

Presumed Impotence:  
The Role of Black Protest in Expanding the Scope of Conflict

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**Abstract**

Studies of black agenda setting are often cautionary tales of political impotence. This paper argues that these studies have overlooked the collective power of black individuals to garner white support. Black issues require this white support to reach the agenda, and black protest is the tool for acquiring it. Using a new data set spanning 1947-1998, the analysis shows that increasing rates of black protest yield higher levels of attention from the media and Congress for black issues. This research is the first quantitative study of black agenda setting over such a long time period, and it makes the rare contribution to the broader agenda setting literature by examining how issues move onto the public agenda. Despite their disadvantaged status, black Americans do have a source of agenda setting power: protest.

A presumption of impotence is the distinguishing characteristic of black agenda setting research. As a result, scholars have denied black people any systematic agency in the orchestration of those rare moments of power. This paper is interested in finding a tool through which the disadvantaged might confront the type of agenda power in Bachrach and Baratz (1962). Research on agenda setting advises such seemingly outmatched groups to “expand the scope of conflict” as a way of minimizing disparities in bargaining leverage (Schattschneider 1975). In the context of black agenda setting this advice provides a clear directive: black issues need white support to reach the agenda (McClain 1993). The purpose of this paper is to determine whether and how black participation and black representation are able to garner this necessary support.

Previous work has not paid much attention to the conflict expansion element of agenda setting. In this regard, black politics is no different. Thickly descriptive narratives of black policymaking emphasize themes of almost inevitable failure. When there is some exceptional success, the “why” question is answered by factors beyond the control of black Americans themselves (Klinkner and Smith 1999; Hamilton and Hamilton 1997; Williams 2003). Scholars of racial policy attitudes stress that intermittent black policy victories result from overcoming or avoiding (mostly avoiding) entrenched racial stereotypes and prejudice (Sears, Hensler and Speer 1979; Krysan 2000; Tarman and Sears 2005; Sniderman et al. 1996; Peffley, Hurwitz and Sniderman 1997). However, concrete theoretical arguments for how racial prejudice can be overcome are beyond the scope of this work. Studies of the civil rights movement tend to focus on external opportunity structures (McAdam 1999; Meyer and Minkoff 2004) as the driving forces of change; casting black protest activity as a necessary – but not sufficient – condition for success.

This paper argues that black issues reach the agenda because they receive broader non-black recognition. Black representation is poorly suited for conflict expansion and problem definition. Thus, political activity is the most effective means of gaining majority attention for items on the black agenda. Using a combination of data from the Policy Agendas Project, the Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson 2007), and yearly counts of black protests (Jenkins, Jacobs and Agnone 2003) the results show that black issues are accepted onto the agenda in response to rising rates of black political activity and black representation. However, representation faces external

constraints that do not hinder black protests. The scope of conflict is more reliably expanded through sustained collective efforts of black individuals.

The paper proceeds in five sections. Section one details the motivation for this study by showing how Congressional attention to black agenda items has fluctuated from 1947-1998. The second section explains these fluctuations through the ability of black protest activity to garner broader, non-black support for black issues. Section three details the measures of conflict expansion, protests, and representation used to evaluate this claim. The central findings, that the salience of black issues is positively associated with black protest activity, are presented in the fourth section. Section five concludes with a discussion of the contributions to an understanding of black politics, agenda setting, and political participation. More specifically, this research uniquely emphasizes the relationship between non-voting participation and conflict expansion, and it provides quantitative analysis of the fundamental stage in black policymaking – securing white attention/support.

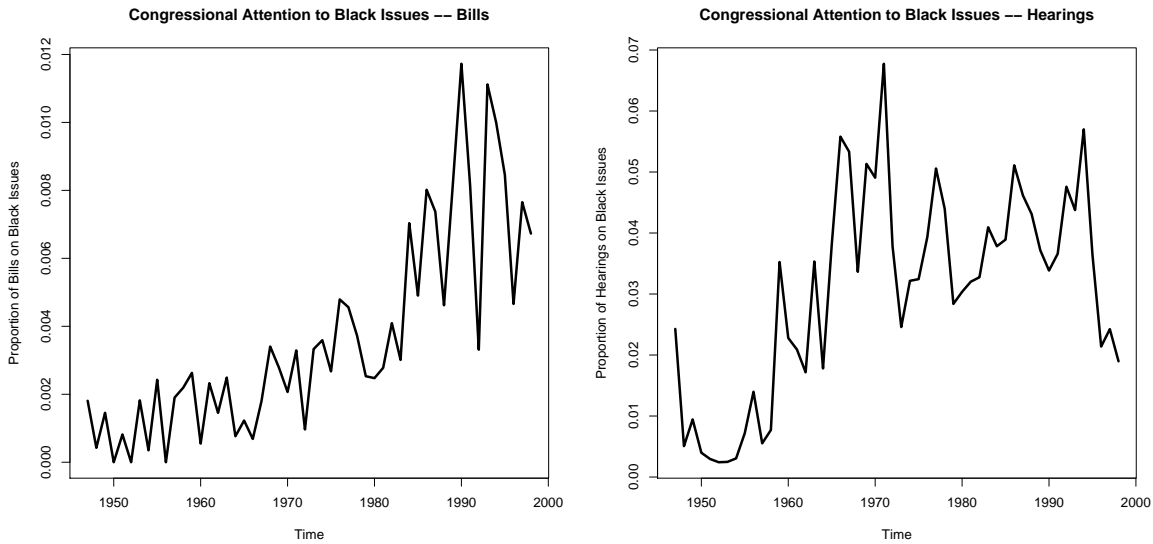
## 1 Motivation

The first step in answering what accounts for changes in Congressional attention to the black agenda is to demonstrate that there is some change worth explaining. The black agenda is defined as the set of issues that black people could conceivably support because they are black (Shelby 2005). The unifying principle of this agenda is racial justice, so it consists of the following types of issues:

1. Anti-racist, remedial policies intended to protect equal rights or address the effects of past discrimination;
2. Commemorations, holidays, and landmarks which counter negative stereotypes of black Americans;
3. Social welfare policies that explicitly address some racial disparity; explicitly attempt to remedy urban poverty; foster non-stigmatizing, non-discriminatory social programs such as full employment, a guaranteed income, federal control over programs, or an opposition to means-testing and work requirements.

There are two primary ways of measuring Congressional attention, bill sponsorship and hearings. Figure 1 presents plots of the annual proportion of all bills introduced and hearings held that deal

Figure 1: Changing Congressional Attention to Black Issues, 1947-1998



with black issues. The data for bills comes from the Congressional Bills Project, and the data for hearings is provided by the Policy Agendas Project. Each bill and hearing from 1947 to 1998 was then coded as pertaining to black issues or not.<sup>1</sup> The basic message from Figure 1 is that Congressional attention is neither constant nor abundant. Black bills (bills that deal with items on the black agenda) are usually less than one percent of all legislation introduced during the year. There is also an upward trend that is suggestive of a link with the number of black representatives in Congress, which also steadily increases since 1947. Perhaps legislative attention is driven by black representation rather than protest participation.

The right hand panel of Figure 1 underlines that there is a puzzle worth studying. Despite being less than one percent of the bills introduced, black issues comprise over three percent (on average) of Congressional hearings. In that sense, black agenda items are over-represented. Additionally, it is clear that Congressional attention towards black issues does shift over time. After ignoring these issues in the 1950s, Congress steadily paid more attention to the black agenda until its interest peaked in 1970. This rise was followed by a leveling off in the 1980s and 1990s that was still

<sup>1</sup>More information on how these data were coded, a discussion of what constitutes the black agenda, and what black issue priorities are can be found on the author's web page: [http://mail.rochester.edu/\[tilde\]plat/dissertation.html](http://mail.rochester.edu/[tilde]plat/dissertation.html).

well above the previous periods of neglect. Figure 1 illustrates that black issues do receive fairly low levels of attention from Congress; however, this general trend of disregard is interspersed with periods of rising and falling levels of interest. This paper seeks to understand how those peaks were achieved.

## **2 The Argument**

I argue that the black agenda requires white support to reach the formal agenda. Given a general understanding of Congress, black representation is not well-suited for building that sort of broad coalition. Conversely, black protest acts as a signalling mechanism to both legislators and fellow citizens. These signals express the distribution of preferences for policy alternatives and define social conditions as social problems. The remainder of this section elaborates on these four central points.

### **2.1 The Necessity of White Support**

A baseline assumption of this paper is that the government of the United States is not inherently or irreparably racist. Therefore, legislators must – and can – be convinced that it is in their own interest to support any given policy (Arnold 1990). However, racial prejudice exists inside individual Americans (Sniderman et al. 1991). This prejudice manifests itself as a general opposition to extending particularistic benefits to black people (Krysan 2000; Tarman and Sears 2005). Legislators are not immune to these attitudes. Recognizing the lack of electoral incentives, non-black representatives who do not have a substantial number of black constituents oppose legislation targeted towards black “special interests” (Whitby and Krause 2001). Advocates for the black agenda are left with two options: offer race-neutral policy alternatives or provide a universal justification for racially based issues (Sniderman et al. 1996).

Studies of the civil rights movement, and black agenda setting generally, argue precisely this point. Much of the social welfare portion of the black agenda succeeded or failed based upon the support of organized labor (Hamilton and Hamilton 1997; Isaac and Christiansen 2002). The direct action of the civil rights era secured concessions because it inflicted high economic and political

costs on policymakers (Morris 1993; Luders 2006). Finally, scholars claim that the Cold War made the government more willing to press for racial equality domestically (Skrentny 1998; Klinkner and Smith 1999). Racial progress is the product of rational, interest-based calculations. White support provides non-black legislators with the incentives to effect change.

## 2.2 The Inadequacy of Representation

Representatives effect this change by accepting issues onto the agenda, not by building these coalitions themselves. Members of Congress do not have the national platform to “go public” in the way a president can (Kernell 1993). More importantly, they do not have the motivation. Wawro’s study of legislative entrepreneurship suggests that institutional advancement is the most likely benefit (aside from a concern for policy itself) of entrepreneurial agenda setting activities (Wawro 2000), so members have incentives to work within the institution rather than poaching others’ constituents to build outside pressure. From an even more practical perspective, research has shown that black representatives are either unwilling or unable to mobilize their own white constituents (Swain 1995; Gay 2001). There is no cause to expect these black members of Congress to suddenly begin forming the rainbow coalitions needed for successful black agenda setting.

The above argument for the necessity of white support is based on an assumption of black issue advocates (that is, those who advocate for black issues) as legislative outsiders. It is not appropriate to classify black members of Congress in this way. However, black representatives are also constrained in their ability to work from within the institution. The power to control the agenda is concentrated in relatively few offices such as the majority leadership, the Rules committee, and committee chairs. Cox and McCubbins (2005) describe these offices as a “procedural cartel.” From the 41st to the 109th Congress sixteen black people have held twenty committee chair assignments and served four terms on the Rules committee for a total of 108 cartel-years.<sup>2</sup> As a comparison, Sam Rayburn and James Eastland combine for 51 cartel years. The point is that black representatives generally do not have access to the levers of agenda setting power. Without this access, black members of Congress have a limited ability to act as insider agenda setters. None of

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<sup>2</sup>That is the sum years of service for all assignments in the procedural cartel. Alcee Hastings has served three terms as a minority on the Rules Committee, so his years have been excluded.

this is to say that black representation is irrelevant for enacting black interest legislation. It is to say that the role of a black representative is not as an agenda setter.

### **2.3 The Signalling Power of Participation**

This important agenda setting role is reserved for black Americans themselves. The agenda setting power of political participation rests on three pillars. First, collective aims provide the motivation for individuals to take political action (Schlozman, Verba and Brady 1995). Second, participation does not necessarily require elite mobilization (Lohmann 1993, 1994). Lastly, civic activism acts as a signal to policymakers and other citizens. The basic idea is that there is some core set of activists who always participate. When the level of activity rises above expectations for this core group, political participation acts as an informative signal about the nature of a regime, the probability of repression, support for policy alternatives, etc. (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Lohmann 1993, 1994; Kollman 1998; Meyer 2004). This is the link to conflict expansion. Urban poverty, employment discrimination, and hate crimes are conditions that exist in society. In order to gain broader white support for ameliorating these issues, the conditions must be defined as problems that require government resolution. Theories of agenda setting assume that there is some set of indicators that alert citizens and policymakers to such problems (Cobb and Elder 1972; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Wood and Doan 2003; Jones and Baumgartner 2004). This paper argues that the signals conveyed by black protest are some of these indicators.

To summarize, items on the black agenda require white support to receive attention from Congress. Black political activity expands the scope of conflict, to include non-black Americans, by defining existing social conditions as social problems in need of government resolution. Congressional attention to black issues should increase as a result of both enhanced public awareness of problems and the direct indicators of problems provided by protests. Three claims emerge from this discussion:

1. As the level of black protests increases, items on the black agenda should receive more attention from white Americans.
2. Black representation should not have any impact on levels of white attention to black issues.

3. Increasing attention for black issues in the broader white public will translate into greater attention to black issues by non-black legislators.

### 3 Measuring Conflict Expansion

The first step in addressing this claim is to provide measures for conflict expansion and Congressional attention. For black agenda setting, expanding the scope of conflict should be understood as alerting the broader public to an issue. Media coverage is a standard way to capture this public awareness. The idea is that policymakers pay attention to issues that receive a lot of attention in the media and vice versa, so measuring media coverage should capture the visibility of issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Jeon and Haider-Markel 2001). The Policy Agendas Project has data on a random sample of articles from the *New York Times* from 1946-2003. These articles were coded for whether or not they covered black issues. The dependent variable for media coverage is the yearly count of articles that deal with black interest issues.

As stated in the first section of this paper, there are two primary measures of Congressional attention, bill introductions and hearings. Typically, hearings are considered as “serious” attention to an issue; they comprise the “formal” agenda (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Bill introductions are seen as a much lower level of attention; they comprise the “public” agenda (Cobb, Ross and Ross 1976). This is the level of attention pertinent to the current argument. Basically, introducing legislation signifies that Congress is at least aware of a given issue. If black protest is successful in expanding the scope of conflict, then non-black members of Congress should introduce more legislation on black issues, what will henceforth be referred to as black bills. Using the data described in Figure 1, the dependent variable for Congressional attention is the annual count of black bills introduced by non-black members of Congress.

There are three explanatory variables corresponding with the three claims above: protest, representation, and public awareness. The last variable has already been operationalized as the measure of media coverage. Black protest is measured as the yearly count of events. This data was compiled by Jenkins, Jacobs and Agnone (2003) using coverage in the *New York Times*. It was not immediately obvious how black representation should be operationalized, so two separate variables

are used. Black representation is measured as the number of black members of Congress and the yearly count of black bills introduced by black members of Congress. The first variable gauges representation by mere presence, and the second variable deals with actual activity. In addition to these explanatory variables, a few controls are also included. Worsening economic conditions will raise the profile of unemployment and poverty issues, which are components of the black agenda. Thus, rising unemployment and declining growth rates should result in greater media coverage and more black bills introduced in Congress. Unemployment data is taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the annual growth rate is provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Lastly, the total number of bills introduced is included to control for levels of Congressional activity.

Table 1: Expectations for the Data Analysis

	Black Presence	Black Action	Protest	Media Coverage
Media Coverage	0	0	+	
Congressional Attention	0	0	+	+

Since both of the dependent variables, NYT stories and black bills, are counts, the data analysis is conducted using a negative binomial model. A summary of the argument is helpful to guide us through the discussion of the results from this analysis. There are two main points: 1) Black agenda setting requires white support; and 2) black protest expands the scope of conflict to obtain this support. Table 1 provides the expectations drawn from these two points. The measures of black representation should have no impact on media coverage or Congressional attention. Meanwhile, black protests should be positively associated with expanding the scope of conflict, as measured by both dependent variables. Finally, increased media coverage of black issues should translate into increased numbers of black bills. Now we can see if those expectations have been met.

## 4 Results

Table 2 presents the findings for the coverage of black issues by the *New York Times*.<sup>3</sup> Attention

<sup>3</sup>Statistically significant coefficients appear in bold, and standard errors are in parentheses.

Table 2: Media Coverage of Black Issues

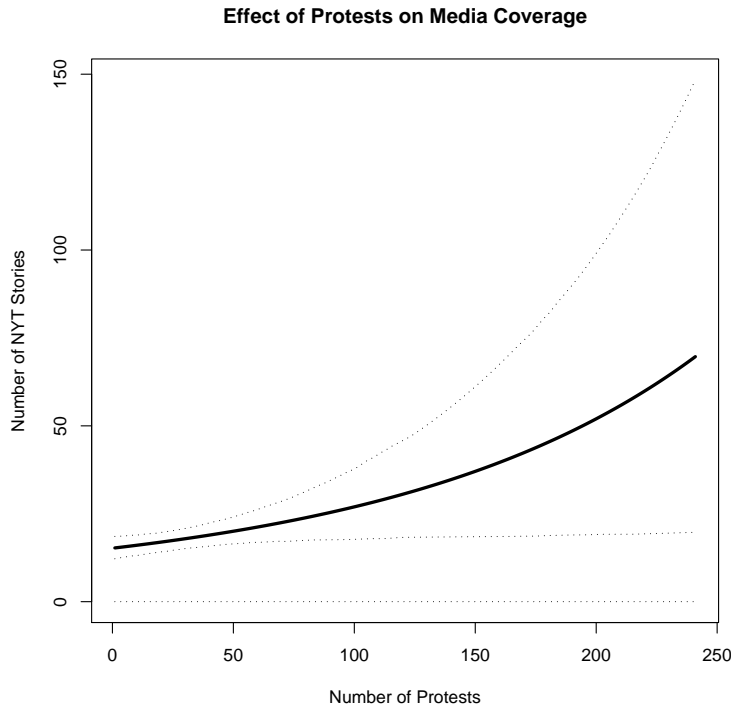
	Representatives	Bills	Full
Intercept	<b>3.366</b> (0.485)	<b>3.255</b> (0.475)	<b>3.269</b> (0.475)
Black Presence	0.001 (0.011)		-0.008 (0.012)
Black Action		0.010 (0.007)	0.012 (0.007)
Protest	<b>0.006</b> (0.003)	<b>0.006</b> (0.003)	<b>0.006</b> (0.003)
Unemployment	-0.084 (0.073)	-0.103 (0.068)	-0.090 (0.071)
Growth	-0.050 (0.043)	-0.048 (0.041)	-0.047 (0.041)

is immediately drawn to the single significant coefficient – protest. Regardless of how black representation is measured, it is consistently insignificant. Meanwhile, the positive and significant coefficient on the black protest variable is robust to these changes. The assertion was that black political activity was more effective than representation at achieving white recognition for black issues. Table 2 straightforwardly supports that point.

Figure 2 illustrates the substantive effects of black protests on media coverage. This plot shows the expected number of news stories on black issues as black protests increase from zero to 240 (the maximum value in the sample). The slope of the curve in figure 2 sends a clear message: Black protest does expand the scope of conflict by increasing mainstream media coverage of black issues; however, this expansion occurs slowly, and it requires a great deal of mobilization. To gain a firmer grasp on this point, it is helpful to think in terms of a daily protest rate (annual number of protests/365 days). A protest rate of 0.036 (moving from 0 to 13/365) is needed to add an article on black issues. Protests must be sustained at a rate of 0.597 before a 2:1 ratio of protests

to news stories is reached. These findings shed light on the long periods of non-responsiveness to black policy demands described by Klinkner and Smith (1999). When a near-constant state of

Figure 2: The Impact of Protest on the Scope of Conflict



unrest (almost two protest events every three days) is required to produce a serious change in media coverage (a 2:1 protests to stories ratio) – as Figure 2 suggests, then it is reasonable to observe intermittent bursts of responsiveness among a general trend of neglect.

Table 3 allows for a greater understanding of how media coverage and protest interact to influence Congressional attention. The positive and significant coefficient shows that the number of protest events directly shapes Congressional attention to black issues, but there is also an indirect effect through the relationship between protest and media coverage. This supports the argument that black protest is an effective agenda setting tool because it signalled to the public and policymakers alike. However, the claims regarding representation are not supported by Table 3. The presence of black representatives and the legislative actions they take increase the number of black bills introduced by non-black members. These three sets of findings for protest, media

coverage, and representation will be discussed at greater length below. First, some attention is due

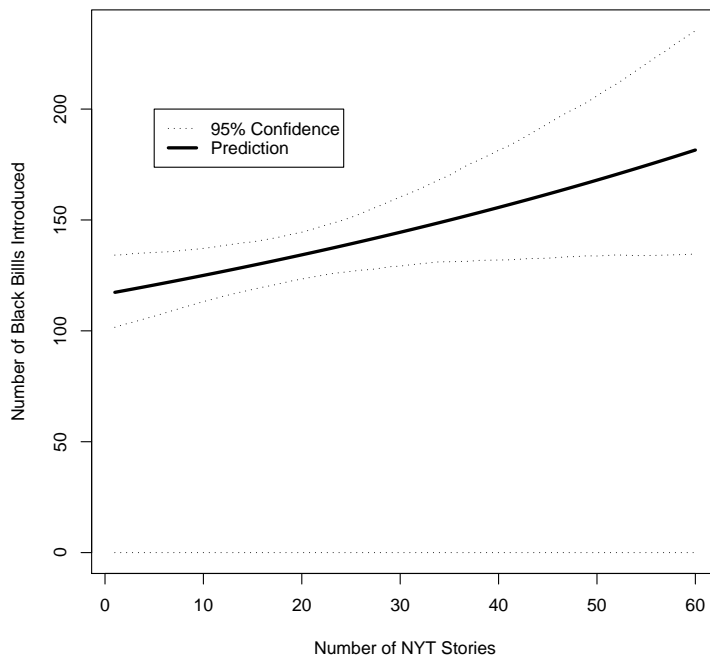
Table 3: Gaining Congressional Attention

	Representatives	Bills	Full
Intercept	<b>2.983</b> (0.302)	<b>3.086</b> (0.282)	<b>3.053</b> (0.282)
Black Presence	<b>0.019</b> (0.005)		0.007 (0.007)
Black Action		<b>0.018</b> (0.004)	<b>0.014</b> (0.006)
Cong. Activity	<b>0.016</b> (0.002)	<b>0.009</b> (0.002)	<b>0.011</b> (0.003)
Protest	<b>0.003</b> (0.001)	<b>0.003</b> (0.001)	<b>0.003</b> (0.001)
NYT Stories	0.005 (0.004)	<b>0.008</b> (0.004)	<b>0.007</b> (0.004)
Unemployment	<b>0.099</b> (0.043)	<b>0.117</b> (0.038)	<b>0.104</b> (0.039)
Growth	-0.007 (0.023)	0.000 (0.022)	-0.02 (0.022)

to the control variables. As expected, the number of black bills increases when Congress is generally more active (as in more bills are introduced in Congress). When Congress increases the available pool of attention resources generally, it makes sense that attention to black issues should also rise. Unemployment is also positive and significant. Since issues of job training, high unemployment, full employment, and guaranteed incomes are all elements of the defined black agenda, it is not surprising that rising unemployment rates would increase Congressional notice of such issues. Once again, the overall state of the economy does not influence the expanding scope of conflict for black issues. Nonetheless, the focus is on how protest, representation, and media coverage relate to

expanding Congressional attention. We return to that discussion now.

Figure 3: The Impact of Media Coverage on Congressional Attention

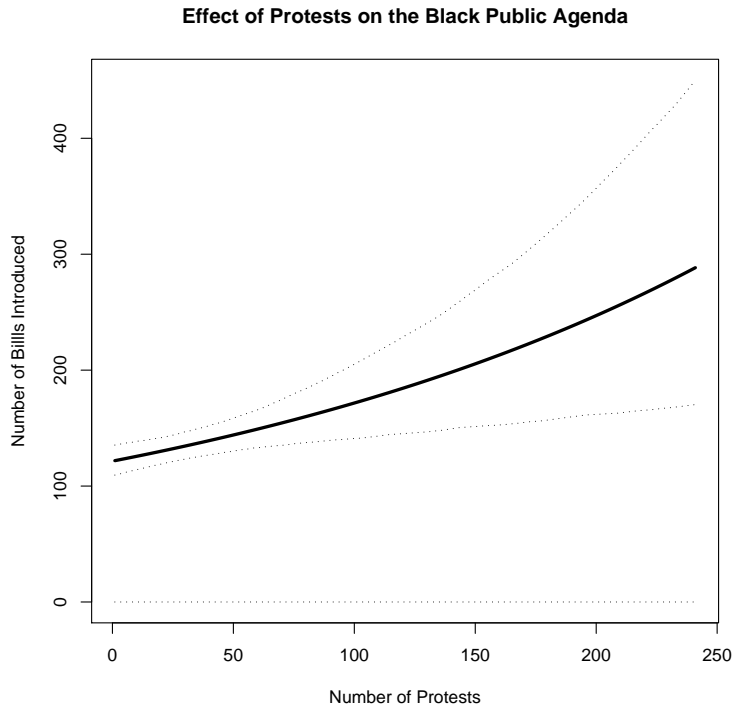


One of the primary claims is that increasing attention to black issues among the public will manifest in greater Congressional attention to these issues. Figure 3 supports this claim. The relationship between public and Congressional attention is almost linear. An additional story in the mainstream press is sufficient for approximately one additional black bill in Congress. That 1:1 ratio remains fairly constant as the number of stories increases. Without some non-black issues to serve as a baseline, it is difficult to judge whether Congress is more or less responsive to the black agenda. However, the more important point is that this helps to flesh out a full story of black agenda setting. Figure 2 illustrated that a daily protest rate greater than 0.6 would produce one news story for every two protests. Within the context of sustained black insurgency, two protests are indirectly responsible for one additional black bill introduced by a non-black member of Congress. The next step is to determine the direct effect of black protest on legislative attention.

Black protest activity does not have a dramatic direct effect. Figure 4 illustrates this relatively

slow pace of change. On average, roughly three protest events are required for one additional black issue on the public agenda. In conjunction with the findings for media coverage, a fuller understanding of the relationship between black protest and Congressional attention is possible. Starting with the extreme case of a sustained movement with a daily protest rate greater than

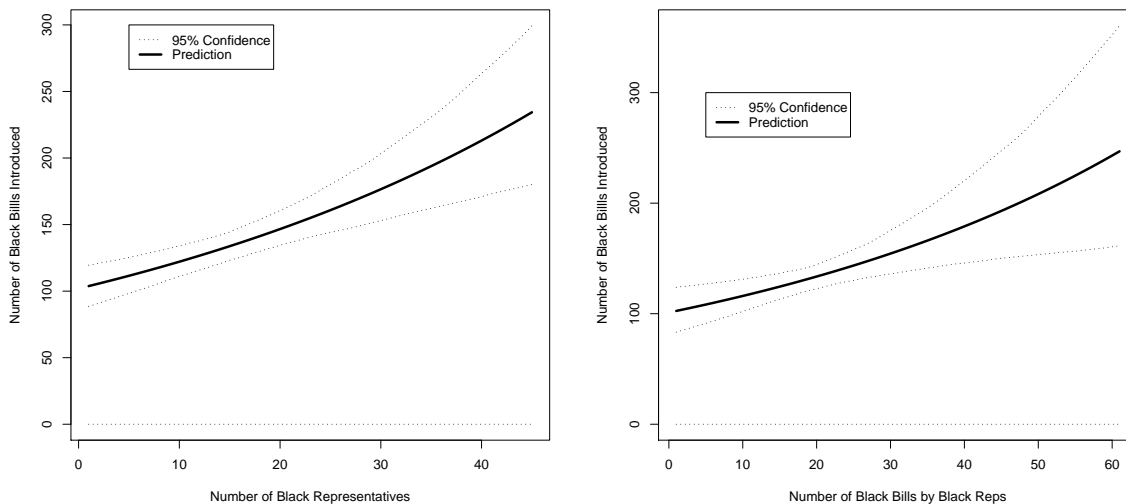
Figure 4: The Impact of Black Protests on Congressional Attention



0.6, eight additional protest events should yield eleven more black bill introductions (seven directly and four indirectly through media coverage). At the more realistic median daily protest rate of 0.025, eight additional protest events yield five more black bill introductions (four directly and one indirectly). The point of Figure 4 is that isolated black protest events are not sufficient to garner non-black legislative support. It is within the context of a sustained movement that black political activity delivers agenda setting benefits.

Black representation does not appear to suffer from such constraints. Figure 5 depicts the relationship between black representation and Congressional attention. Each plot contains the

Figure 5: The Impact of Black Representation on Congressional Attention



predicted number of black bills as representation increases from zero to the maximum.<sup>4</sup> Looking at the left-hand plot, holding all else constant, when Charles Diggs joined William Dawson and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in Congress (raising the number of black representatives from two to three) white support for black issues on the public agenda should have increased by two bills. The influx of five new representatives from the election of 1968 (going from six to eleven) should yield a boost of eleven additional bills. Finally, the wave of black representatives after redistricting in 1992 (going from 27 to 39) would garner 46 extra black bills from non-black members. The right-hand plot for the number of black bills introduced by black members of Congress is virtually identical to the plot for the number of black representatives. Black legislative activity will result in approximately two more black bills by non-black members of Congress. Counter to the claims of this paper, black representation influences the agenda, and it appears to be a less-constrained tool than black protests.

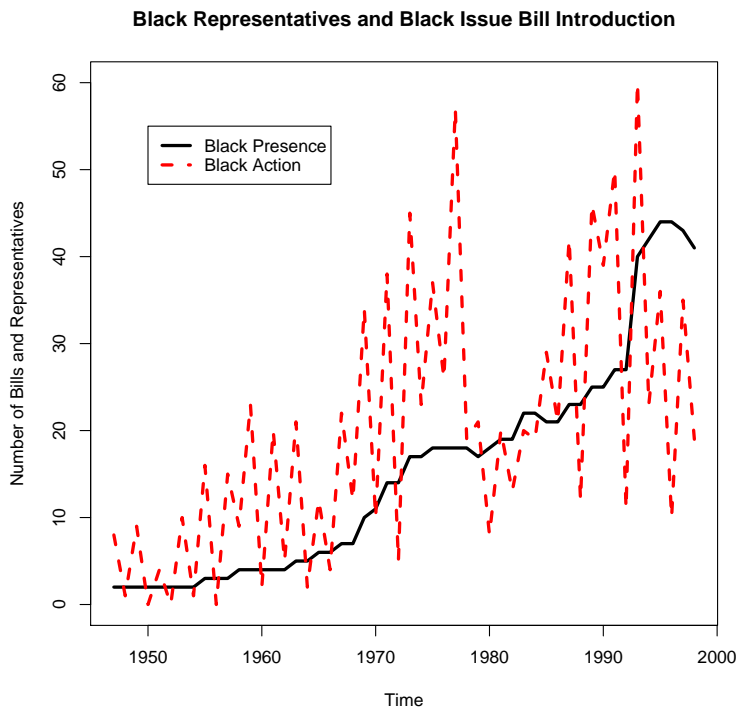
That appearance is slightly deceiving. The similarity between the effects for the two measures of black representation – illustrated by almost identical plots in Figure 5 – suggest that they might be capturing the same phenomenon. This reasoning is particularly compelling given the lack of

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<sup>4</sup>The Full model was used to derive values for black bills introduced by black members, and the “Representatives” model was used to derive values for the number of black representatives.

significance for black presence when black action is also included in the model.<sup>5</sup> These questions of redundancy and constraint are addressed by Figure 6. This is a plot of the two representation variables over time. There are two points to make from this graph. First, the number of black

Figure 6: Comparing Measures of Representation



representatives, though steadily increasing, surges every ten years after 1970. This is the well-known effect of racial redistricting. Second, these two variables follow a similar – though not identical – time trend. Combining the second and third points, the number of black representatives and the subsequent bills they introduce will experience marked increases only on a ten-year cycle. In this sense, black representation faces institutional constraints that do not limit black protest.

As a final point, Figure 6 suggests that the nature of black representation has changed. The first decade of the Congressional Black Caucus oversaw a fairly active period of black legislative behavior, reaching a peak of 57 black bills introduced in 1977. That number dropped the next congress, and

<sup>5</sup>This could be multicollinearity; especially given the small number of observations (50). However, the correlation between these two measures was only 0.57.

that peak was not surpassed until 1993 when there were 40 black members of Congress. This reflects a basic confusion regarding the role of black representatives that also confounds the results of the data analysis. Future work should be dedicated solely to exploration of black representation over this time period (1947-1998). Only then can arguments about agenda setting have a firm substantive grounding.

## 5 Discussion

The presumption of impotence characterizing black agenda setting mandates an enhanced role for conflict expansion. This paper has taken that mandate seriously. However, unlike other studies of black agenda setting, black people have been given some control over their political lives. Expanding the scope of conflict to include white Americans was shown to increase Congressional attention to black issues, and black protest activity was found to have a positive impact on that expansion. In addition to this indirect effect on Congressional attention, black protest also directly influences the legislative behavior of non-black members of Congress. Impotence has been replaced by agency.

Aside from the importance these findings have as a foundation for a non-elite-centered study of the black agenda, there are contributions to the broader agenda setting literature. Figures 2 and 4 demonstrated that a great deal of mobilization is required to achieve a relatively fast pace of change in public awareness. This offers a challenge to ideas about disproportionate information processing. Jones and Baumgartner (2005) argue that Congressional attention changes slowly because policymakers lack the resources to monitor social problems. The result is flurries of action after problems have become more severe. That story is not entirely consistent with these results. Protest, media coverage, and representation all translated into increased Congressional attention on a fairly proportionate basis. However, great efforts were required to secure attention from the media, who presumably have far more resources and incentives to disperse attention broadly. The general lack of responsiveness to black issues may simply be the result of exorbitant mobilization costs.

The protest finding ties this work in nicely with social movements research. Political opportunity structures are based upon the idea that the cost of mobilization is not fixed, but instead it changes

according to contextual factors (Meyer 2004). Although the causes of protest are beyond the scope of this paper, the door is left open for a more unified approach to social movements and agenda setting that combines exogenous forces with individual agency. Similarly, the broader participation literature could build on some of these ideas. Rather than only answering why people participate, this project extends the analysis to the consequences of political activity. Indeed, future empirical work needs to deal more concretely with the signalling aspect of non-voting political participation. Any disadvantaged group should have to employ a strategy of conflict expansion (Schattschneider 1975); future research should look for supporting evidence beyond black agenda setting.

This should not be construed as the final word on black agenda setting. While this paper does make some important contributions to the subfield, there is still much to be done. The new data set employed here, providing information on Congressional attention to black issues from 1947-1998, serves as a valuable tool for future research. Its utility has already been displayed in this project, which is the first quantitative study of the black agenda over such a large time span. Future work must take advantage of the data on black representation summarized in Figure 6. The findings for the role of representation did not fit the expectations. However, it is puzzling that so little is actually known about black representation and agenda setting. Using this data, future research can explore that role and how it has changed over time. Implicit throughout the discussion has been a comparison between representation and protest. Such comparison is nothing new to black politics. In addition to the insights regarding black agenda setting, this project takes a first step toward answering that long-standing tactical question of protest versus politics. The presumption of impotence does not mean that black agenda setting is impossible or not worth studying. It simply means that we must search for power in new places. This paper shows that individual black Americans are a fine place to start looking.

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