

Mobilizing Against Inequality: How Protests Shape Preferences for Redistribution

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28 mar. 2023

Abstract

What is the effect of protests in shaping preferences for redistribution? Although the role of political narratives in the inequality-redistribution link has been emphasized extensively, there is scarce empirical evidence connecting political mobilization with preferences for redistribution. Experimental evidence, however, reveals that factors such as perceptions or moral evaluations around inequality affect people's redistributive demands. The present paper connects this experimental evidence to actual political settings, arguing that massive mobilizations can affect people's preferences for redistribution by shaping their fairness evaluations or perceptions of inequality. To test these expectations, I rely on a most-likely case approach with an 'unexpected event during survey design' methodology, studying the effect of several protests: anti-austerity waves in 2011 in Portugal and Spain and the French Gilets Jaunes in 2018 and their spillover effects in Belgium. The results suggest that these protests led to increased redistributive demands, likely due to magnified grievances and changing beliefs towards economic fairness and egalitarianism, providing new insights into inequality and mobilization research.

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Introduction

Long-standing debates around the responses to inequality have painted a pessimistic picture: while inequality increases, public opinion seems to remain unaffected (Scheve and Stasavage, 2016), thus contradicting the predictions of classic rational choice models (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). A consensus in the literature revolves around a ‘Robin Hood paradox,’ by which more unequal countries redistribute less, and the population tends to legitimize the levels of inequality and even view it as meritocratic (Mijs, 2019). Institutional, historical, and sociological factors explain these findings, simultaneously emphasizing the immutability of redistributive demands (Cavaille and Trump, 2015; O’Grady, 2019). These frameworks leave little room for the agency of political actors such as protesters, positing that the development of inequality and the public (in)tolerance towards inequality are stable over time and depend on institutional factors (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Martin and Chevalier, 2021).

However, such views contrast with public opinion trends in several other countries over recent decades. For example, the percentage of people agreeing or strongly agreeing with redistribution increased substantially in some European countries, e.g., by 7.5% in Spain 2008-2015, or 7% in France 2014-2018¹, coinciding with heightened protest mobilization. These numbers are much larger for countries in the global South. The implementation of neoliberal policies across Latin America in the ’90s strongly correlates with large increases in redistributive demands, e.g., by 50% and 40% in Argentina and Chile respectively over the period 1990-2000². Moreover, the revolution in Egypt in 2011 was accompanied by an increase of 60% in redistributive demands from 2008 to 2013 (El Rafhi and Volle, 2020a).

Despite these large changes, we still know very little about how redistributive preferences change in actual political contexts, such as during mass citizen mobilization. The emphasis in the literature on the stability of public opinion towards inequality seems to capture long-run trends, while offering little room to understand the processes underlying different responses towards growing inequality. The cases highlighted above point to the importance of country-specific political processes, in which political agendas and mobilization largely influenced public opinion. This view resonates with previous research linking voting participation and policy responsiveness to inequality (Pontusson and Rueda, 2010). However, the direction of causality is unclear - does mobilization lead to increased redistributive demands, or vice versa, or do the two phenomena reinforce each other?

In contrast with the emphasis on the stability of preferences for redistribution, extensive experimental evidence highlights the ‘elasticity’ of such preferences (Cruces et al., 2013). In these models, the accuracy of the classical rational choice model increases substantially when perceptions of inequality, rather than actual inequality levels, are foregrounded (Choi, 2019; Gimpelson and Treisman, 2018). For instance, providing information about different aspects of inequality increases individuals’ preferences for redistribution (Ciani et al., 2021), especially when this information exposes moral arguments, such as deservingness or social mobility evaluations (A. Alesina et al., 2018; Trump, 2020). This cross-country and experimental evidence suggests that objective inequality levels do not drive changes in redistributive

¹European Social Survey

²World Values Survey

demands and policies, but instead the available information in conjunction with moral, contextual, or sociotropic evaluations of inequality.

However, these experimental findings are rarely translated into actual political contexts and events. Shifts in the political narratives, fostered by protest and mobilization, seem to play a key role in setting the political agenda (Gaby and Caren, 2016; Wasow, 2020), potentially affecting evaluations towards inequality. Thus, in the same way economic crises only lead people to update political views in conjunction with political crises (Kriesi et al., 2020), economic hardship might not automatically lead to updating redistributive demands but through social contestation. This view highlights the role of sociotropic evaluations shaping public opinion (Groenendyk et al., 2022), emphasizing the importance of studying redistributive demands under actual political contexts.

To fill this gap, the present paper brings these perspectives together by putting mobilization in motion: Do protests focused on economic issues affect public redistributive demands? I argue that, in spite of the stability of such preferences, successful protests can directly impact public redistributive demands through four interrelated mechanisms. First, mobilizations, especially big ones, can facilitate the widespread adoption of protesters' policy positions via identification with the protesters. Second, mobilizations can provide new information on social inequality and economic hardship, updating individuals' self-positioning on the social scale and subsequently updating their redistributive demands. Third, protests focused on economic issues can legitimize the economic outcomes of the poor, increasing egalitarian beliefs and eroding meritocratic principles. Finally, large protests can affect individuals psychologically by facilitating blame attribution to elites as protests contest hegemonic discourses that individualize the causes of poverty and inequality, consequently affecting individuals' views around inequality.

To test the effects of protests on redistributive demands, I rely on an 'Unexpected Event During Survey Design' (Muñoz et al., 2020) from a set of European protests: Geração a Rasca in Portugal, 15-M in Spain, Gilets jaunes in France, and its spillover effects in Belgium. These are examples of large and successful grassroots-led mobilizations organized without the participation of main unions or political parties, where the wider population remained largely unaware of the mobilizations' potential before the onset. Thus, these mobilizations represent most-likely cases of exogenous influence of protest on public opinion, offering the opportunity to approximate causal effects of the protests on the general population.

Literature review

The existent literature has provided little attention to the specific question of whether protests are able to influence public opinion towards inequality. A chasm between long-run aggregate perspectives on political change and experimental evidence on preferences for redistribution illustrates this gap in the literature. The first set of studies has argued the inability of occupy movements to shape mass public opinion on economic issues after the Great Recession period in the US (Bartels, 2016) and Europe (Bermeo and Bartels, 2014). In these long-run narratives, mobilizations are only one part of the political process, showing little or no clear effect in the political trajectories, especially in the US (Bartels, 2016).

At the same time, the social movements literature has evidenced the ability of protests to influence a myriad of outcomes also in the long-run, such as political agendas, public opinion (Mazumder, 2018; Wasow, 2020), voting (Bischof and Kurer, 2023; Lagios et al., 2022), or legislation (Bernardi et al., 2021). The countering role played by elites through different channels such as ideological framing (Bansak et al., 2021) or institutional control (Acemoglu et al., 2015; Anderson and Beramendi, 2012) seems to be central in explaining these patterns. While increasing inequality might foster grievances, it also deteriorates the ability of lower classes to participate in politics, potentially leading to a stalemate in the long-run responses to inequality.

Simultaneously, a vast experimental and longitudinal evidence points to the ‘elasticity’ of redistributive demands (Ciani et al., 2021; Cruces et al., 2013; Margalit, 2013). Often relying on psychological micro-foundations, this literature explains the mechanisms by which people think about redistribution, aiming to understand the long-standing puzzle of increasing inequality without increasing public support towards redistribution. A common observation is that perceptions of inequality are more important than actual inequality levels in predicting aggregate preferences for redistribution (Choi, 2019; Condon and Wichowsky, 2020). For instance, providing information about individuals’ position in the income scale leads individuals to demand more redistribution (Cruces et al., 2013) or more progressive taxes (Cansunar, 2021; Fernández-Albertos and Kuo, 2018). Most importantly, morals or the implications of inequality seem to matter more. Giving information about actual social mobility levels (A. Alesina et al., 2018; Trump, 2020), the potential externalities of inequality (Lobeck and Støstad, 2022), or the prosociality of rich people (Hansen, 2022), influences preferences for redistribution. Although recent literature has started to test some of these expectations on real-life events (Dunaiski and Tukiainen, 2023; Ouali, 2020), most of the outlined experimental evidence remain enclosed, lacking external validity. Thus, these studies do not allow to answer whether there is an influence of protest mobilization on preferences for redistribution.

The literature on the effects of protests over multiple outcomes offers insights into the potential role of protests in shaping redistributive demands. Protests seem to be the most important extra-institutional actor in shaping public debates, with the ability to introduce new issues in the public discussion. In the ‘struggle for the agenda,’ protests can define what issues are ‘talked about,’ with a direct potential impact on public opinion (Mazumder, 2018; Wasow, 2020) and party strategy (Hutter and Vliegenthart, 2018; McAdam and Kloos, 2014). Given the decreasing attention given to socio-economic conflict in western media (Epp and Jennings, 2020), protests can counter these trajectories by increasing media attention over inequality issues, as shown for the Occupy Wall Street protests in the US (Gaby and Caren, 2016).

Similarly, protests can impact the framing of poverty or facilitate blame attribution to economic and political elites in response to austerity policies. In this sense, protests can be a main non-institutionalized actor with the ability to ‘correct’ inequality trends by influencing party systems and voting behaviour. By signalling parties (Björn Bremer et al., 2020) and other political actors, protests can initiate self-reinforcing cycles in both general political debate and party rhetoric, moving parties towards the position advocated by the movement.

However, most of the extensive body of empirical research investigating the effects of protests

on public opinion or electoral behaviour do not focus on economic redistributive issues. In the US, the Civil Right or Black Lives Matter movements greatly impacted public opinion (Mazumder, 2018; Reny and Newman, 2021; Wasow, 2020) and the political trajectories of parties (Mazumder, 2018; McAdam and Kloos, 2014). Women’s marches (Larrebourg and Gonz, 2021) or anti-LePen protests (Lagios et al., 2022) also seemed to impact electoral behaviour, favouring historically underrepresented groups or diminishing the vote share of far-right parties. Although mobilizations raising racial, gender, or accountability issues often incorporate redistributive economic claims, the existing research leaves aside the potential effects of these protests on public opinion towards redistribution.

Despite the apparent link between protest mobilization and public opinion towards redistribution, there is little empirical evidence connecting them. Beyond the experimental literature on preferences for redistribution, only some studies touching upon governmental redistributive policies or protest politics can help to elaborate expectations around the effect of successful protest events on preferences for redistribution. Focusing on the political participation of lower classes, Pontusson and Rueda (2010) show that higher voter turnout among the lower-income individuals correlates with governments being more responsive to increasing inequality. Additionally, Kurer (2019) shows that higher aggregate levels of protest in a country facilitates the protest participation of lower classes, reducing the obstacles to participating in politics advanced by resource models of political participation (Brady et al., 1995). Taken together, these pieces of evidence suggest that large mobilizations can foster the political participation of broader sections of the population, affecting their behaviors and preferences. However, these studies offer evidence on different dynamics of inequality rather than on the independent effect of protest mobilization on redistributive demands.

To my knowledge, only one empirical study has linked protests or revolutions with changes in redistributive demands, while another one observes the effect of protests on resource allocation. El Rafhi and Volle (2020b) argue that the revolution in Egypt should have affected redistributive demands among the general population. Indeed, coinciding with the Egyptian revolution, there is a stark increase in redistributive demands between 2008 and 2013. However, the five-year time-lapse does not allow to infer a causal effect from the revolution. A second study links policy responses to mobilization, showing that protests in Nigeria led to higher resource allocation to regions where protests were more intense (Archibong and Moerenhout, 2022). Besides the absence of theoretical arguments, these studies do not provide causal evidence on the potential effect of protest on public preferences for redistribution. The next section builds theoretical expectations on the potential effects of protest on redistributive demands.

Protests lead to Society-Wide Redistributive Demands

The literature on preferences for redistribution provides extensive evidence on how and when preferences change, often from laboratory and field experiments (Trump, 2020). Herein, I present two distinct rationales by which people may update their redistributive preferences under actual political settings: ‘redistribution from’ and ‘redistribution to’ (Cavaillé and Trump, 2015). The first emphasizes mobilization among the lower classes, by which protests

can impact perceptions of economic self-interest and blame attribution among lower economic strata. As lower classes face more difficulties to engage in political participation, protests make such participation more accessible (Kurer et al., 2019), shaping their grievances and redistributive preferences. The second perspective focuses on the middle and upper classes, for whom the protests potentially impact other-regarding evaluations based on the perceived fairness of outcomes, affecting their ‘preferences for redistribution to’ (Cavallé and Trump, 2015).

Mobilizing lower classes: ‘Redistribution from’

The evidence shows that individuals tend to overestimate their position in the income rankings. This pattern arises because people tend to rank themselves using informational cues endogenous to their local environment rather than deriving the information from objective country-level indicators (Franko and Livingston, 2020). However, when given accurate information about individual’s positions on the national income scale, those that overestimated their positions tend to demand more redistribution (Cruces et al., 2013) or progressive taxation (Cansunar, 2021; Fernández-Albertos and Kuo, 2018). Thus, protests may impact individuals’ identities and self-categorizations regarding income ranking and status. For instance, individuals could update their income ranking if they share identities with participants (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), leading to update their economic evaluations by observing the economic grievances raised by fellow protesters. Simultaneously, protests can increase the salience of economic issues, forcing individuals to take positions on redistributive policies. Although people’s positions towards redistribution can diverge substantially depending on many factors, both the median voter theorem (Downs, 1957) and classical political economy models (Meltzer and Richard, 1981) imply that increased salience on economic issues should guide the majority of people to update their redistributive demands upwardly.

In combination with the classic rational choice perspective, a second argument underlies the role of emotions and dispositional reasoning toward elites, offering insights into the role of grievances on redistributive demands. Often, economic and political elites blame the general population for their economic outcomes, emphasizing individuals’ agency for wider economic hardship. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, many political elites across Europe evidenced these discourses, even during the implementation of harsh austerity measures. For instance, the then Prime Minister of Finance of Ireland blamed the Irish people in 2010 for the banking crisis: “We decided as a people, collectively, to have this property boom (Kerrigan, 2012, p. 104).” In Spain, Rajoy, as the leader of the conservative party, declared in 2010 that “we have lived beyond our –economic- possibilities” (Servimedia, 2010), a vision corroborated by the centre-left Minister of Development in 2011 José Blanco (El Economista, 2011). These discourses arguably legitimized spending cuts, justified austerity policies (Bansak et al., 2021) and demobilized the population.

Countering this logic, experimental evidence shows that randomly exposing individuals to anti-elite statements increases their ‘pocketbook’ anger (Marx, 2020), arguably influenced by a shift in blame attribution to elites. Similarly, depicting rich people as selfish as opposed to generous or prosocial increases peoples’ redistributive demands (Hansen, 2022). In line with this evidence, the release of the Panama papers, unveiling tax heavens and arguably shaping

perceptions of rich people as ‘greedy’, increased public preferences for redistribution (Ouali, 2020). Thus, protests can play a similar role signaling the audience by externalizing blame and redirecting it to political elites, facilitating individuals’ recognition of their economic struggles and consequently affecting their redistributive demands. By holding economic elites accountable for the economic outcomes, protests can foster demands among the lower classes to ‘redistribute from’.

Legitimizing lower classes: ‘Redistribution to’

An alternative rationale puts forward the possible implications of a protest on the middle and upper classes. Middle and upper classes face a contradiction between short-run economic self-interest and other-regarding preferences when forming their preferences for redistribution (Armingeon and Weisstanner, 2022). Although self-interest would lead those classes to prefer low levels of redistribution, a large body of research shows that other-regarding preferences can be influential in shaping people’s redistributive demands by pointing out the fairness of economic outcomes (A. Alesina et al., 2018). Research shows that increased concerns about income inequality can impact beliefs around ‘equality of opportunities’ (McCall et al., 2017; Trump, 2020), thus increasing redistributive demands also among middle-upper classes. Mirroring these experimental findings, protests can foster discussion around inequality and poverty (Gaby and Caren, 2016), influencing upper classes’ identification with lower classes (Mo and Conn, 2018). Thus, protests can impact the fairness perceptions and proximity towards lower classes, increasing redistributive demands among this social strata.

A second, more pragmatic argument raises the potential impact on middle/upper classes by emphasizing the inequality externalities (Lobeck and Støstad, 2022). Providing novel experimental evidence, this research shows that an emphasis on the externalities generated by inequality fosters concerns towards such inequality and increases demands for redistribution (Lobeck and Støstad, 2022). In this sense, protests can raise a practical argument in favour of redistribution by pointing out specific situations derived from income inequality or poverty, potentially impacting middle and upper classes preferences.

In sum, protests can affect redistributive demands among lower and middle/upper classes via alternative channels. Firstly, an increasing public discussion around inequality might in turn increase the grievances and demands for redistribution of lower classes by fostering a self-interested rationalization of economic outcomes and by externalizing blame on political elites. Secondly, protests might foster redistributive demands among middle and upper classes due to increased concerns about the (un)fairness of economic outcomes and the externalities derived from such inequalities. Thus, the arguments presented above lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: Protests incorporating economic demands increase public preferences for redistribution.

Cases

The selection of social movements follows a most-likely approach with two criteria: first, the availability of survey data for the period in which the mobilization occurs, and second, its

unexpectedness and disruptiveness, facilitating their ability to set the agenda and influence public opinion. The second criterion follows previous theorization, by which social movements have a larger impact if they can break with the 'business-as-usual political developments (McAdam et al., 2001). Large, unprecedented mobilizations are by definition unexpected, leading people to update their views about what is legitimate and most importantly about what other people think (Kuran, 1991). Thus, the common denominator across the selected mobilizations is the use of disruptive tactics and new action repertoires (McAdam et al., 2001), with usually large levels of participation garnering substantial attention in the media. Moreover, the mobilizations under study present coordinated participants in big numbers and saw considerable diversity among the protesters, factors that arguably affect the potential of protests to influence public opinion (Tilly, 1993; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017). All the selected mobilizations focused, with varying degrees, on economic issues and demands on the general political process.

I study four mobilizations, affecting four countries: Portugal's Geração à Rasca in March 2011; the 15th May 2011 mobilization in Spain; and the Gilets Jaunes mobilization in France and Belgium in 2018. This combination allows for the observation of the same outcome in different institutional settings and mobilization waves between Southern and Western European countries. While considering valuable heterogeneity across cases, there are also many theoretical similarities. First, the selected cases represent large, meaningful events incorporating legitimacy concerns to their economic demands. Second, although leftist participants represent a majority in most cases, they contain populist components (Aslanidis, 2016; Guerra et al., 2019), usually rejecting the media, political elites, or unions and other social organizations. They were organized through social media without the knowledge of traditional social organizations, reflecting primarily bottom-up mobilizations unexpected by the general public. Thirdly, their heterogeneous social base (Peterson et al., 2015), with a renewed focus on class and economic equality (Tejerina et al., 2013), highlights the transformative power of such mobilizations. Finally, they took place in moments of political crisis, characterized by low approval rates for the incumbents and widespread political disaffection, facilitating the update of preferences beyond partisanship cues. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of each specific case in order to expand the aforementioned theoretical assumptions.

Portugal's Geração à Rasca – 12th March 2011

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, Portugal was one of the first countries where an anti-austerity mobilization took place. The Geração à Rasca or 'Desperate generation' mobilization gathered a massive participation and was the most important mobilization since the revolution in 1974. While the protest was followed by the resignation of a left-wing cabinet and the electoral success of the right-wing candidate in June 2011, its objective and message were deeper. Following the government deal with the IMF by the centre-left Socialist Party, the protest focused its central claims on the 'precarariat' and living conditions (Accornero, 2017). Moreover, the incorporation of legitimacy concerns affected various levels of political trust among Portuguese people (Valentim, 2021), going beyond a mere anti-government protest.

The mobilization started a wave of contention in Portugal, which previously had not witnessed significantly large mobilizations (Valentim, 2021), allowing to isolate the protests' effects. Research has shown that this protest was quite disruptive compared to previous mobilizations (Accornero and Ramos Pinto, 2015), and it was disconnected from unions or other social organizations (Valentim, 2021, p. 3). Moreover, I had a bottom-up organization since it was organized through social media. Web search trends for the keywords' Geração à Rasca' peaked only after the protest (Valentim, 2021, p. 14) (see also Appendix 7). Finally, the mass media reported the protests following online social media, validating the intuition that the general public was unaware of the protest.

Indignados in Spain, 15-M 2011

The 15-M in Spain resembles the Portuguese mobilization, being part of an increasingly contentious activity led by Occupy and anti-austerity protests, especially prominent in Southern Europe (Gessler et al., 2020). Mirroring the Portuguese trajectory, the 15-M mobilization took place under the government of the main centre-left party, PSOE, which initiated austerity policies early in 2010. The 15-M movement hugely impacted Spanish politics, and a reconfiguration of the principal political actors (Orriols and Cordero, 2016; Romanos, 2021). The protest has been recognized as a symbol of other long-term effects in Spanish politics (Orriols and Cordero, 2016; Rodon and Hierro, 2016), with the appearance of the new leftist party Podemos in 2014.

The protest was highly innovative, with camping sites in the main squares of numerous cities. The 15-M mobilization began a wave of protests lasting until 2015, accompanied by a variety of large rallies. The mobilization combined democratic and economic demands and raised economic issues onto the agenda (Labio and Pineda, 2016), with the participation of the middle classes in the protests signaling the unmet economic expectations of the population. A social media group called "Democracia Real Ya" (Real Democracy Now) initiated the event while unions, parties and prominent social actors were not involved, thus the protest took a straightforward bottom-up approach. Appendix 7 shows that the google search trends do not capture keywords linked to the protest until 15th May, while searches for other words such as "crisis" do not vary.

Yellow Vests in France

The Yellow Vest movement in 2018-2019 is considered the most important mobilization in France since May 1968. Triggered by the announcement of a new fuel tax policy, its influence on French politics has been huge, triggering debates on specific economic policies or broader democratic demands (Develennes, 2021). Among its observable successes, it forced President Macron to reverse some of his tax reforms and propose a 'grand national debate' months after the beginning of the protest. The mobilization was incredibly disruptive, gathering unprecedented national and international media attention (Shultziner and Kornblit, 2020) and the sympathy of politicians abroad (Stampa, 2019). A massive participation sustained for months with a heterogeneous social composition (Tucat, 2019) highlights its importance. Moreover, the total disconnection with existing unions or parties and its anti-establishment

rethoric, rejecting Left-Right labelling, largely resembles previous Occupy Movements such as 15-M (Yagci, 2017). The demands focused on social justice and economic policies (Guerra et al., 2019), gathered the support of many non-participants (Elabe, 2019).

The protest was organized on Saturdays every week, beginning on 17th November 2018. As proof of its success, by the first week of December, the government had to reverse some of the previously proposed policies, proposing a substantial rise in the minimum salary. Thus, months after, the Yellow Vests reframed the political situation in a new direction. Although the online mobilization was already taking place, its size was largely unexpected since it was organized mainly through social media (Tucat, 2019). Appendix 7 shows that keywords linked to the Yellow Vests movement do not appear in google searches until two days before the first protest.

Yellow Vests in Belgium

The French Yellow Vests resonated heavily in Belgium, where protests spread on the basis of similar demands: reducing the taxation of basic-needs products, including fuel (Dufresne et al., 2019, p. 49; Stroobants, 2018). The protests, tactically cutting off the fuel supply to gas stations, were highly disruptive and set the agenda for weeks (Dufresne et al., 2019, p. 50). Unions and other formal organizations were disconnected from the movement, as the leader of the main union Marie H el ene Ska (CSC) explained: “The Gilets Jaunes are the outcome of unresponsiveness towards the union’s demands” (Dufresne et al., 2019, p. 51). The demonstrations, demanding the government’s resignation, impulse a platform for the 2019 Belgian elections. As in France, google searches peaked after the protests (Appendix 7), starting to take place gradually after 17th November.

Data and Methodology

To observe the effects of social movements on redistributive demands, I implement an “unexpected event during survey” design (Mu oz et al., 2020), coupling the survey timing with the protest events, using European Social Survey (ESS) data. The survey’s and protest timing are described in the Appendix 6. Except for Portugal, all countries have a substantial number of observations before and after their respective protest events, allowing for observation of effects over long periods. I implement the following two specifications, aiming to capture the effect of the protest events on redistributive demands by comparing the averages before and after (Eq. 1), and around the protest events (Eq. 2):

$$Eq.1 : y_{i,r} = \alpha + \beta T_i + \delta X_{i,r} + \mu_r + \epsilon_{i,r}$$

$$Eq.2 : y_{i,r} = \alpha + \beta T_i * day_i + \delta X_{i,r} + \mu_r + \epsilon_{i,r}$$

The dependent variable ‘y’ measures individuals’ answers to the following statement: “Government should reduce differences in income levels,” with reordered responses ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). For every case, the independent variable ‘T’ takes the value one (1) if the respondent i is surveyed after the protest event and zero (0) otherwise.

Since the purpose is to capture the effect around specific events, the models should control pre and post-trends (Muñoz et al., 2020), mainly to avoid capturing the effect from a public opinion trend potentially taking place before the mobilizations. For that purpose, I include a separate model specification that interacts with the day count ‘day’ on the protest treatment ‘T’ (Eq. 2). The trend is captured by counting the days since the protest event, ranging from -40 to 40 depending on whether the respondent was surveyed before or after the protest.

Moreover, I include several pretreatment control variables ‘X’ to avoid estimation bias from imbalances in the data. I select them based on controlling for fundamental socio-economic indicators, taking special attention to those mentioned as more influential in the literature on preferences for redistribution. I include education level, age, and gender as people with lower education levels, older people, and women prefer more redistribution in Europe (Finseraas, 2009). Other sociodemographic factors unrelated to the protest events that can affect preferences for redistribution are controlled for, such as residence description, trade union membership, employment status, and declared vote, focusing on the L-R economic dimension. As the number of countries analyzed presents many parties, I create a three-category variable to control party identification. Thus, I categorize individuals as having voted for a leftist party, centrist/abstentionist, or right-wing party (see Appendix 8). I also categorically control for income and occupation, recodifying missing responses as “other” to avoid losing a substantial number of observations.

Finally, I include region fixed effects μ , as previous studies have shown substantial imbalances related to the survey timing and regional composition of respondents (Giani and Méon, 2021). Since the database contains respondents from different countries and regions with varying baseline levels for the dependent variable, I include region-fixed effects to control for heterogeneities derived from different baseline levels. Simultaneously, some countries included in the analysis have more observations than others in the ‘non-treated or ’treated’ group due to the different paces in which the surveys were conducted, as shown in Appendix 6. Therefore, I include fixed effects at the regional level to prevent bias derived from the different regional compositions in the treatment and control groups.

Table 1 shows the summary statistics for the dependent variable and controls, subset by people surveyed before and after fifteen days from the protest. The control variables do not show statistically significant differences, as shown in Appendix 2. Moreover, Appendix 2 expands this analysis by looking at the imbalances for 1 to 40 days before and after the protests, showing minimal imbalances in the data for up to -/+ 30 days.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics. -/+ 15 days.

	Before			After		
	N	Mean	St. Dev.	N	Mean	St. Dev.
PrefRed	1,032	3.97	0.97	914	4.11	0.88
Residence	1,048	0.41	0.49	923	0.44	0.50
Gender	1,048	0.54	0.50	925	0.54	0.50
Educ. years	1,028	12.26	4.93	908	12.40	5.07
Voted Left	910	0.30	0.46	804	0.27	0.44
Age	1,047	49.98	19.19	925	49.34	18.60
Income	863	5.19	2.81	713	5.27	2.84
Member union	1,047	0.13	0.33	924	0.12	0.32
Unemployed	1,046	0.36	0.48	923	0.35	0.48

As the mobilizations under study have large participation numbers, they could include distortions in respondents’ reachability. However, as Appendix 1 shows, reachability does not significantly change around the mobilizations. The increase occurs gradually, with similar levels before/after 15 days and without a visible change around the protests. Moreover, the mobilizations do not seem to affect non-response. There is no change in missing responses on the dependent variable around the cutoff point, neither of success for the first contact with the respondent (see Appendix 1). Moreover, to control for potential systematic differences between non-respondents before and after the protests, additional analyses in the Appendix 2 shows no substantial differences regarding observations collected by the interviewers.

Results

Figure 1 shows the main effects of varying bandwidths before and after the protest with robust clustered standard errors by region. As observed, preferences for redistribution are between 0.20 and 0.10 higher on a 1-5 scale after the mobilizations. The effect is substantial: equivalent to an increase of 5 to 10 percentage points in respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with redistribution (see Appendix 4 for this alternative specification). With a 20-day bandwidth, the averaged preferences for redistribution are around 0.15 points higher and statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, suggesting that the social movements under study affected average public preferences for redistribution. The grey spikes support the findings by measuring the ‘gap’ in public redistributive demands around the protest event. Moreover, when including response attrition, the results remain similar. Although the effects tend to decrease over time, they stabilize and generate a new baseline level, suggesting long-run effects. Although the results in the long term cannot be directly attributed to a single protest due to other events or continued protests, the importance of most of the studied protests suggests that they served as a trigger to persistent public opinion change. The results by country (see Appendix 3), with larger standard errors, show consistent results in narrow bandwidths (-/+ 15 days) across all the cases, suggesting longer-term and stronger effects for the French and Belgian cases.

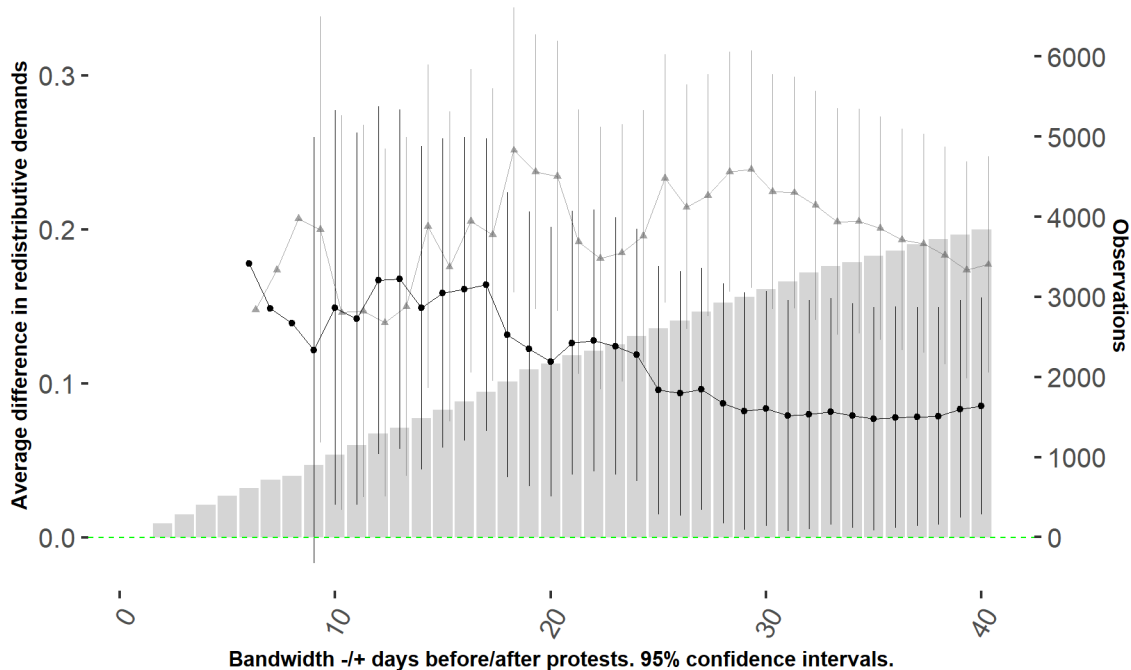


Figure 1: Main result. Change in preferences for redistribution before/after 0-40 days of the protests events. Grey spikes show estimate with interaction term, black dots average difference.

Although the effect observed 15 or 20 days after the protest event can be arguably attributed to the protest events, the effect observed after is challenging to disentangle, given the variety of cases and the number of political events following the first protests. From other-related events such as elections, highly salient news, or government responsiveness towards the protests' demands, the political environment under which individuals would update their preferences for redistribution is harder to grasp. Many subsequent events can impact the agenda-setting, e.g., the Spanish municipal elections taking place one week after. However, in the Spanish case, the protests and campsites lasted longer than three weeks, and they were mainly directed at the central government, indicating that the regional elections did not demobilize participants. Similarly, after the first two weeks of protests in France, a series of events could have also affected public opinion on redistribution. Forced by massive protest participation and the public support enjoyed by the Gilets jaunes, Macron and Prime Minister Édouard Philippe gave some economic concessions in response to the protests, arguably affecting preferences for redistribution and grievances downwards. At the same time, violence in the third week of protests and a terrorist attack in December may have influenced the salience and framing around the demonstrations. However, protests continued every Saturday for months in significant numbers, reflecting unsolved grievances and potential long-run effects on public opinion. Although these arguments could be debatable, with the current setting, it would be inappropriate to conclude a causal relationship between a unique protest event and redistributive demands for very long periods. Thus, the results in Figure 1 for 40 days

before/after reflect, although interesting, might reflect compounding effects unrelated to the protest events.

Placebo and alternative strategies

One crucial concern in event designs is the potential relationship between the running variable and potential heterogeneities that depend on the survey timing. As the ESS does not randomize the dates in which people are interviewed from the representative sample, those at the end of the survey can have different characteristics from those interviewed at the beginning of the fieldwork. For instance, people responding at the end of the survey may be systematically different, as the survey design may prioritize reaching some areas, thus influencing the outcome variable. Although these concerns should be mostly mitigated by the region fixed-effects and the controls included, I ran three placebo tests aiming to address potential biases. First, I rerun the analyses for 1-60 days' bandwidths using the ESS surveys from the previous wave (5th for Portugal and Spain, 8th wave for France and Belgium) using the median date cutoff point to maximize statistical power. Second, I conduct the analyses by using all the countries in the 9th wave, excluding France and Belgium. Appendix 5 shows that the estimates are inconsistent and small. Moreover, the analyses are always non-significant. Finally, I ran several regressions in the control group of the original sample. As observed in Appendix 5, changing the bandwidth from ± 30 to ± 5 days in the control group (ranging from day -60 to the first day of the protests) shows inconsistent results. The condition interacting with the running variable (grey spikes) takes small positive and negative values, indicating inconsistent variation and smaller coefficients in the previous two months.

Additionally, I balance the control and treatment groups using matching techniques on a larger number of covariates, reported in the Appendix 4. The matched samples lead to almost identical results. However, the matching techniques cannot control for bias generated by unobserved variables. To reduce concerns about the existence of such a confounder, I conduct two sensitivity analyses following Cinelli and Hazet framework ([Cinelli and Hazlett, 2020](#)), showing that potential unobserved variables correlated with the treatment and the outcome should explain more than five times what (observable) education or income explain (see Appendix 4).

Finally, the analyses by country are provided in Appendix 3. For short-time spans the results are similar for all countries, while after 20-30 days preferences for redistribution remain higher in France and Belgium, mirroring the continued mobilization in these cases.

Heterogeneous results: non-participants and working class

Following the theoretical section, I identify three main subpopulation groups arguably affected by the protest events: lower classes, middle/upper classes, and politically disengaged groups. The results favour a 'politicization' perspective by which non-participants and working classes are more affected by the protests. The analyses for lower classes seem to support the idea

that the mobilizations fostered the political grievances of those sectors that usually do not participate in politics.

Regarding the effect for non-participants, a ceiling effect is less likely for demobilized individuals. Protest participants seem to be systematically different from the rest of the population, being more left-leaning on average (Kostelka and Rovny, 2019; Torcal et al., 2016). Indeed, for the cases under study, those reporting having participated in a demonstration in the last 12 months prefer more redistribution by 0.17 points on a 1-5 scale. Second, and more importantly, the theory described above emphasizes a ‘politicization of inequality’ approach, in which a redefinition of identities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001) and self-evaluation is taking place, potentially through the diffusion to important sectors of the population other than protest participants. A framework in which protesters are ‘actors on a stage’ (McAdam et al., 2001) delineates a clear-cut division between participants and the rest, by which protests try to raise public awareness of an otherwise disengaged mass public. Empirically, by focusing on non-participants, at least two potential biases can be avoided: firstly, an underestimation derived from already engaged participants before the protests, and secondly, an effect driven solely by participants’ involvement in the protests. Thus, I focus on non-participants by excluding those responding affirmatively to participating in a demonstration in the last 12 months. As observed in Table 2, the results are more robust for this subpopulation group. Arguably, non-participants and the politically disengaged are arguably more affected by the changing political environment, becoming aware of new debates following the protests, leading them to update their political preferences in a bandwagon fashion.

Table 1: Subsample non-participants

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Preferences for Redistribution						
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	0.252*** (0.065)	0.167** (0.053)	0.137** (0.045)	0.144*** (0.041)	0.093* (0.038)	0.091** (0.034)	0.099** (0.031)
Gap	0.228 (0.141)	0.187+ (0.107)	0.228* (0.091)	0.190* (0.084)	0.236** (0.077)	0.180** (0.063)	0.119* (0.053)
Observations	964	1,550	2,146	2,598	3,119	4,333	5,537

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Next, I focus on the effects by income and class groups, following the ‘redistribution to’ and ‘redistribution from’ mechanisms. The results slightly favor the latter perspective, by which lower classes are most affected by the protest events. To capture heterogeneous effects for the lower classes, I run the analyses by occupation, dividing occupational sectors into two: workers (production and service) and other occupations. While the effects are not

Table 2: Treatment interacted with working class occupations.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Preferences for Redistribution						
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	0.123 (0.099)	0.039 (0.075)	0.087 (0.065)	0.079 (0.059)	-0.027 (0.055)	-0.027 (0.048)	-0.014 (0.043)
After*workclass	0.089 (0.126)	0.148 (0.096)	0.034 (0.083)	0.050 (0.075)	0.150* (0.069)	0.144* (0.060)	0.120* (0.053)
Observations	1,137	1,798	2,492	3,000	3,582	4,922	6,195
R ²	0.058	0.112	0.091	0.087	0.082	0.095	0.093

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

statistically significant at standard levels, they are larger and more stable over time in the subset of production and service workers, groups that tend to be more disengaged from formal and informal political participation (Brady et al., 1995). In combination, working class non-participants seem to drive the results, as shown in Appendix 9.

Mechanisms and alternative outcomes

This section, relying on a battery of questions asked in the 9th wave of the ESS, investigates the potential mechanisms driving the effects in the French and Belgian cases. These indicators include meritocratic, egalitarian beliefs, and fairness views. This last question is further divided into perceptions of fairness for the top 10% (under 4900€ in France, 5900€ in Belgium) and bottom 10% incomes (under 1600€ in France and 2000€ in Belgium). Thus, higher scores represent whether respondents perceive incomes below a certain threshold (bottom 10% national percentile) as unfairly low, and top incomes (above 10% national percentile) as unfairly high. Similarly, higher scores in egalitarian, meritocratic beliefs, or general perceptions on the fairness of wealth differences are

The results, reported in Figure 2, could imply transformations in core beliefs and fairness perceptions. The bottom 10% incomes became perceived as more unfairly low, although general views on the fairness of wealth distribution remained unchanged. Simultaneously, egalitarian beliefs seem to increase after the protests. However, the effect on egalitarian beliefs should be taken with caution since it is not robust for all the possible bandwidths, as shown in Appendix 10. Finally, the fairness perceptions on top 10% incomes remain unchanged after the protest events. In sum, the combined results could explain a general increase in egalitarian beliefs and perceived unfairness of low incomes, leading people to update their preferences for redistribution. Since these results are not robust for all specifications and

do not affect all the indicators in the expected direction, and redistributive demands are arguably a multidimensional attitude not only affected by economic concerns, I explore the possibility of a grievance-driven explanation in Appendix 10.

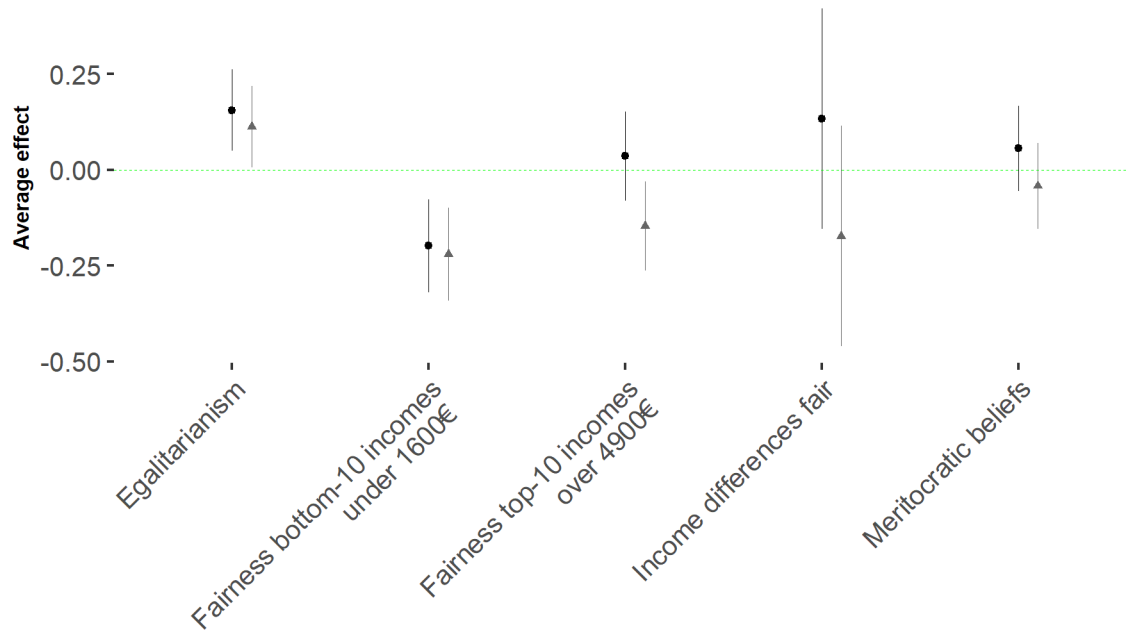


Figure 2: Difference in attitudes before/after 20 days, standardized items. Sample only includes France and Belgium. 95pc confidence intervals.

Discussion

The present study improves our understanding of how redistribution preferences are formed and evolve, providing evidence and building theoretical expectations on whether large economic protests influence public opinion on redistribution. With more robust results for non-participants and working classes, the effects highlight a ‘politicization of inequality’ perspective under which protests can directly influence public opinion through media coverage (Wasow, 2020) and by politicizing non-participants and lower classes (Kurer et al., 2019). In this way, protests can revert self-reinforcing dynamics by which increasing inequality diminishes the political participation of the poor and increase the legitimization of inequality (Mijs, 2019).

The results of the study also reveal the mechanisms through which protests have influenced changes in party systems and populist voting in European countries (B. Bremer et al., 2020). These large-scale mobilizations, typically not associated with traditional leftist organizations or unions, seek broader structural change beyond specific policies or incumbents. Under these contexts, the demands of the protestors pressure mainstream parties while these protests

increased the attention given in the media to issues related to inequality (Valentim, 2021; Yagci, 2017). Thus, these large-scale protests have re-politicized the economy and potentially catalyzed changes in the party system by indicating emerging political spaces (Gessler et al., 2020; H. Kriesi et al., 2012). Moreover, since support for populist parties is closely linked to issues of redistribution (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021; Albanese et al., 2022), and economic grievances are a crucial factor in understanding the popularity of radical right-wing parties (Fetzer, 2019; Hübscher et al., 2021), the role of protests in shaping redistributive demands is essential in comprehending these changes.

Lastly, and in combination with previous literature, the present study provides insights into the self-reinforcing nature of mobilization processes: protests are not only explained by grievances (Grasso and Giugni, 2019; Justino and Martorano, 2019) but can also amplify them, evidencing the observation that protests tend to come in ‘waves’ (Kriesi et al., 2020). This argument, in line with a ‘networks of grievances’ perspective (Colombo and Dinas, 2021), supports the idea that social contestation can legitimize anti-systemic attitudes and behaviour (Puga and Moya, 2022), amplifying the effects of economic and political crises. As shown in the analyses, the protests intensified grievances concerning the economy and different political institutions.

Three main shortcomings should be considered. Firstly, the effects observed for these huge, unprecedented protests might not necessarily extrapolate to smaller, more localized, or less successful protest events. Further research could link the dynamics of inequality within countries with the local patterns driving regional, smaller protests in response to inequality. Since local or regional protest events arguably affect policy at regional or lower governmental levels and growing within-country inequality is explained by different regional economic trajectories (Doran and Jordan, 2013), these protests could be linked to the regional dynamics of inequality. Thus, future research could investigate whether growing patterns of within-country inequality are driven by heterogeneous political contestation across regions, simultaneously studying the effectiveness of such smaller mobilizations.

Secondly, although welfare chauvinism plays a crucial role in research investigating the transformation of party systems in Europe, the present study does not discuss this issue. Especially for the French Gilet Jaunes, the protests might have influenced the ‘inclusiveness scope’ (Harell et al., 2022) when people think about redistributive and welfare policies. Field surveys show the heterogeneous social base of the Gilets Jaunes, emphasizing that many participants declared to have voted for far-right parties (Elabe, 2019). Similarly, the Canadian Gilets Jaunes were mainly a far-right movement (Cecco, 2018). As previous Occupy movements and recent mobilizations linked to covid-19 have shown, the protest arena is decreasingly dominated by traditional left-wing actors. Thus, these phenomena deserve closer attention in protest and social movement research.

Thirdly, as in any event study, the threats to causal identification are larger than in other research designs (Muñoz et al., 2020). When studying the effects on public opinion for extended periods, the ‘unexpected event during survey design’ cannot provide a plausible causal identification (Muñoz et al., 2020, p. 204). However, the high salience of the events with the results for observations after ten days gives confidence in the short-run effects caused by the protest events while suggesting a long-run compound effect on public opinion.

In sum, the present study offers a perspective on how protests can affect public opinion on redistribution and economic inequality, a phenomenon rarely studied in mobilization research. In contrast to previous accounts emphasizing the stability of preferences for redistribution ([Cavaille and Trump, 2015](#)), the present study provides evidence of actual political settings where such preferences change. Moreover, the study indicates that contemporaneous populist and Occupy movements can affect the traditional axis of political competition. This has significant consequences: if contemporary protests can affect redistributive demands, they can significantly affect the dynamics of inequality through different channels, as they are one key component in determining people's votes ([Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021](#)). In an era of increasing mobilization ([Jenkins and Kwak, 2022](#); [Meyer and Tarrow, 1998](#)), normalization of protest and high political disaffection in western European countries, incorporating protests into the analyses of inequality seems a necessary avenue for research.

Appendix

A1. Reachability

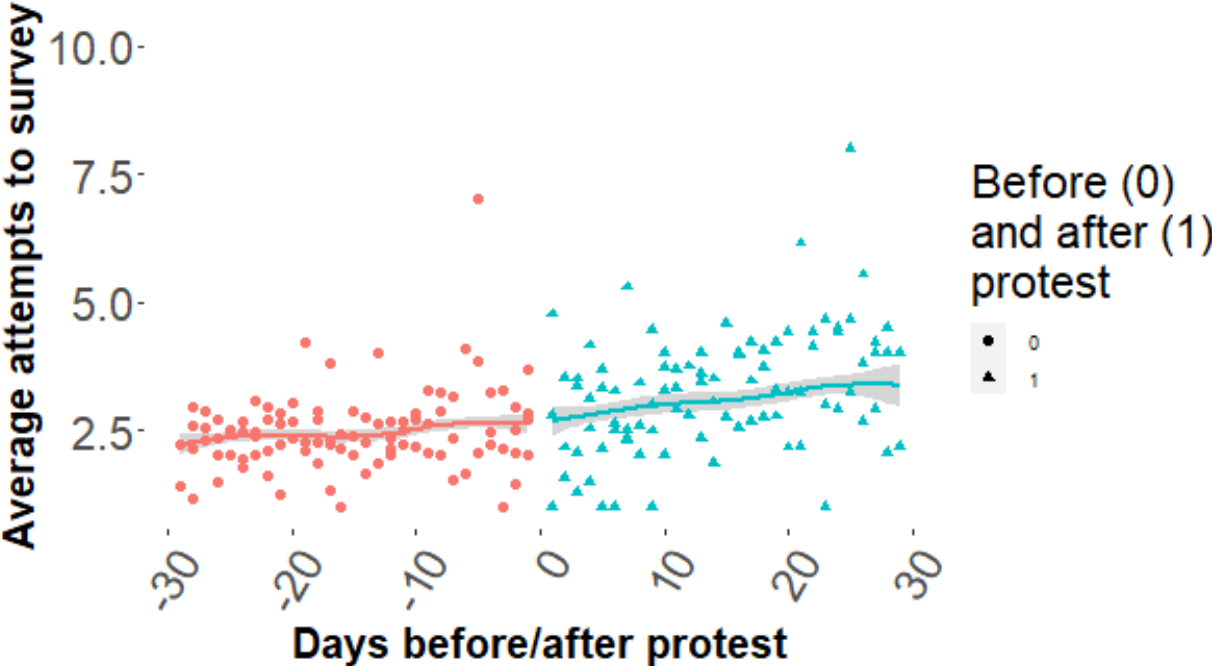


Figure 3: Attempts to survey before and after.

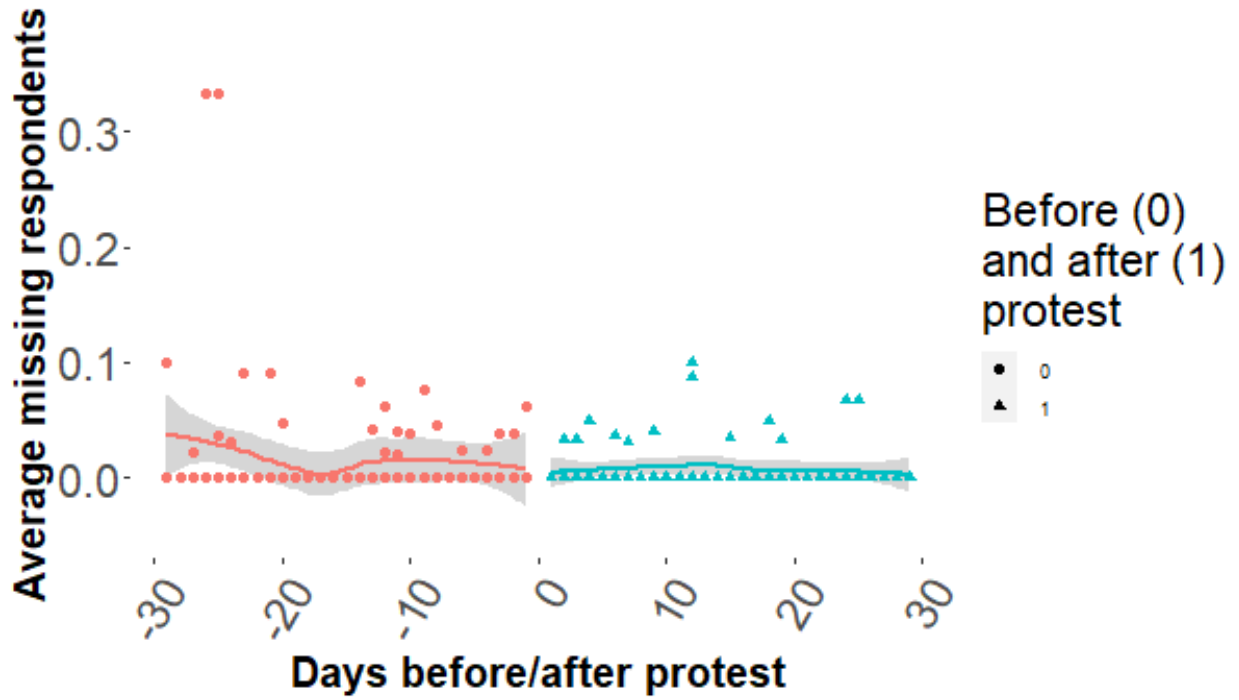


Figure 4: Missing respondents before and after.

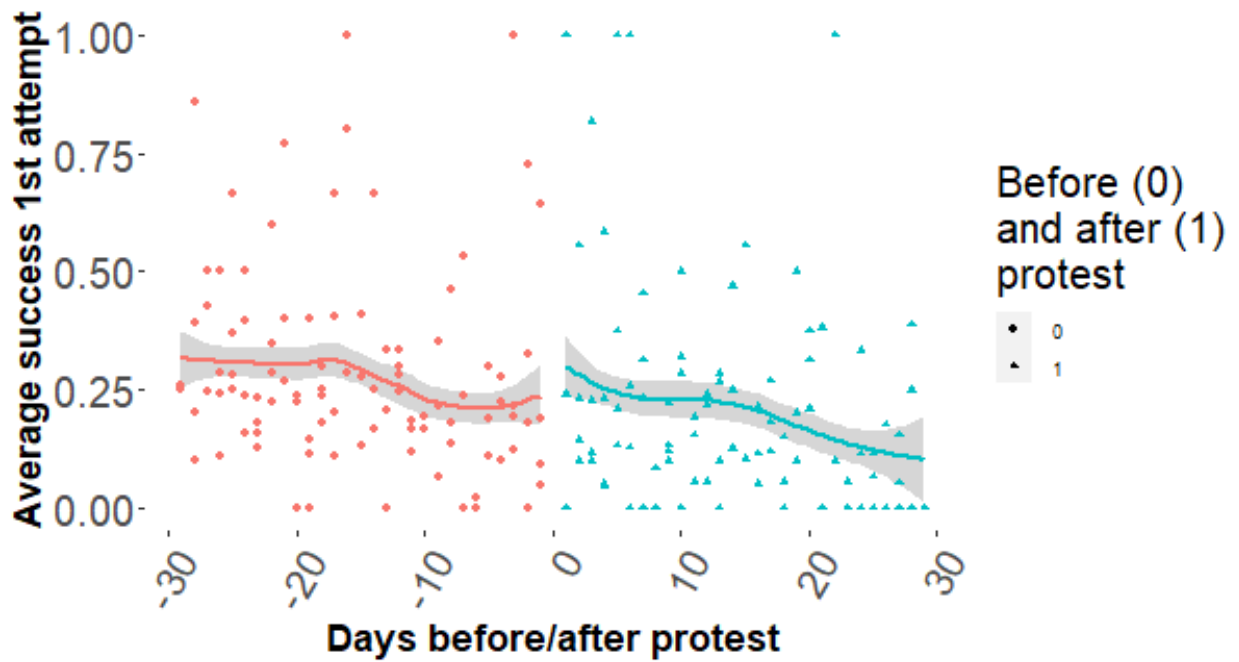


Figure 5: 1st attempt to survey successful.

A2. Imbalances

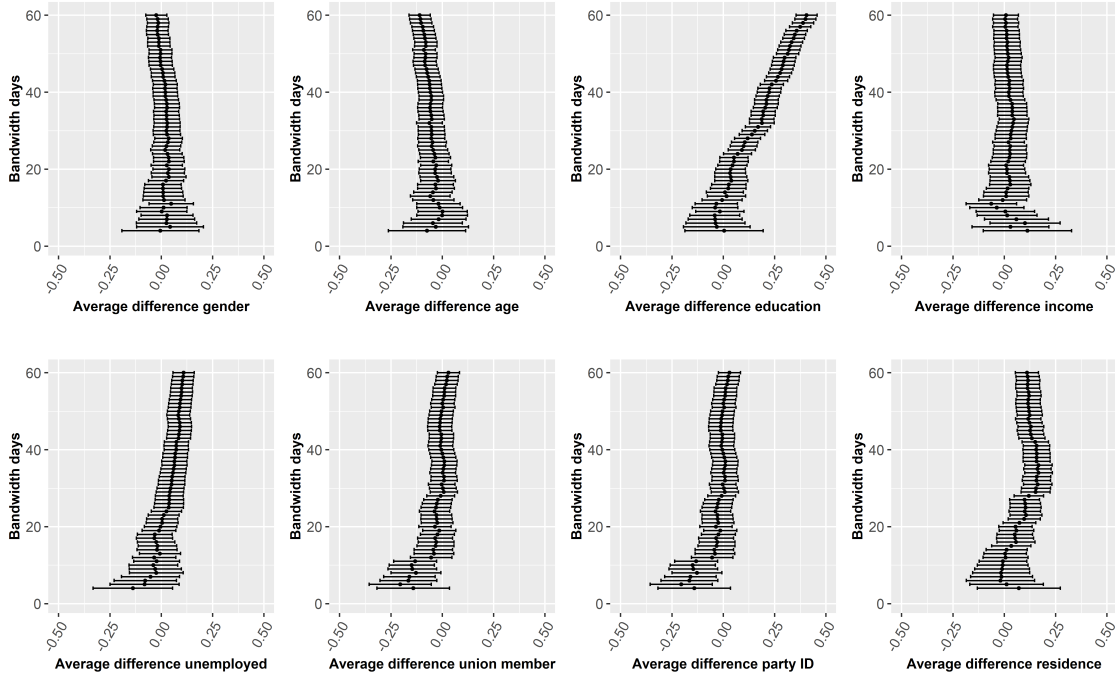


Figure 6: Imbalances between control and treatment groups.

Table 3: Imbalances before and after the protests (-/+ 15 days).

Variable	After (N=894)	Before (N=1011)	P-Value
Pref. Redist.	4.10	3.97	0.00135
age	49.2	49.7	0.51
gender	0.541	0.532	0.687
education years	12.5	12.3	0.424
unemployed	0.347	0.363	0.46
member union	0.347	0.363	0.46
income high	0.302	0.307	0.827
income low	0.243	0.272	0.144
income middle	0.234	0.256	0.256
income missing	0.221	0.165	0.00196
service class	0.280	0.272	0.71
smallbusiness class	0.119	0.123	0.785
missing class	0.106	0.0969	0.502
residence bigcity	0.147	0.180	0.0479
residence suburbs	0.103	0.0772	0.0509
residence town	0.308	0.326	0.379
residence village	0.395	0.372	0.304
residence countryside	0.0481	0.0445	0.71

Imbalances non-respondents

The following table shows the imbalances before/after for non-respondents on different items collected by interviewers, such as type of house where the interview should have taken place, or the perceived gender and age of the non-respondent.

Table 4: Imbalances non-respondents

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	After protests (1) vs before protests (0)					
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	10 days	15 days	20 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
house_farm	0.772*	0.446	0.329			
house_flat	0.324	0.214	0.115			
house_single	0.363	0.273	0.175			
house_others	0.315	0.302	0.255			
gate_access	-0.008	-0.001	-0.002			
house_quality	0.033	0.023	0.005			
litter_vicinity	0.042	0.014	-0.015			
vandalism_vicinity	-0.008	0.003	0.026			
age_over40				0.107+	0.036	0.007
female				-0.060	-0.066+	-0.049
Observations	990	1,791	2,291	370	684	902

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

A3. Results by country

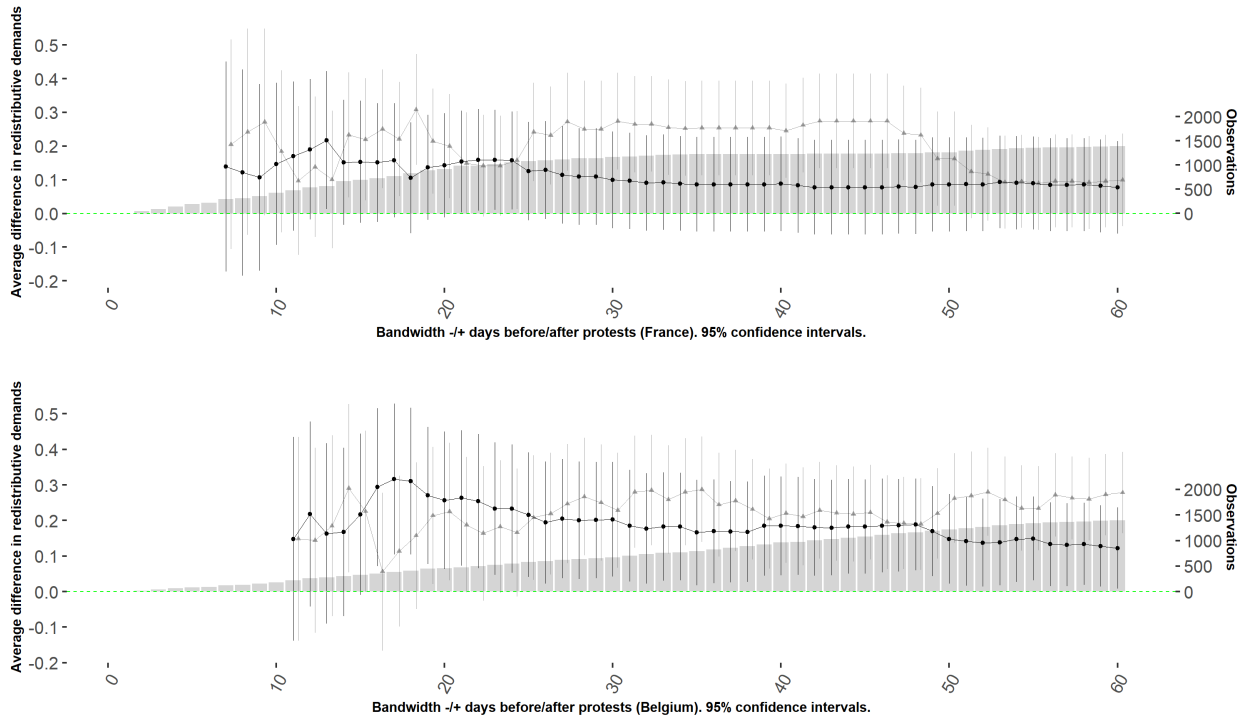


Figure 7: Effects in France and Belgium.

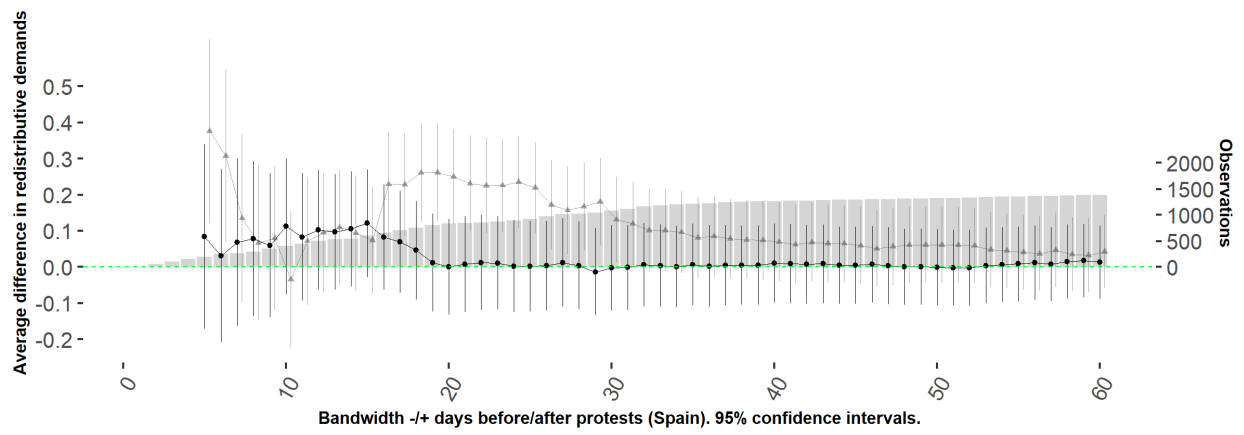
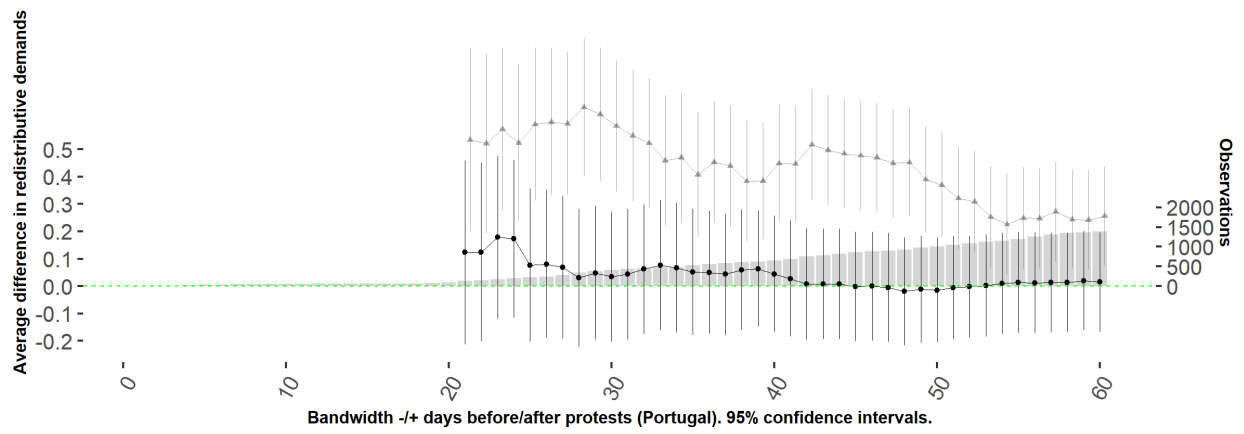


Figure 8: Effects in Portugal and Spain.

A4. Robustness main result

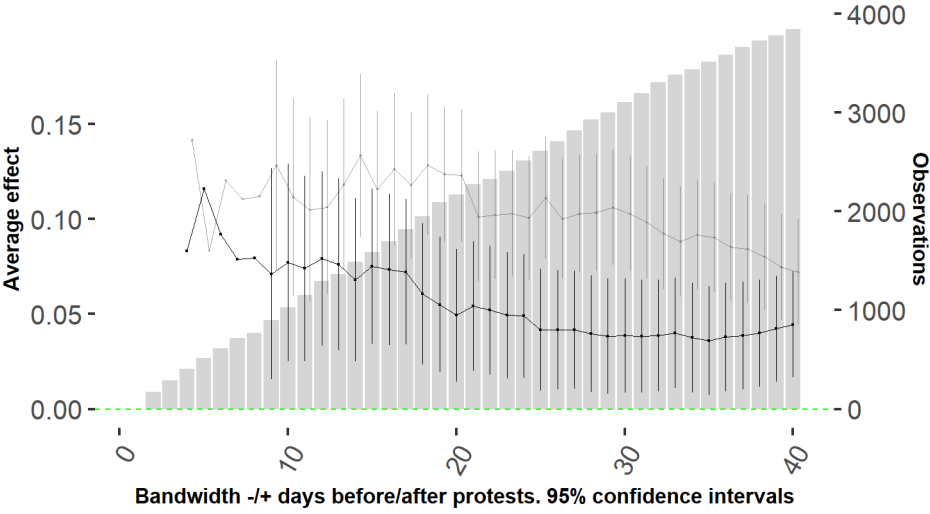


Figure 9: Effects using binary preferences for redistribution.

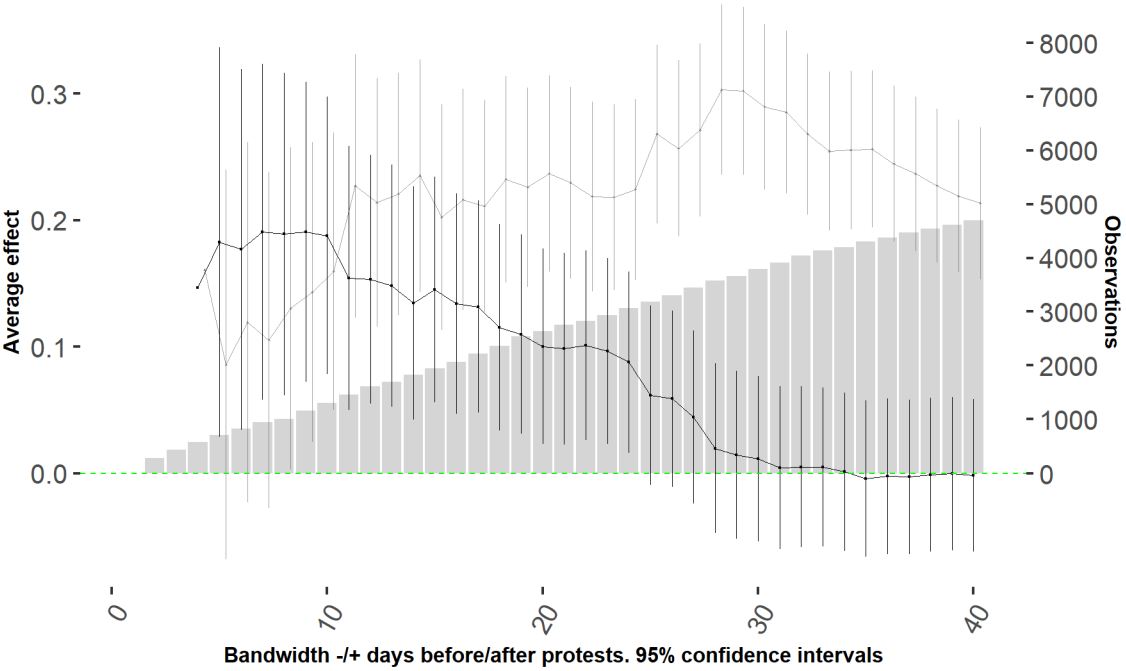


Figure 10: Effects without controls.

Matched samples

Additional controls for the matched samples:

citizenship: Whether the person has citizenship of the surveyed country (dummy).

born_country: Whether the person was born in the surveyed country (dummy).

Marital status

- *married*: legally married / registered in a civil union
- *divorced*: divorced / legally separated
- *widowed*
- *never_married*

Main source of household income, three categories.

- *income_wage*: main source of household income from wages/salaries
- *income_benefits*: main source of household income from pensions or unemployment
- *income_other*

Description of respondent's house

Type of house respondent lives in.

- *house_farm*
- *house_flat*: house belongs to a flat building
- *house_single*: house is a single unit
- *house_others*

gate_access: Entry phone or locked gate/door before respondent individual door

house_quality: Assessment overall condition building respondent's house

litter_vicinity: Amount of litter and rubbish in the immediate vicinity

vandalism_vicinity: Amount of vandalism and graffiti in the immediate vicinity

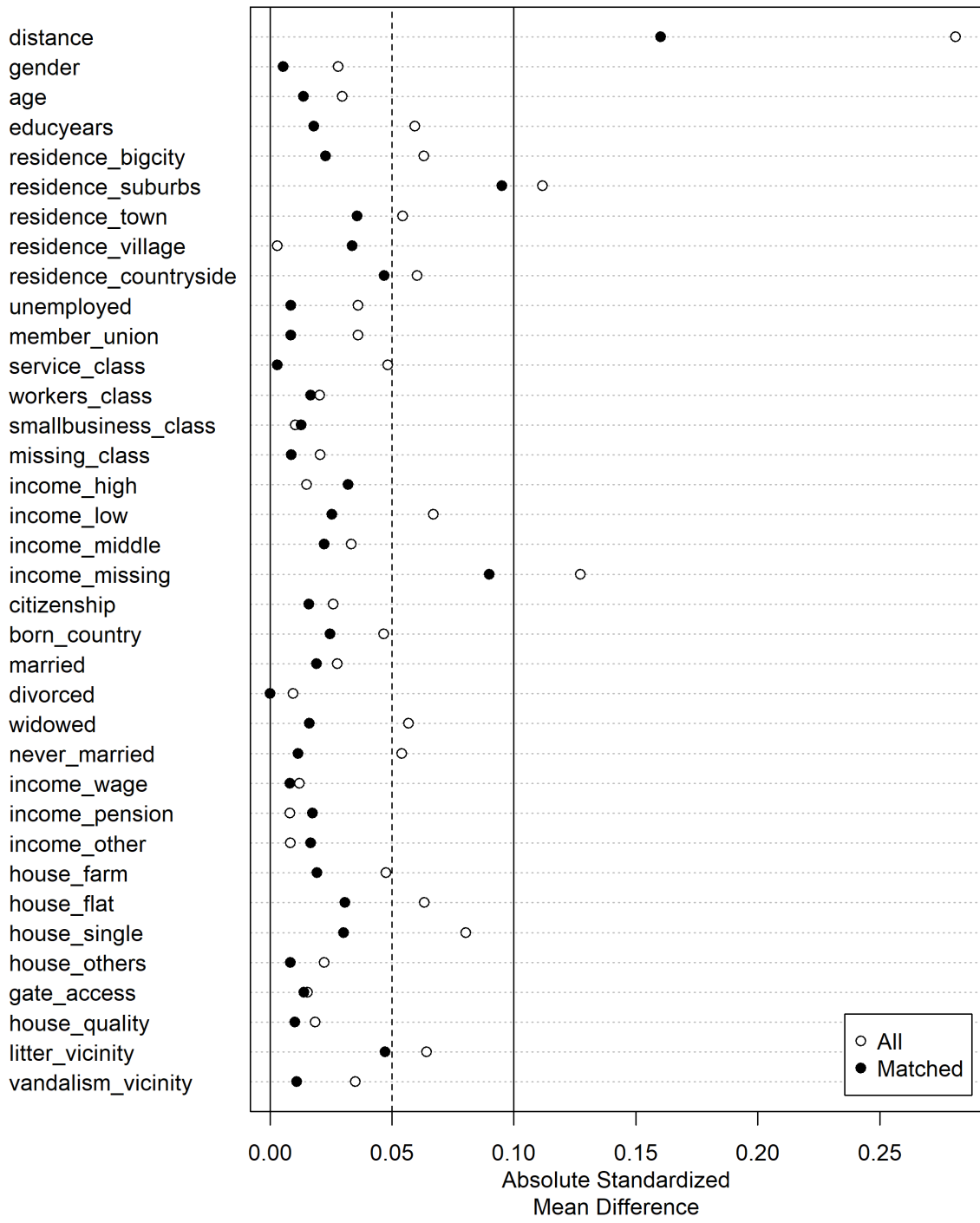


Figure 11: Descriptive balance matched and unmatched samples. -/+ 15 days.

Table 5: Matched samples.

<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
Preferences for Redistribution							
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	0.148* (0.071)	0.131* (0.053)	0.129** (0.046)	0.119** (0.043)	0.088* (0.041)	0.094* (0.039)	0.094** (0.035)
Gap	0.188 (0.150)	0.203+ (0.110)	0.190* (0.095)	0.163+ (0.088)	0.211** (0.082)	0.094 (0.071)	0.099+ (0.060)
Observations	880	1,468	1,998	2,290	2,570	3,004	3,640

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 6: Main result.

<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
Preferences for Redistribution							
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	0.162* (0.066)	0.146** (0.053)	0.121** (0.045)	0.118** (0.041)	0.083* (0.039)	0.078* (0.035)	0.078* (0.032)
Gap	0.228 (0.141)	0.187+ (0.107)	0.228* (0.091)	0.190* (0.084)	0.236** (0.077)	0.180** (0.063)	0.119* (0.053)
Observations	974	1,565	2,172	2,594	3,076	4,179	5,195
R ²	0.079	0.127	0.109	0.099	0.094	0.107	0.103

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Sensitivity analysis

The sensitivity analysis shows that the treatment variable would be significant at standard levels even in the presence of an unobserved confounder five times stronger than education (right panel), or more than twelve times stronger than income (left panel). Since observed, theoretically relevant, variables for the treatment and control groups are strongly balanced for up to twenty days (Appendix 2), the presence of a strong unobserved confounder seems very unlikely.

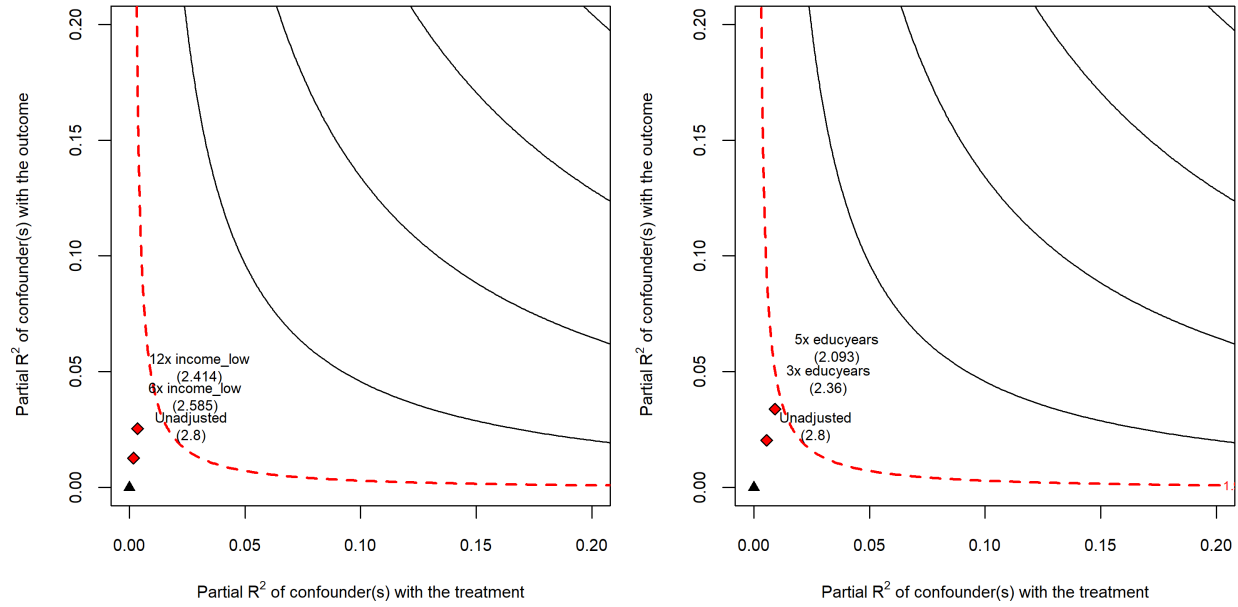


Figure 12: Sensitivity analysis for results +/-15 days. Red line represents threshold for significance (95 p.c. confidence interval) of the treatment variable.

A5. Placebo tests

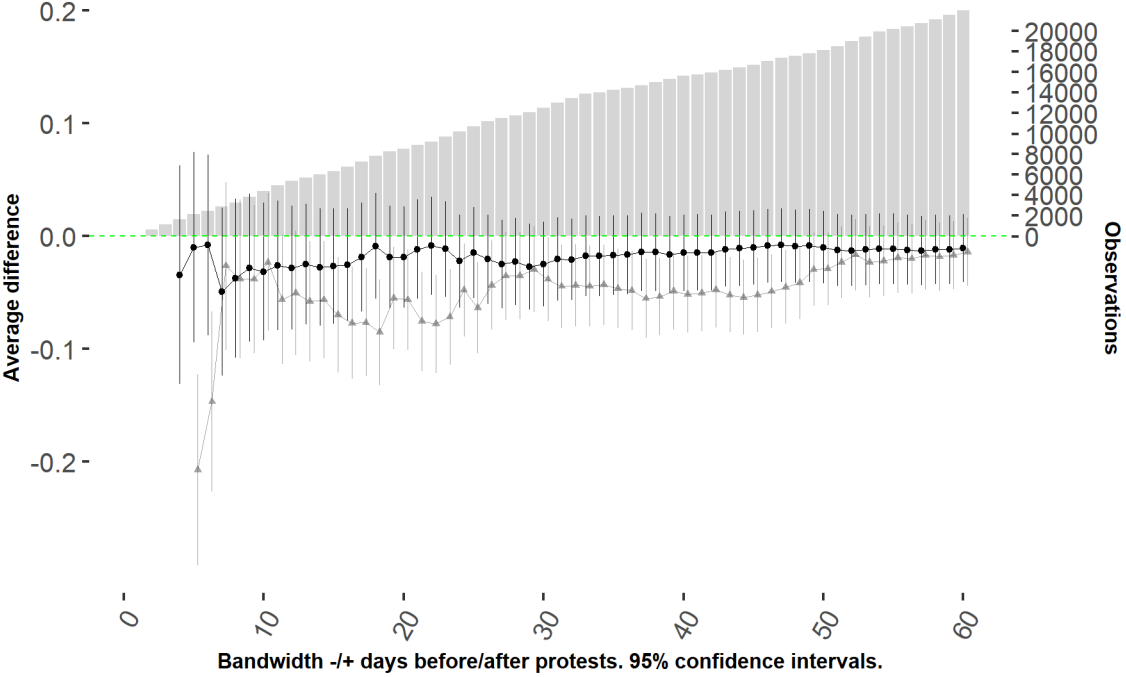


Figure 13: Placebo for all European countries except France and Belgium, 9th wave

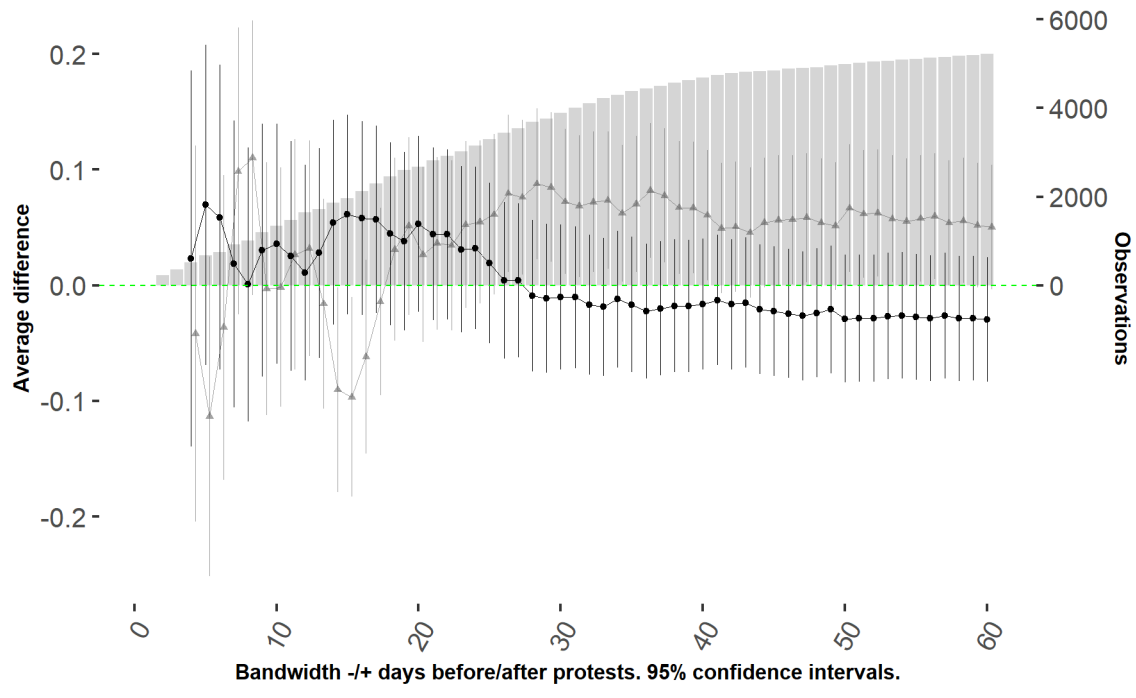


Figure 14: Placebo using median dates for the 6th and 8th wave (for Portugal and Spain, and France and Belgium, respectively).

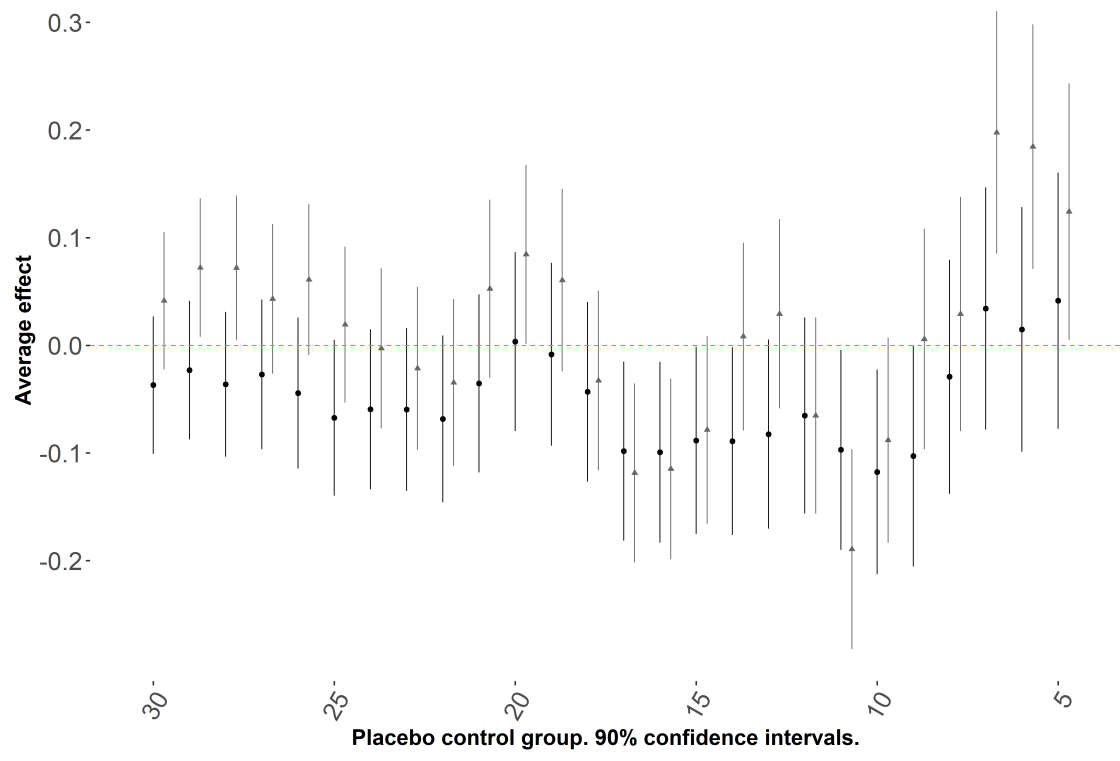


Figure 15: Placebo control group. The x-axis represents the bandwidth in the control group before the first protest, where '30' is the median date in the control sample. Grey spikes show estimate with interaction term, black dots average difference before/after the protest.

A6. Daily observations

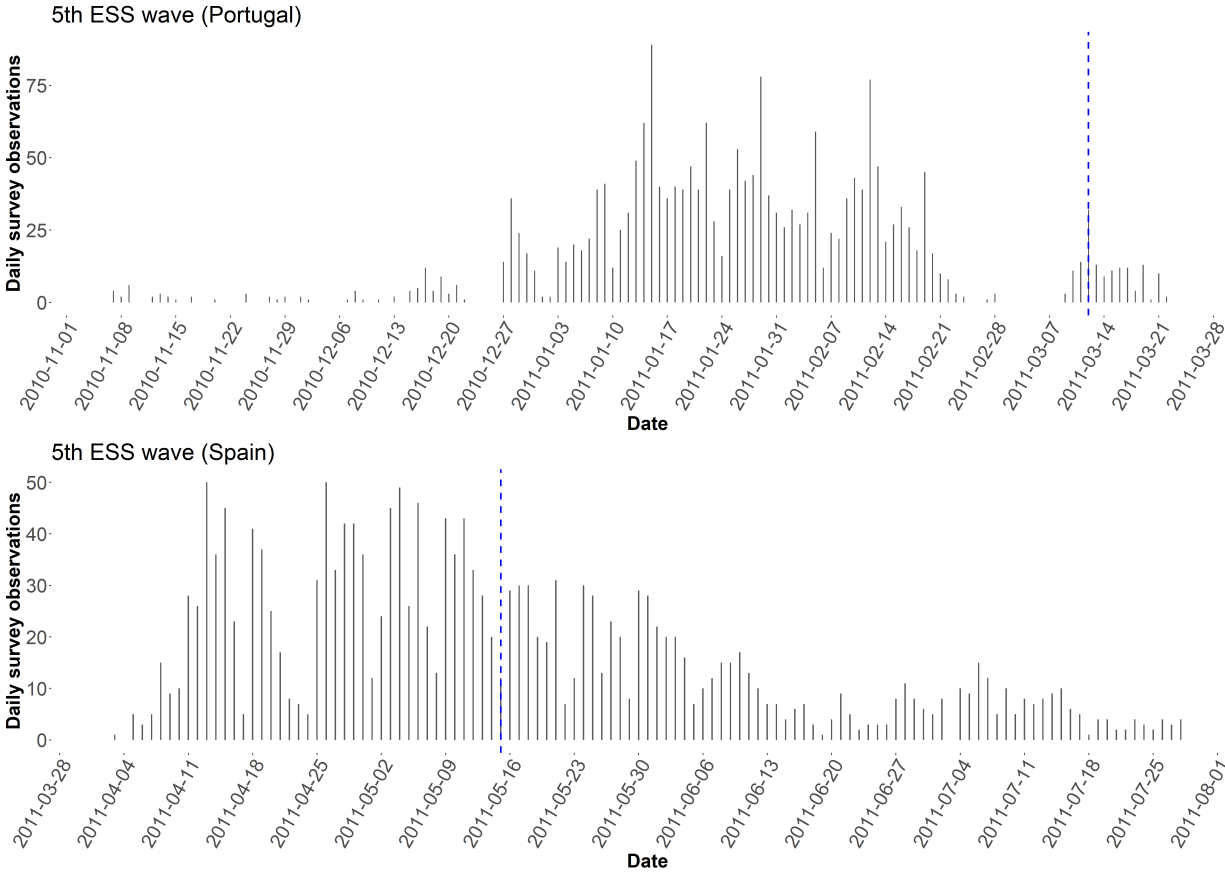


Figure 16: Daily observations and cutoff date - 6th wave ESS - Portugal and Spain.

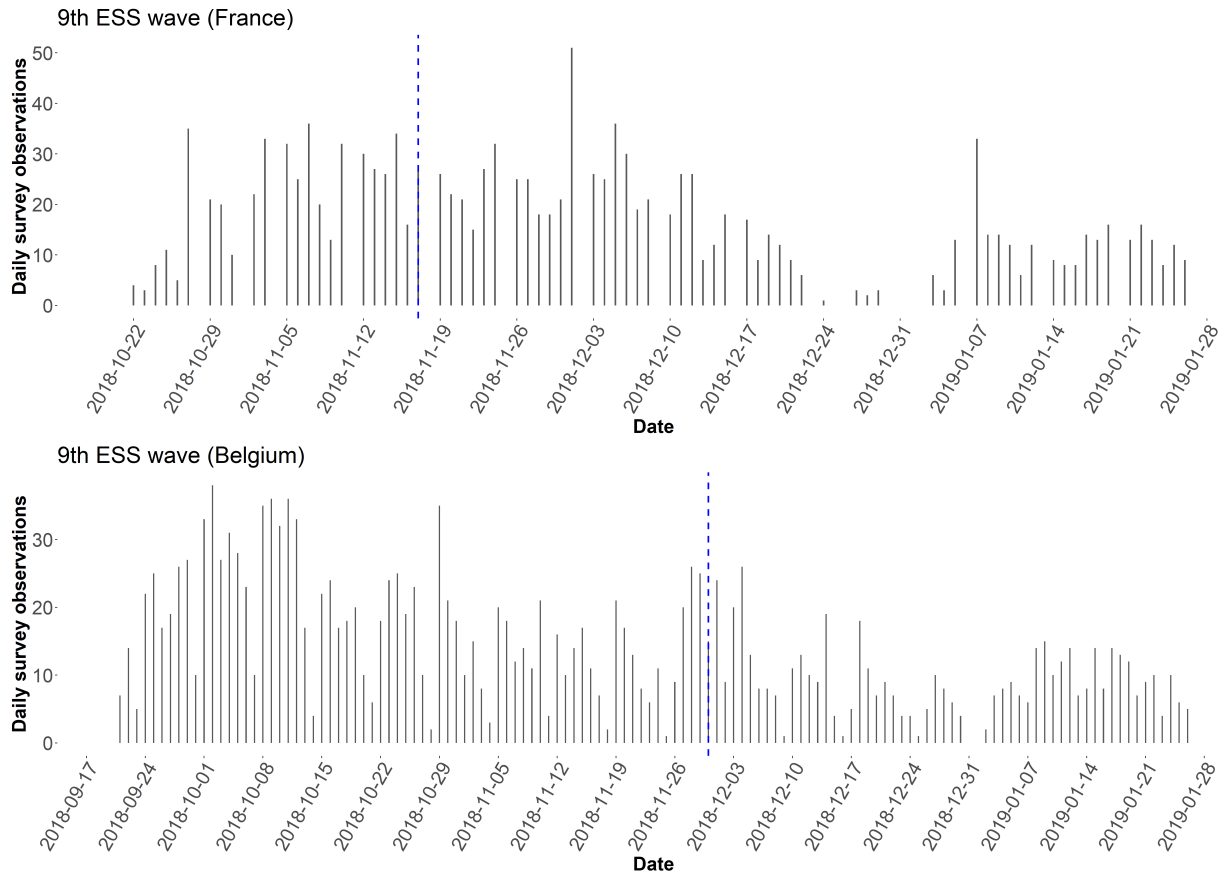


Figure 17: Daily observations and cutoff date - 9th wave ESS - France and Belgium.

A7. Google searches

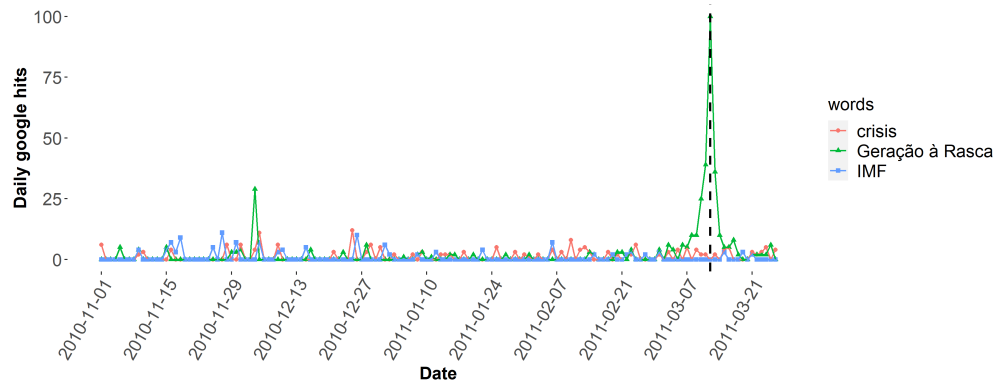


Figure 18: Replication following Valentim (2021). Google search trends in Portugal for keywords linked to the Geração à Rasca protest.

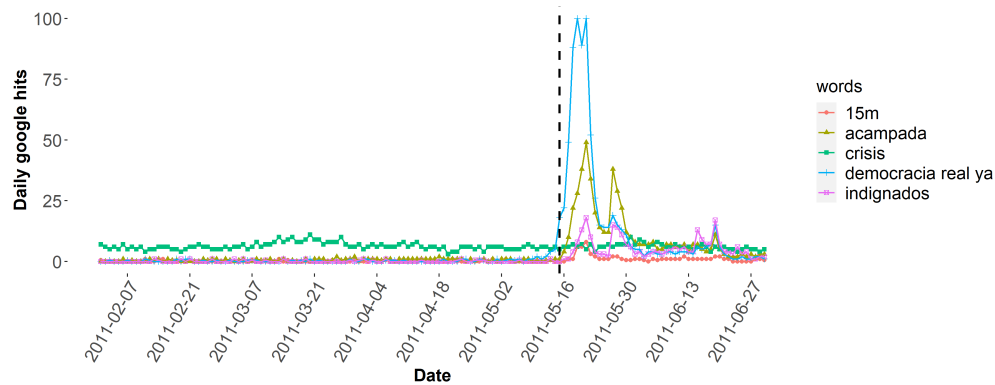


Figure 19: Google search trends in Spain for keywords linked to the 15-M movement.

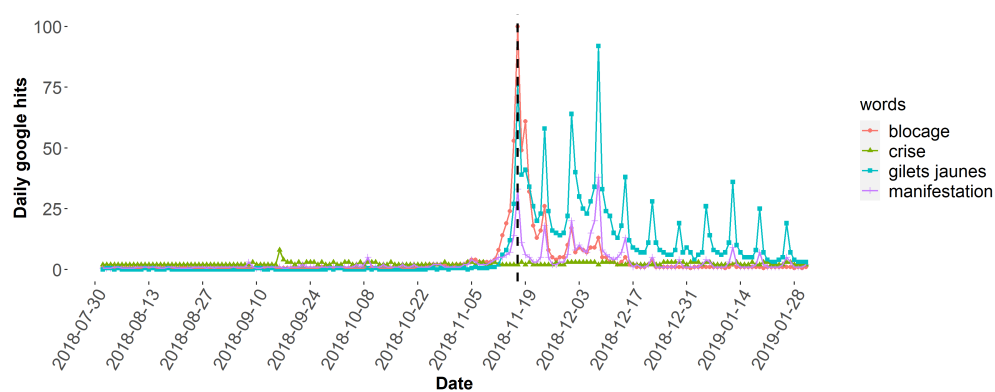


Figure 20: Google search trends in France for keywords linked to the Yellow Vests movement.

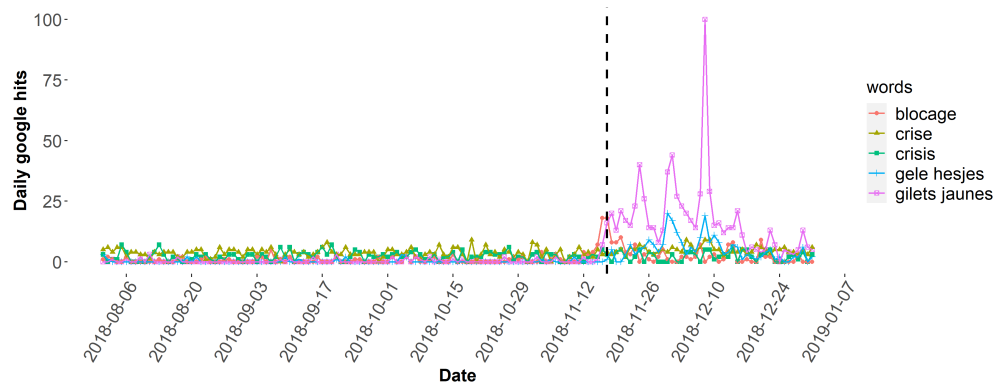


Figure 21: Google search trends in Belgium for keywords linked to the Yellow Vests movement.

A8. Party categorization

Table 7:

Party	L-R econ	Party family	Mainstream	Incumbent
France				
Lutte Ouvrière	L	Far left	0	0
Nouveau parti anti-capitaliste	L	Far left	0	0
Parti Communiste Français	L	Socialist	0	0
La France Insoumise	L	Rad left	0	0
Parti Socialiste	L	Socialist	0	0
Europe Ecologie Les Verts	L	Green	0	0
La République en Marche	C	Liberal	1	1
Mouvement Démocrate	C	Liberal	1	0
Les Républicains	R	Conservative	1	0
Debout la France	R	Rad right	0	0
Front National	R	Rad right	0	0
Spain				
Partido Popular	R	Conservative	1	0
PSOE	L	Socialist	0	1
Izquierda Unida	L	Rad left	0	0
Convergencia i Unió	R	Regionalist	0	0
ERC	L	Regionalist	0	0
Partido Nacionalista Vasco	R	Regionalist	0	0
BNG	L	Regionalist	0	0
Coalición Canaria - PNC	R	Regionalist	0	0
Nafarroa-Bai	L	Regionalist	0	0
UPyD			0	0

Table 8:

Party	L-R econ	Party family	Mainstream/not	Incumbent
Belgium				
Groen	L	Green	0	0
CD&V	C	Christian Dem	1	1
N-VA	R	Regionalist	0	1
Lijst Dedecker	R	Liberal	1	0
SP.A	R	Socialist	0	0
PVDA+	L	Rad left	0	0
Vlaams Belang	R	Rad right	0	0
Open VLD	R	Liberal	1	1
CDH	L	Christian Dem	1	0
Ecolo	L	Green	0	0
Front National	R	Rad right	0	0
MR	R	Liberal	1	1
PS	L	Socialist	0	0
PTB	L	Rad left	0	0
Parti Populaire	R	Rad right	0	0
Défi	L	Regionalist	0	0
Portugal				
Bloco de Esquerda	L	Rad left	0	0
CDS - Partido Popular	R	Conservative	1	0
Coligação Democrática Unitária	L	Rad left	0	0
PCTP/Movimento Reorganizado	L	Rad left	0	0
Partido Democrático Atlântico	C	Liberal	1	0
Partido Humanista	C	Liberal	1	0
Nova Democracia	R	Conservative	1	0
Partido Nacional Renovador	R	Rad right	0	0
POUS	L	Rad left	0	0
Partido Social Democrata	R	Liberal	1	0
Partido Socialista	L	Social Dem	1	1

A9. Heterogeneous results

Table 9: Main result interacted with working class non-participants

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Preferences for Redistribution				
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
After	-0.016 (0.100)	0.026 (0.074)	0.075 (0.064)	0.060 (0.059)	-0.015 (0.055)
Afterworkclassnonparticipant	0.222 ⁺ (0.133)	0.233* (0.101)	0.085 (0.087)	0.108 (0.080)	0.182* (0.073)
Observations	974	1,565	2,172	2,593	3,075
R ²	0.152	0.125	0.103	0.096	0.092

Note:

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

A10. Mechanisms

Mechanisms: Four indicators in the ESS (only 9th wave).

Fairness wealth differences:

- *wltdffr*: How fair wealth differences are in the country. From -4 low, extremely unfair, to +4 high extremely unfair

Fairness low-incomes:

- *btminfr*: Bottom 10% full-time employees in country, earning less than [amount, 1600€ for France and 2000€ for Belgium], how fair. From +4 low, extremely unfair, -4, high, extremely unfair

Fairness high-incomes:

- *topinfr*: Top 10% full-time employees in country, earning more than [amount, 4900€ for France and 5900€ for Belgium], how fair. From -4 low, extremely unfair, to +4 high, extremely unfair.

Meritocracy:

- *ppldsrv*: By and large, people get what they deserve. From 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly)

Egalitarianism:

- *sofrdst*: Society fair when income is equally distributed. From 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly)

Table 10: Egalitarianism. Belgium and France.

<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
Egalitarianism. Belgium and France.							
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	-0.011 (0.085)	0.131* (0.062)	0.166** (0.052)	0.116* (0.048)	0.092* (0.046)	0.086* (0.042)	0.080* (0.038)
Gap	-0.275 (0.192)	-0.140 (0.132)	-0.008 (0.112)	0.110 (0.102)	0.140 (0.094)	0.114 (0.078)	0.159* (0.065)
Observations	558	974	1,329	1,584	1,779	2,313	2,839

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 11: Perceptions bottom incomes. Belgium and France.

<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
Fairness bottom 10 incomes							
	+/- 10 days	15 days	20 days	25 days	30 days	45 days	60 days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After	-0.098 (0.088)	-0.221** (0.069)	-0.212*** (0.058)	-0.148** (0.054)	-0.126* (0.050)	-0.103* (0.046)	-0.134** (0.041)
Gap	-0.127 (0.201)	0.023 (0.147)	-0.108 (0.124)	-0.223* (0.112)	-0.261* (0.103)	-0.228** (0.085)	-0.154* (0.071)
Observations	543	940	1,290	1,537	1,727	2,251	2,769

Note: + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Alternative outcomes

Following Valentim (2021) for the Portuguese Geração a Rasca protest, these mobilizations arguably affect institutional trust. These mobilizations raised legitimization concerns, leading to expect general decreases in trust and satisfaction with elites at the national level and concerning supranational institutions such as the European Parliament. Figure 3 shows the disaggregated effects on trust and satisfaction variables, with a 20-day window around the

protest. As for the main results, the average levels before/after the event are represented by black dots and the gap around the event by the grey spikes. The results indicate that the mobilizations negatively affected most institutional satisfaction and trust indicators. Respondents showed lower satisfaction levels with the economy, the government, the national parliament, and the European Parliament after the protest events, also controlling for pre and post-trends (grey spikes). Trust in parties and politicians decreases after the protests, although the effect of the protest event is more uncertain (grey spikes). In sum, grievances against political elites seem to increase substantially after the protests, supporting the notion that redistributive preferences are linked to, not only fairness considerations or inequality aversion but also to political grievances.

Other indicators in relation to institutional trust show less consistent results. While the protests seem to be in the middle of a downward trend in satisfaction with democracy (black dots), the protest events suggest a positive effect (grey spikes). This is in line with the findings by Frye and Borisova (2019), who observed that the absence of police repression after an important protest event in Russia led to higher satisfaction with democracy, as it legitimated the state. In most of the cases in this study, protests developed peacefully until the first weeks, when demonstrators faced police repression. Thus, these dynamics could be leading to higher satisfaction with democracy around the protest event, while police violence and unmet demands in the following weeks could affect satisfaction with democracy downwardly. Finally, trust in the police or the legal system appears to be unaffected by the protests, with potential heterogeneity across cases with different levels of police repression and violence. Finally, voting for mainstream and incumbent parties seems to decrease after the protests, as shown in Appendix 11.

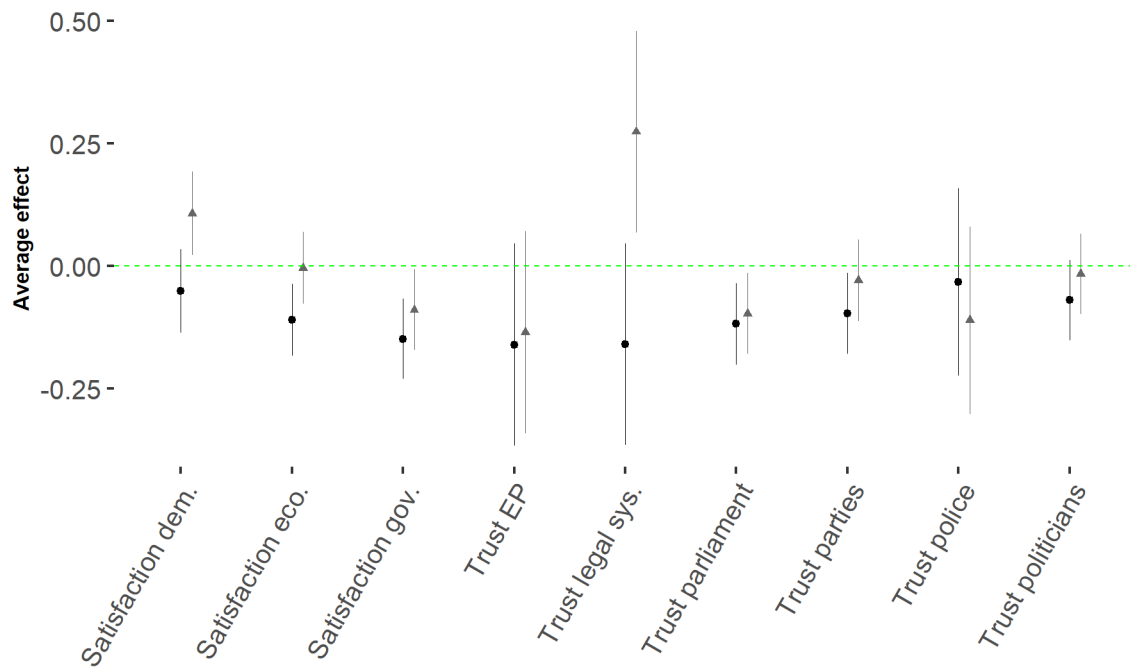


Figure 22: Trust in institutions and satisfaction with elites before/after 20 days. Grey spikes show estimate with interaction term, black dots average difference before/after the protest.

A11. Voting

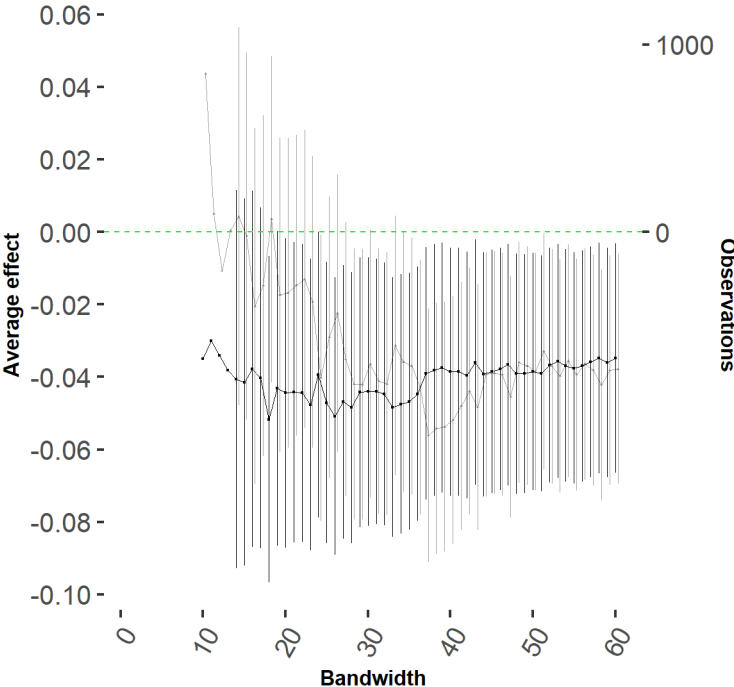


Figure 23: Vote intention for mainstream parties after protests.

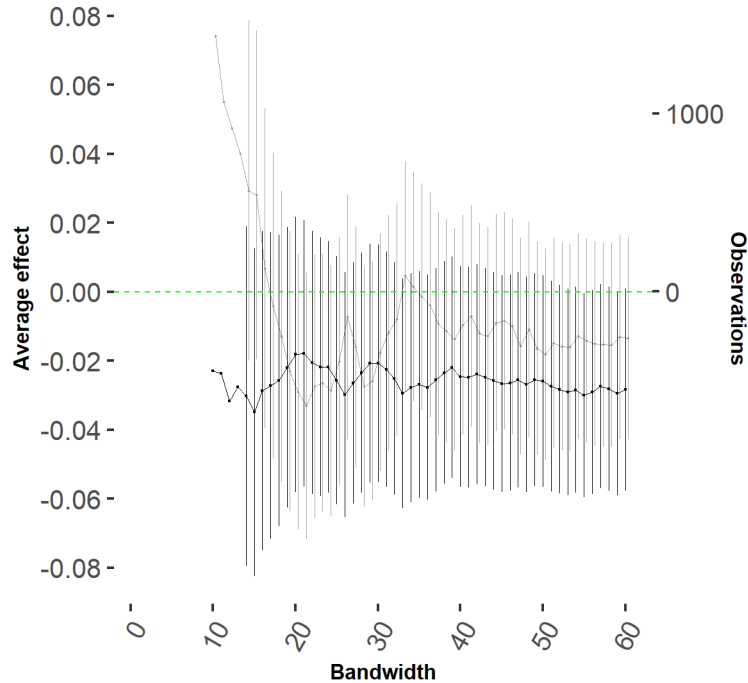


Figure 24: Vote intention for incumbents after protests.

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