

Geographic Distribution of Protests & Election Results

Figure 1. Black Lives Matter Protest Size (per 100 capita)

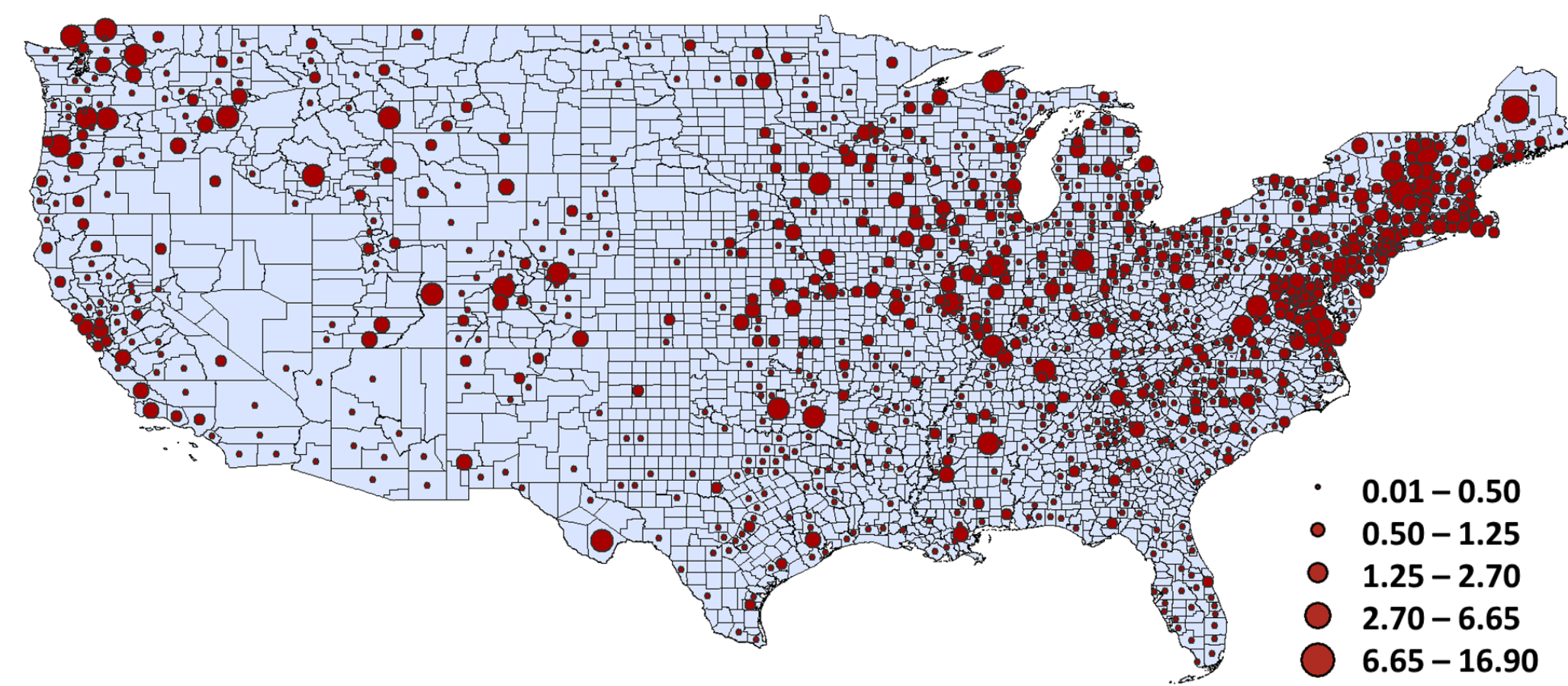
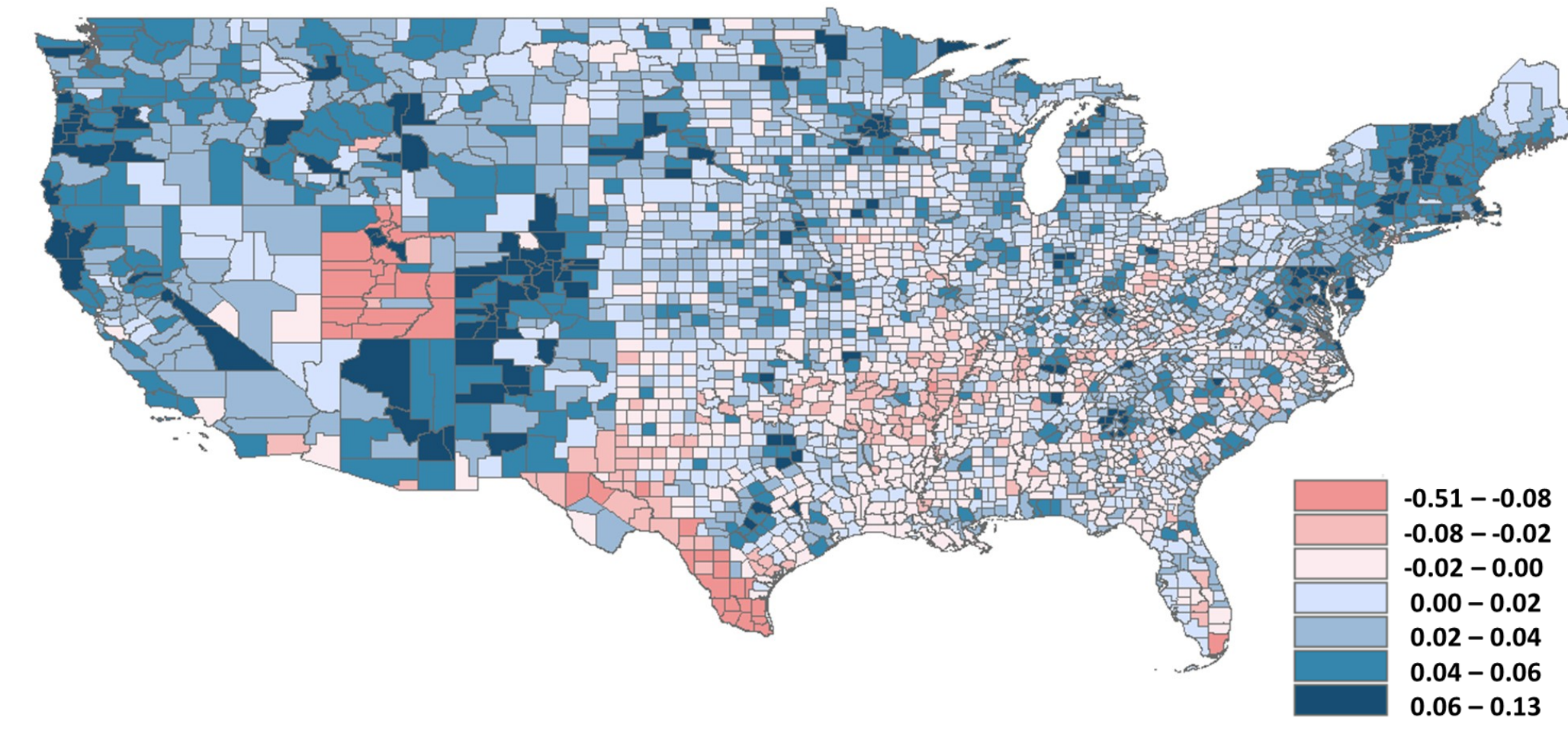


Figure 2. Change in the Democratic Vote Share (2020-2016 US Election)



Data Set

- US Presidential Election (2020 – 2016):** MIT Election Data and Science Lab
- BLM protest:** Crowd Counting Consortium & ACLED US Crisis Monitoring
 - The main analysis focuses on protest activity between May 26 – June 7, 2020 (when the BLM protest movement was at its height)
- Hourly rainfall data (instrument):** ERA5-Land Hourly dataset from the Copernicus Climate Data Store
 - Rainfall is restricted to 8AM – 2AM when protests are likely to occur
- Demographic & Economic controls:** American Community Survey (ACS) from the US Census Bureau & the US Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Covid-19 Case Rate:** Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University

Summary Statistics

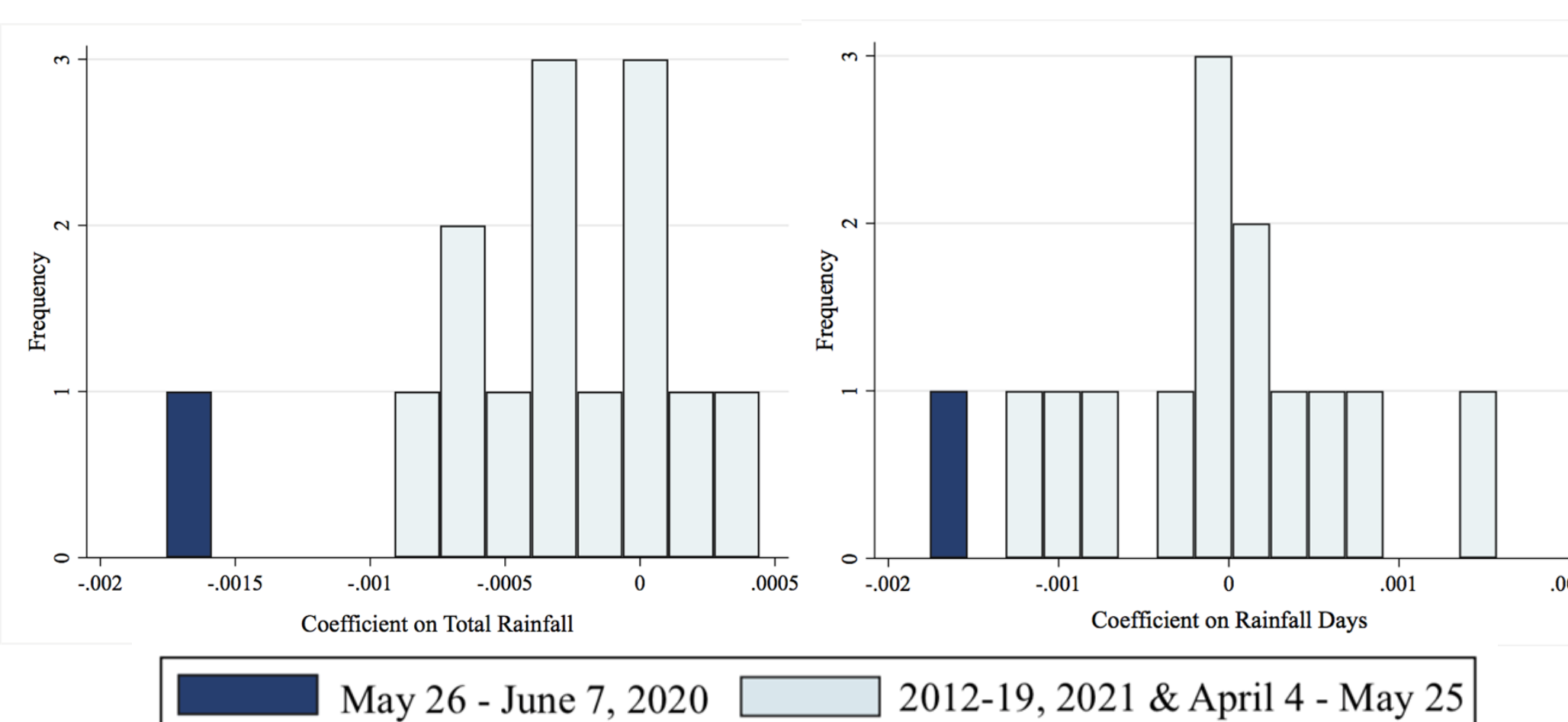
Table 1. County-level Summary statistics

	(1) All Counties	(2) Protest Counties	(3) Swing States	(4) Democratic States	(5) Republican States
BLM Protests (May 26 – June 7)					
Protest Size (per 100 capita)	0.21	0.53	0.17	0.50	0.12
	[0.67]	[0.96]	[0.47]	[1.14]	[0.42]
Days of Protests	1.09	2.71	1.16	2.15	0.55
	[2.02]	[2.39]	[2.03]	[2.73]	[1.28]
Precipitation (May 26 – June 7)					
Total Rainfall (mm)	31.58	32.86	38.80	22.75	29.64
	[25.17]	[24.90]	[32.09]	[13.35]	[20.76]
Days of Rainfall (> 1 mm)	4.20	4.36	4.61	3.84	4.03
	[2.09]	[2.09]	[2.34]	[1.90]	[1.90]
US Presidential Election (2020 – 2016)					
Δ Democratic Vote Share	0.016	0.029	0.012	0.036	0.009
	[0.035]	[0.038]	[0.033]	[0.028]	[0.037]
Number of Observations	3,112	1,255	1,130	627	1,355

Note: Standard deviations are reported in brackets.

Placebo Test: Rainfall

Figure 3. Distribution of Reduced-Form Results on Different Placebo Periods of Rainfall



Can Protests Swing Voters?

The Impact of the 'Black Lives Matter' Protests on the 2020 US Presidential Election

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Introduction

- Can protests lead to political change by influencing voting behaviour in subsequent elections?
- Research Question: Did the 'Black Lives Matter' protests increase the Democratic vote share in the 2020 US presidential election?**
 - BLM is a decentralized social movement to address racial inequality in the criminal justice system and police brutality
 - On 25 May 2020, the murder of George Floyd (an unarmed Black man) by a police officer triggered a series of racial justice protests across the US

Literature & Contribution

- Two recent studies on the BLM protests and 2020 US election report contradicting findings:
 - Teeselink & Melios (2021) – BLM protests increased Democratic vote share by 0.68 to 1.76 percentage points in counties on average.
 - Mohnot (2021) – BLM protests increased Republican margins by 0.019 percentage points on average instead (driven by Republican backlash in Democratic areas)
- This study addresses the lack of consensus on the electoral effect of BLM protests and further explores the differential impact of violence and state-level party affiliation.

Empirical Strategy

- Identification strategy: follows the existing literature using rainfall as an instrument to capture the exogenous variation in protest activity

First-stage regression:

$$\widehat{Protests}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Rainfall_i + X_i' \eta + u_i$$

- $\widehat{Protests}_i$ – 'Black Lives Matter' protest intensity; protest size (total number of protesters per 100 capita) or days of protest
- $Rainfall_i$ – total rainfall or number of rainy days between May 26 to June 7, 2020
 - Protest size is instrumented by total rainfall (between 8AM – 2AM) and protest days is instrumented by the number of rainy days (> 1mm of rain between 8AM – 2AM)
- X_i' – vector of control variables
 - Historical average rainfall, population density, median income, median age, education, racial composition, unemployment rate, Covid-19 case rate

IV regression:

$$\Delta Democratic\ Vote\ Share_i = \alpha + \delta \widehat{Protests}_i + X_i' \rho + \varepsilon_i$$

- $\Delta Democratic\ Vote\ Share_i$ – change in the Democratic vote share between the 2016 to 2020 US presidential election
- $\widehat{Protests}_i$ – protest intensity between May 26 to June 7, 2020 (instrumented by rainfall)

First-Stage Results

Table 2. First-Stage Results: The Effect of Rainfall on Black Lives Matter Protests

Dependent variable:	Protest Size (per 100 capita)			Days of Protest		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Total Rainfall (cm)	-0.026***	-0.019***	-0.019***			
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)			
Days of Rainfall				-0.098***	-0.072***	-0.072***
				(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Covid-19 Case Rate	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
F-stat	17.40	7.60	7.80	19.47	13.33	13.47
Observations	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112

Note: F-statistic refers to the excluded instrument. Standard errors correcting for spatial correlation within a radius of 150km are in parentheses (Conley 1999). *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

- 1 cm of additional rainfall during the two-week period would reduce the protest size by almost 10%

Key Findings

- BLM protests increased the Democratic vote share by 2 – 2.5 percentage points in counties on average**
- The positive effect of BLM protests on the Democratic vote share is driven entirely by peaceful demonstrations**
- BLM protests shifted the average vote share in swing state counties towards the Democratic party by 1.3 percentage points**
 - Protests had no statistically significant effect in Democratic states but protest days incited a backlash effect in Republican states
- BLM protests helped the Democratic vote share in swing states by causing Republicans to abstain from voting**
 - Voting for the Republican incumbent may have become implicitly associated with racism (which led to abstention)

Main Results

Table 3. The Effect of Black Lives Matter Protests on the Democratic Vote Share

Dependent variable:	Change in the Democratic Vote Share					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: OLS						
Protest Size	0.0056**	0.0002	-0.0001			
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)			
Days of Protest				0.0032***	0.0007	0.0006
				(0.0005)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Panel B: 2SLS/TV						
Protest Size	0.132***	0.094**	0.094**			
	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.042)			
Days of Protest				0.037***	0.023**	0.023**
				(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Panel C: Reduced-Form						
Total Rainfall (cm)	-0.003***	-0.002***	-0.002***			
	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)			
Days of Rainfall				-0.004***	-0.002***	-0.002***
				(0.0008)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Covid-19 Case Rate	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112	3,112

Note: All regressions include log population density and historical 10-year averaged rainfall in May and June. County-level controls include log median income, median age, percent with bachelor's degree or higher, percent white, percent African-American, percent Hispanic, percent immigrant, unemployment rate 2020, and change in unemployment 2019-2020. Covid-19 Case Rate is the cumulative number of confirmed Covid-19 cases on November 3, 2020 as a share of the county population. Standard errors correcting for spatial correlation within a radius of 150km are in parentheses (Conley 1999). *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

- An additional percentage of the population protesting is associated with a 9.4 percentage point increase in the Democratic vote share
- An additional day of protest is associated with a 2.3 percentage point increase

Peaceful vs. Violent Protests

Table 4. Impact of Violent and Peaceful Protests on the Democratic Vote Share

Dependent variable:	Change in Democratic Vote Share					
	Counties with Riots			Counties with Peaceful Protests		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Protest Size	0.029	0.002	0.003	0.076***	0.060***	0.061**
	(0.029)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.026)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Covid-19 Case Rate	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	168	168	168	1,092	1,092	1,092

Note: Standard errors correcting for spatial correlation within a radius of 150km are in parentheses (Conley 1999). *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Swing States

Table 5. The Electoral Effect of BLM Protests in Swing States

Panel A	Δ Democratic Vote Share					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Protest Size	0.187***	0.077**	0.078**			
	(0.070)	(0.036)	(0.037)			
Days of Protest				0.060***	0.012**	0.012**
				(0.027)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Panel B						
Δ Republican Vote Share						
Protest Size	-0.042	0.031	0.031			
	(0.051)	(0.030)	(0.030)			
Days of Protest				-0.013	0.007	0.007
				(0.015)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Covid-19 Case Rate	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,130	1,130	1,130	1,130	1,130	1,130

Notes: Swing states defined by the Cook Political Report 2020 include: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine 2nd CD, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska 2nd CD, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Wisconsin. Standard errors correcting for spatial correlation within a radius of 150km are in parentheses (Conley 1999). *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Voter Turnout Mechanism

Table 6. The Effect of BLM Protests on Voter Turnout in Swing States

Dependent variable:	Δ in Democrat Voter Turnout			Δ in Republican Voter Turnout		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A						
Protest Size	0.104***	0.034	0.035	-0.066***	-0.125***	-0.125***
	(0.040)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.043)	(0.044)
Panel B						
Days of Protest	0.025*	-0.001	-0.001	-0.021***	-0.128***	-0.128***
	(0.013)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Covid-19 Case Rate	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1130	1130	1130	1130	1130	1130

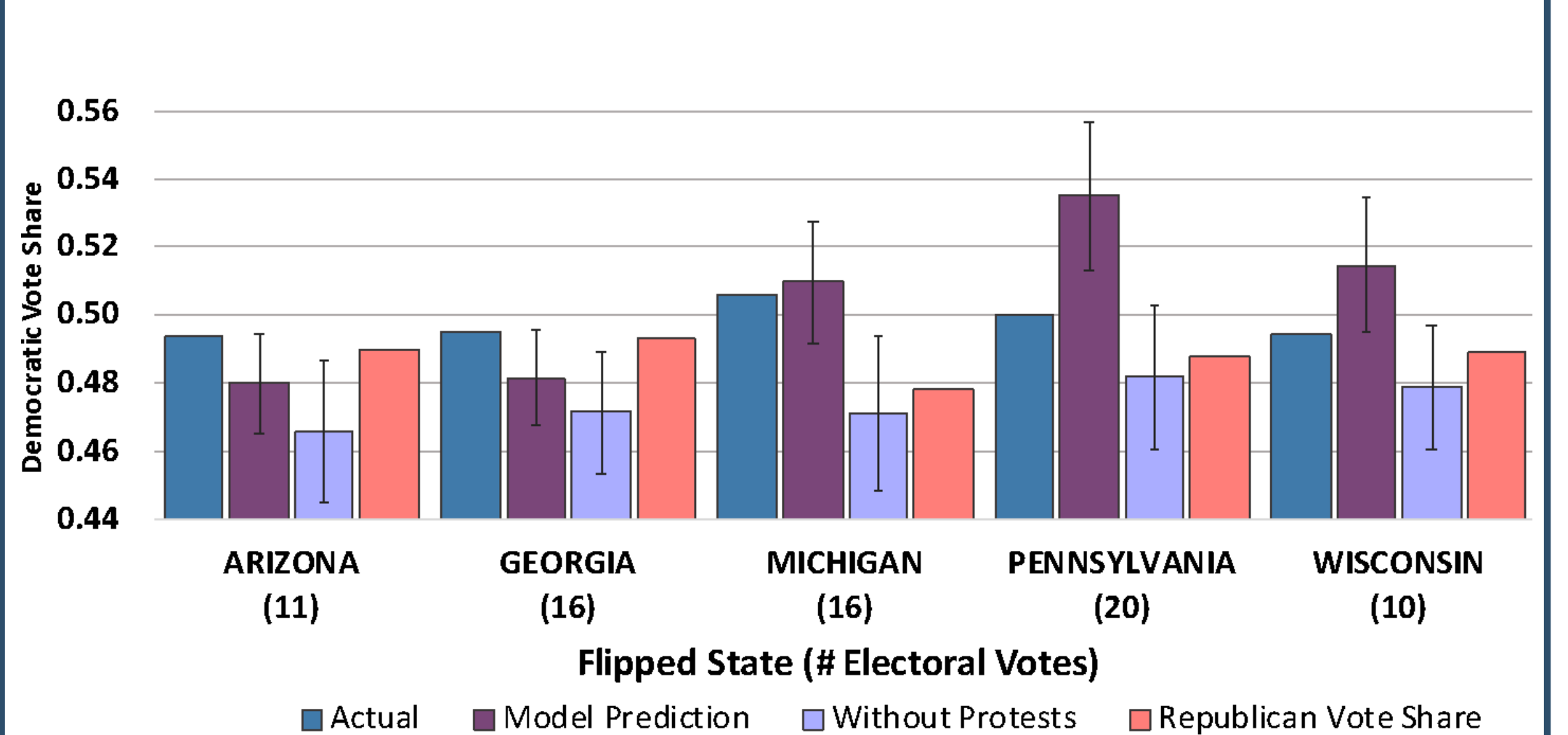
Notes: Change in Voter Turnout is the number of votes as a share of the voting population. Standard errors correcting for spatial correlation within a radius of 150km are in parentheses (Conley 1999). *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

- BLM protests discouraged Republicans from voting in swing states

Implications

- The heterogeneity in results suggest that peaceful protests in swing states are more effective forms of political activism
- A 1.3 percentage point increase in vote share among swing state counties can be large enough to influence the election outcome (the average Democratic margin of victory is 0.03 in swing states)

Figure 4. Predicted and Actual Democratic Vote Share of Flipped States in 2020



- The model predictions suggest that BLM protests had an impact in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin
- Joe Biden would not have the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidential election without flipping these 3 states