government action that would have to happen in order for them to go.

In the open-ended responses to the question “If you have never attended a political protest, what would convince you to do so?” we discovered two categories which were unexpected. The first category was a group of eleven individuals who could never be convinced to protest, many of them adamantly so. One respondent said, “Nothing could convince me to go to a protest, even if something happened to a family member of mine. Nothing is accomplished when you stand in the streets with signs. I would rather take rational action in the court or whatever is necessary for there to be a change.” Others in this category echoed this opinion, saying that nothing, ever, would convince them to participate.

The other category we called “content” or “substantial cause.” Forty-five percent of the seventy-one participants said that if they agreed with the cause, if they were passionate about the cause, or if something happened that was significant enough to warrant a protest, that they would participate. The cause could vary from something that they thought was unjust, to something that they thought was important but had no personal impact on them. Also noteworthy, a little more than half of these thirty-two cases also said that incentives or government action would motivate them.

Discussion: Limitations of the Study

The notable disparity between the number of incentive responses versus government responses could result from a few different sources. First, the way that the question is framed— “If you have never gone to a protest, what would convince you to go?”—is already orienting the participant to think individually about being persuaded. A

primary way that people in our society are persuaded is through incentives, so this disparity may be a result of the framing. Second, the context of this past summer and the protests within it could have affected the responses, specifically concerns about safety, after seeing so many portrayals of protests being allegedly unsafe. This might explain why so many participants were concerned about safety.

The choice of having a qualitative portion of the survey for those who had not participated greatly improved the quality of my research. The data within that portion provided a great deal of insight and information that increased the overall value of the study. It was also a good choice to extend the sample size past Malone participants. The size of Malone, as well as the general lack of diversity, meant that the data I received would be inherently biased, however, since the survey was extended on social media to multiple groups and social circles, data was better off for it. That aside, my work over the past year has had many things that I wish could have been done better. While 120 participants is nothing to ignore, there were many opportunities to get involved in protests that I missed where I could have asked individuals and gotten more participants who had gone to protests and increased that specific sample size. In addition to this, due to time constraints, I was unable to go through and code the open-ended questions that protest participants had answered. If I had more time I would like to go through and see if there are trends in those answers that could reveal useful insights. I would have also tried to think of different ways of asking about government action and inaction. Unfortunately I only had one question that would indicate anything useful in that area, and if I could do it again I would try to come up with at least one more question that tested government action and inaction.

I was also unable to gather demographic data from those who took the survey, so while there could be trends among certain groups for certain answers I wouldn't be able to see them. I think that if given the chance for another survey I would attempt to use some of my survey to gather demographic information so that the data could be more solid.

Conclusions

The quantitative analysis found that there was not enough evidence to support the hypothesis, that *either incentives or government action is more likely to motivate people to protest*. Participants did not cite one motivation more often than the other in a statistically significant way. The qualitative data showed a large amount of support for incentives over government, with 54% of participants mentioning incentives, while only 5% mentioned government. A good case can be made for the validity of substantial cause as a motivation, since a large number of participants, 45%, mentioned it as something that they would need in order to be convinced to protest.

The political science literature on protests focuses on three schools of thought: incentives, social relationships and government action. However, something that I didn't see in any of the literature was the motivation of substantial cause. When coding the qualitative data, there were enough mentions of "a cause I could believe in" or similar statements to warrant notice, but this idea was not a key theme in the political science literature on protests. Key studies in the literature do not argue that people participate in protests based on what the protest is about. Instead they cite different qualifiers and processes, such as specific government action or incentives, instead of the substance of the protestors' claims.

What would have convinced a large portion of the non-protestors to join a protest was a cause that they cared about what was being protested. I think that if this study has done anything, it has brought up the question as to why this idea of substantial cause isn't talked about more in the study of protests? If this study is representative of the general population, then why isn't it a more popular school of thought that is studied and debated in academic circles? The study provides an opportunity for another individual to more deeply study this idea, that while incentives and government could be motivators, it is equally if not more likely that the content of the protest is the key factor in the decision of whether or not to protest.

Fourteen years ago when I was taken to that protest in front of the abortion clinic I didn't know why I was there. I understood that my mom was there so I was there, but after this thesis it is interesting to look back and see that my mom didn't have any reason to be there. She had no incentive or personal reason to be there, but she believed that it was important that she protest, that abortion was wrong and she had to say something. It was because she was passionate about what was being protested.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. Have you ever attended a political protest in person? If "no", move to the bottom of th3 page and click "next".
2. At the most recent protest you attended, what were the people protesting? Were they for it or against it?
3. Did you receive any monetary or other forms of compensation for participating in the protest?
4. If you replied yes to the previous question then please explain what kind of compensation it was.
5. Were you relatives or friends with any of the individuals organizing the protest?
6. Were you asked by any friends or relatives to participate in the protest?
7. Did you attend the protest with your friends or relatives?
8. Were you a member of a specific group (a church or civic or lobby group) that encouraged you to attend the protest?
9. Did you feel obligated to attend for any reason?
10. If you replied yes to the previous question please explain why.
11. Did you identify with the people who were protesting?
12. Was the protest held in a space and time permitted by the state or local authorities?
13. Was the protest attended by state or local officials?
14. Did the protest occur within an area marked off by police?
15. Was the protest triggered by the actions or inaction of a government official? eg. police officer, elected official, or another government employee
16. If you replied yes to the previous question please explain the governmental action or inaction that contributed to the protest.
17. If none of these questions applied to you or your reasons for protesting, why did you attend? Please explain.
18. **If you have never attended a political protest, what would convince you to do so?**