8-2022

Examining the Escalation to Violence at Political Protests: A Conjunctive Analysis

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Examining the Escalation to Violence at Political Protests: A Conjunctive Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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University of Nebraska – Omaha and Lincoln
Bachelor of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice, 2020

August 2022
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

Despite extensive sociological research on the broader causes of collective violence, there has been much less research on the situated nature of more recent violence committed by individuals attending protests and rallies, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and the 2021 Stop the Steal rally at the U.S. Capitol. To fill this gap in research, I draw from the tenets of Environmental Criminology and the Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) perspective to quantitatively examine individual-level and incident-level risk factors most associated with contemporary forms of collective violence. After exploring situated differences across ideological movements, I ask *how do risk factors for protest-related non-violent crimes compare to those of violent protest-related crimes*? Data on collective violence events come from the U.S. Protests Database (USPDB), an open-source database that contains information on criminal acts committed at political demonstration events resulting in arrests and formal charges. Bivariate and multivariate analyses examine how individual risk factors, including group identification, use of travel, demographics, weapon(s) use, and levels, and types of media engagement are associated with escalation to protest violence. In addition, Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations ("conjunctive analysis") is used to examine which combinations of situational risk factors are most associated with escalation to protest violence.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Over the last several years, adherents of both left-wing and right-wing political movements in the United States have increasingly taken to the streets to protest during an especially polarized political environment. On the left, for example, activists gathered across major cities to protest racial bias in law enforcement, as well as systemic racism in society more generally (Buchanan et al., 2020). Some of the most prominent and active actors are members of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement who seek to combat police violence against the Black community and enact police reform, including by calling for defunding (or abolishing) the police (Black Lives Matter, n.d.; Kishi & Jones, 2021; Wortham, 2020). While most BLM demonstrations have remained peaceful, some protests have devolved into civil unrest and violence (Flaccus, 2020; Schmidt & Chason, 2021).

The nation has also witnessed an increase in right-wing protests, some of which have also turned violent. Former President Trump's Make American Great Again (or MAGA) movement has evolved as a major enclave of a broader right-wing movement in the United States. MAGA adherents often point to acts of anti-police violence and property destruction by members BLM and other groups like ANTIFA (anti-fascists) to gain support for their cause. Some of the more militant portions of the right-wing movement, including militia groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, called for anti-government violence in response to former President Trump's false allegations that 2.7 million votes were stolen from him and given to President Joe Biden, supposedly causing Trump to unfairly lose the 2020 presidential election (Gerhart, 2020). Following the now infamous January 6, 2021 "Stop the Steal" rally organized by Trump allies, thousands of MAGA protestors and other more militant right-wing extremists marched to the

U.S. Capitol, some illegally entering the restricted building, causing property damage, and committing violent attacks against police in attempt to overturn the election results.

While there has been extensive research conducted on various forms of collective violence more generally (Geschwender, 1968; Smelser, 1963; Tomlinson, 1968), there has been less scholarly attention paid to the situational risk factors, and combinations of such risk factors, to more recent manifestations of protest-related crime (Kunst & Obaidi, 2020). As a result, little is known about how risk factors, both individually and in tandem, are associated with non-violent and violent crime outcomes in the contexts of political protest. Furthermore, how such risk factors are associated with the escalation of protest violence remains a question.

The purpose of the current study is to explore the similarities and differences in persons federally indicted for crimes related to BLM protests and the Stop the Steal rally, as well as in risk factors and combinations of risk factors associated with the escalation to protest violence. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

> 1) How do federal protest-related defendants and case attributes compare across Black Lives Matter and Stop the Steal movements?
>
> 2) What *individual* risk factors are most associated with contemporary forms of collective violence in the U.S.?
>
> 3) What *combinations of* risk factors are most associated with contemporary forms of collective violence in the U.S.?

The remainder of this research unfolds in the following way. First, I begin with a discussion of contemporary protest movements and the violence that sometimes stem from them. Second, I present the theoretical orientation guiding the study, drawing from environmental criminology and situational crime prevention (SCP), to explain explore how some situations are more or less conducive to protest-related violence. Third, I discuss how data will come from the newly created U.S. Protests Database (USPDB) that includes defendant- and incident-level accounts of

protest-related crimes. Fourth, I present the findings of my analytical plan, including traditional variable-oriented quantitative (bivariate and multivariate) analyses to address Research Questions 1and 2 and Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations (or "conjunctive analysis," as discussed more below) to address Research Question 3. Fifth, I briefly discuss the implications of the study and suggest future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Contemporary Protest-Related Violence

In this section, I provide some background information and socio-historical context for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Stop the Steal (STS) movements in the United States. My goal is to place these two specific protest movements within a broader socio-historical and political context. While it is acknowledged that both movements grow out of much broader social movements, the focus in this chapter is narrowed to more recent manifestations of each movement especially as it pertains to protest-related crimes.

Black Lives Matter (BLM)

Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the United States became increasingly common in 2019 and 2020 (Buchanan et al, 2020). BLM began after a string of violent, sometimes fatal, altercations between police officers and Black citizens between 2014 and 2016 (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Drakulich et al, 2020). The phrase "Black Lives Matter" has been in use since July 2013, when a Black community organizer named Alicia Garza expressed her rage on Facebook about the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who chased down, shot, and killed unarmed Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager Zimmerman perceived as “suspicious” (Koo et al., 2020). As a movement, BLM has maintained a constant presence in the United States by consistently protesting police brutality against the Black community (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Drakulich et al, 2020; Koo et al., 2020). BLM supporters use protests to bring attention to cases in which they believe deadly force was unjustly used against unarmed Black citizens. Many BLM adherents continue to call for the defunding or outright abolition of law enforcement, suggesting that underlying racism continues to permeate modern police agencies (Black Lives Matter, n.d.;

Drakulich et al, 2020; Kishi & Jones, 2021; Wortham, 2020). The movement also gained increased momentum in the run up to the 2016 presidential election when then presidential candidate Donald Trump and members of his campaign were accused of pandering to White supremacists (Bobo, 2017). For example, many detected racist undertones of Trump's claim that a southern border "wall" was needed because "[w]hen Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best… They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Powell, 2016, paras. 3). These and other statements by Trump enflamed an already politically polarized nation and led to the increased growth of the BLM movement.

A flashpoint event that gave the BLM movement increased traction was the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Floyd was a 46-year-old, Black male who was detained by Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers for allegedly trying to pass a counterfeit $20 bill at a local convenience store (Bruno, 2021; Deliso, 2021; Holt, 2021). While being apprehended by MPD officers, Floyd resisted being placed in a patrol car, claiming he was claustrophobic. The responding officers then forcibly removed Floyd from the vehicle before pinning him to the ground for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, obstructing his breathing and rendering the victim unresponsive before being later pronounced dead at a local hospital (Bruno, 2021; Deliso, 2021; Holt, 2021). Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin was ultimately convicted of murder and various other charges related to the incident. The event was filmed by bystanders and widely shared across social media, sparking protests against police brutality and systematic racism.

BLM Protest-Related Violence

While BLM protests have occurred in cities across the United States, varying in size and level of violence, a specific example can be seen in one particular protest beginning on June 1, 2020 and ending on June 2, 2020 in Washington, D.C. Initiated as a peaceful protest, thousands

of political activists marched in response to the police killing of George Floyd, and more generally to protest systemic racism and racial bias in law enforcement. Disobeying a 7 p.m. curfew, protestors remained in the area until federal law enforcement officers and members of the U.S. National Guard began to apply riot control techniques. By June 2, 2020, the threat of violence had been contained and a total of 289 people were arrested on charges including, but not limited to, curfew violations, assaults of a federal officer, vandalism, destruction of federal property, and arson (Constantino & Vitka, 2021; Schmidt & Chason, 2021).

Violence by BLM protesters and the police tactics employed during the protest manifested in various forms. By the third day of protesting, BLM protesters attempting to breech the Capitol Building were met with hail of pepper bullets and tear gas from heavily armored U.S. Park Police. Later, American flags, parked cars, and buildings were lit on fire – including St. John's Church, a historic landmark opened in 1816 and attended by every U.S. President since James Madison (Borger, 2020; Constantino & Vitka, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). While firefighters were able to quickly extinguish the fire, police determined the blaze was intentionally set. The destruction of property extended towards downtown Washington D.C. and Lafayette Square. Protesters used baseball bats to bash through windows of coffee shops, banks, and office buildings, while vandalizing the area with spray paint and looting dozens of businesses. The windows of the Lafayette Building, home of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and other businesses, was also looted (Borger, 2020; Tan et al., 2020; Constantino & Vitka, 2021). Former President Donald Trump and his family were rushed to a secure bunker in the White House once protesters scaled temporary barricades near the adjacent Treasury Building. Throughout the event, law enforcement and National Guard soldiers were met with extreme violence, including

assault by bodily weapons, blunt objects, street flares, unidentified liquids, bricks, and pepper spray.

Stop the Steal (STS)

In contrast to the BLM movement, adherents of the MAGA movement and more militant anti-government extremists of the extreme right-wing movement were mobilized in part by Trump's claims about the 2020 election, anti-Covid-19 measures, and as a counter-response to BLM protests. Throughout 2020, extreme right-wing actors staged several armed protests around the country, including storming the capitol buildings of states like Kentucky, Michigan, and Virginia (Lee, 2021). They believed their Constitutional rights were being infringed upon and it was their duty to take action to protect them. Former President Trump added to this fire by supporting their antics. For example, in response to an FBI investigation towards an incident where Trump supporters surrounded President Joe Biden's campaign bus in Texas, Trump tweeted, "In my opinion, these patriots did nothing wrong. Instead, the FBI & Justice Department should be investigating the terrorists, anarchists, and agitators of ANTIFA, who run around burning down our Democrat run cities and hurting our people!" (Lee, 2021, para. 60). However, the event that directly led to the actions of violence on January 6, 2021 was 2020 Presidential Election. After a grueling campaign, President Biden was elected to office, securing an electoral vote of 306 – 232, leading Trump to push false claims of widespread election fraud, specifically from swing states like Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, and Wisconsin (CNN, n.d.). In particular, Trump alleged of vote miscounting due to mail-in ballets, insinuating that 2.7 million votes were stolen and given to Biden (Gerhart, 2020).

Following the results of the national election, several actors organized a plan to stage a rally on January 6. Members of the U.S. Congress, White House staff, and extremist militia associates contributed to planning the rally, engaging in activities from planning and financing the rally to recruiting and preparing Trump supporters for a violent altercation (Marquette, 2021; Walker, 2021; United States v. Caldwell; Zuckerman, 2021). Nine government workers, including Robert "Bobby" Peede Jr., House Candidate Max Miller, former Trump campaign official Katrina Pierson, former director of political affairs Brian Jack, Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Ala.), Brian Lewis, Ed Martin, Kimberly Fletcher, and Committee Vice Chair Liz Cheney (R-Wyo), were subpoenaed for a role in organizing the rally and working directly with former President Trump (Marquette, 2021; Walker, 2021). However, the violence itself stems from plans orchestrated by extremist groups like the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Three Percenters, and QAnon. Documents stemming from a federal case of seditious conspiracy against 11 Capitol Riot defendants suggests that members of the Oath Keepers used social media and messaging applications to plan the storming of the Capitol building as early as November 3, 2020 (United States v. Rhodes III et al., Indictment). Others federally indicated were cited with recruiting former military and law enforcement to join the militia and trained them to be in "fighting shape" for the presidential inauguration, reportedly sending "incendiary messages aimed at recruiting as large a following as possible to go to Washington D.C." (United States v. Caldwell et al., Statement of Facts, para. 9).

January 6th Capitol Riot

The United States Capitol Police had been warned of the potential for violence by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Agency leaders, however, stated that, "The Department fully agrees with many of the recommendations it

has received. It is also aware that nearly all of the recommendations require time and significant resources the Department does not have" (Collins & Levy, 2021, para. 3). Additionally, after receiving criticism for their heavy police presence at recent BLM protest events, Capitol Police officers were asked to rely less on more imposing weapons and munitions to control the crowd, including stun grenades. However, in hindsight such harder measures would have helped law enforcement officers push the unruly mob back away from the Capitol Building. Following the events of January 6, former U.S. Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, who resigned shortly after the attack, blamed the disaster and the lack of preparedness and inability to quickly summons the National Guard on what he called "intelligence failures" and "excessive bureaucracy" by federal law-enforcement agencies (Collins & Levy, 2021).

The events of the Capitol Riot began as a rally in support of former President Trump's false claims that the election was stolen from him and the Republican Party. Originating at 6:00 a.m. near the Ellipse, protesters numbering in the thousands congregated to protest their perceived indignations until the former president's sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr., as well as his lawyer Rudy Giuliani, began to speak around 11:00 a.m. (Petras et al., 2021). This lasted until around 11:50 a.m., when Trump himself approached the floor and spoke for approximately an hour, urging the idea of fighting for the country and assembling the crow towards the Capitol, saying, "We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore. So we are going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue – I love Pennsylvania Avenue – and we are going to the Capitol" (Petras et al., 2021, para. 11).

Following former President Trump's speech at the Stop the Steal Rally, protestors began to march to the U.S. Capitol Building where lawmakers were gathering for a joint session in the House of Representatives chamber to count Electoral College votes. Many activists were

carrying batons, bats, shields, and firearms, and waving Confederate and MAGA flags. Upon their arrival, rioters began grappling with the police for control of the steps outside the U.S. Capitol Building. While a few hundred Capitol Police were stationed outside the complex, the officers were quickly overpowered when rioters pushed through crowd-control stands on the west side of the building and began scaling the walls (Petras et al., 2021; Schmidt & Chason, 2021). Throughout this time, police ordered an evacuation of the Library of Congress, Madison Building, and Cannon House Office Building due to the escalation of protest-related violence. Once inside the Capitol Building, rioters posed for photos in lawmakers' offices and the U.S. Senate Chambers, destroying property and assaulting federal officers, of which 16 were injured. Two pipe bombs were also recovered, one at the Democratic National Committee office and the other at the Republication National Committee office (Petras et al., 2021). Ultimately, five people were killed. Of those killed, Officer Sicknick was initially injured while physically engaging with rioters. He later turned to his division, collapsed, and then was taken to a local hospital where he died (Petras et al., 2021). Ashli Babbitt, 35, was killed when activists were forcing their way towards the House Chambers where Members of Congress were sheltering. Due to the impending danger to the Members of Congress, a U.S. Capitol Police officer fired their weapon, striking Babbitt. The other three who died that day were Benjamin Phillips, 50, from Ringtown, Pennsylvania; Kevin Greeson, 55, from Athens, Alabama; and Rosanne Boyland, 34, from Kennesaw, Georgia; all of which perished on Capitol grounds, but it is not specified how they died (Petras et al., 2021). Finally, Howard Charles Liebengood, a U.S. Capitol Police Officer, died while off-duty from suicide three days after the storming on the Capitol.

While quite a bit is known about these high-profile protests and the crimes committed at the January 6th Riots from media and court records, important questions about these protests and the nature of modern-day protest-related crimes more broadly remain. Arguably one of the most important questions is why some individuals at protests choose to commit violence? That is, what background and situational factors, and combinations of factors, induce some to resort to physical violence, while others go on to commit other forms of property destruction? And how might these factors compare across ideological movements? In the next chapter, I present my theoretical orientation and discuss findings from prior research that I plan to draw from to help me answer my research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

Theory and Prior Research

This chapter identifies the key theoretical orientation employed to help explain how and why actors within political protest events devolve into violent behavior. First, I briefly discuss the macro-level social movement perspective to address past tenets of collective violence theory. Second, I review literature applying an environmental criminology approach to political violence. Finally, I discuss the gaps in research that I plan to address in the current study.

Macro-Level Collective Violence

Most research to date on violent protests has been approached from a macro-level, social movement perspective. This research maintains that generalized belief systems rooted in social strains, including political tensions, can render violence a perceived appropriate remedy to collective grievances (Geschwender, 1968; Smelser, 1963; Weeber & Rodeheaver, 2003). Collective action framing processes are responsible for the social construction of ideas and symbolic meanings that inspire social movements campaigns and acts of protest (Gamson, 1992; McVeigh et al., 2004; Snow & Benford, 1992). Ideology is thought to play an important role in the framing process, building group solidarity, often by framing issues as "us versus them" and spurring collective action through intergroup violence (McVeigh et al., 2004).

Collective violence can occur as a sort of relief valve for pent up strains experienced by social groups within the contexts of social structures, organizations, and situational settings (Locher, 2002; McPhail & Wohlstein, 1983; Smelser, 1963). Collective anxiety fuses with social and political forces of mobilization, resulting in shared ideologies framing some agent(s) as culpable for grievances and calls to action for punishing, restricting, damaging, or removing

those responsible (Geschwender, 1968; Locher, 2002; McPhail & Wohlstein, 1983). In some settings, such as in protest movements, the need for justice, or symbolically addressing a perceived wrong, can erupt into group hostility, mass rioting, and other forms of crime.

Environmental Criminology and Political Violence

Other research has drawn from environmental criminology (Jeffery, 1971) and situational crime prevention (SCP) (Clarke, 2008) perspectives, specifically, to explain how situated, interactive processes can affect the likelihood that political violence will occur (Freilich et al., 2018; Gruenewald et al., 2019). Encompassing routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), rational choice theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), and crime patterns theory (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984), environmental criminology emphasizes the relevance of the criminal event, as opposed to only the offender, and how opportunities to commit crimes are situationally structured in ways that affect crime outcomes (Clarke, 2008; Mandala & Freilich, 2017). Routine activity theory helps us to where and when there are more opportunities for crime, or when motivated offenders, suitable targets, and absence of capable guardians converge (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson & Cohen, 1980). Underlying environmental crime perspectives is rational choice theory, which suggests that those engaging in crime are rational actors, calculating the costs and benefits of their behaviors, and that all persons are equally motivated for crime (Becker, 1968; Cornish & Clarke, 1986). Finally, crime pattern theory posits that crime does not occur randomly, but instead transpires when offenders and victims converge within geographically concentrated environments, with common meeting places for potential offenders and victims becoming crime "hot spots" (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984, 1993, 2008).

Rooted in ideas of urbanism and human ecology (Palen, 2018), environmental criminology is a framework for understanding how social and physical environments are related to criminal opportunities along various points in time (Kim et al, 2013). In other words, this framework seeks to understand how varying environmentally situated conditions facilitate or inhibit crime. Situational features of crime events, such as target accessibility and nearness to victims, structure criminal opportunities in patterned and observable ways, shaping the choices of offenders as they plan and execute crimes that can be patterned and observed (Clarke & Newman, 2006; Gruenewald et al., 2019).

While offenders are assumed to be rational actors (Becker, 1968; Cornish & Clarke, 1986), it is also held that reasoning offenders may be conditioned or "bound" by belief systems or ideologies. Relevant to the current study, the perceived costs and benefits of committing acts of political violence, albeit for retaliation or in response to a grievance, in a particular situation may not seem rational to those of differing worldviews. Potential costs for participating in violent protests, such as arrest or being physically harmed, is viewed higher than the costs of non-violence for most (Ives & Lewis, 2019). However, as calculated costs of non-violence increase in the eyes of protestors, opportunities for violent resistance against the state may be perceived as more enticing. Indeed, circumstances in which non-violent protests are met with disproportionate government repression, or when political demands are being ignored or unmet, may enhance the perceived benefits of violence in some situations. It is also possible that the perceived costs of violence may decrease in situations of co-offending. When one member of a political protest acts violently, it often results in others following suit, diffusing individual responsibility and reducing the perceived costs of engaging in violence (Martin, 2020; Meyer, 2004). In situations of collective violence, such during a violent riot, the odds of arrest or

detention may also be temporarily diminished for any single individual, as law enforcement become out-numbered and out-resourced.

Situational Crime Prevention (SCP)

Situational crime prevention (SCP) is an environmental criminology perspective focused on preventing crime through altering environments and manipulating structured opportunities for various types of crime (Clarke, 1995, 2008). The SCP perspective identifies 25 techniques of situational prevention to reduce criminal opportunity.[1] By considering how offenders think prior to and during criminal events, prevention measures can be enacted to reduce opportunities for offending by increasing the effort it takes to crime, increase the risks and reduce the rewards of offending, reduce offender provocations, and remove of excuses or justification for criminality (Cornish & Clarke, 2003).

Clarke and Newman's (2006) book *Outsmarting the Terrorists* applies SCP to terrorism, while other researchers have since extended SCP to various forms violent extremism (Freilich & Chermak, 2009; Lum & Cooper, 2011; Shaftoe et al., 2007). SCP applications to the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism require researchers to consider how offenders think and make decisions as they navigate situated opportunities for planning, preparing for, and committing acts of terrorism and violent extremism (Mandala & Freilich, 2017). Clarke and Newman (2006) suggest that there are four pillars of opportunity that make some situated circumstances more or less favorable to terrorism and violent extremism, including weapon use, utilization of tools, facilitating conditions that may excuse and entice violence, and target selection. The first three of these pillars are the most relevant to the current study and reviewed below.

[1] See Appendix A.

Weapons

One of the four pillars of criminal opportunity for terrorism and violent extremism is weapon choice. Various weapons present unique advantages and risks that must be weighed before committing a violent attack. Clark and Newman's (2006) outline the dimensions of particular types of opportunity based on the acronym *MURDEROUS*, suggesting that weapons that are deemed as "**m**ultipurpose, **u**ndetectable, **r**emovable, **d**estructive, **e**njoyable, **r**eliable, **o**btainable, **u**ncomplicated, and **s**afe" provide the highest likelihood of successful attacks (p. 108). Past research has also found that weapons choice varies across extremist ideologies (Freilich et al., 2018; Gruenewald et al., 2019). For example, jihadi terrorists in the U.S. typically use or plan to use bombs in their attacks to inflict mass casualties (Gruenewald et al., 2016). Similarly, far-rightists prefer firearms because they are considered safe, lethal, uncomplicated, and widely available (Legault & Hendrickson, 2009). In contrast, because they wish to avoid human casualties, environmental extremists tend to gravitate more towards arson and explosives to destroy businesses they deem harmful to the environment (Gruenewald et al., 2015). Understanding how weapons are used in the context of collective violence, and how the presence of weapons may increase the likelihood for violence, can inform strategies for preventing political violence.

Tools

Tools, which may encompass money, Internet use, and other resources are considered another pillar of opportunity for political violence. Money, for example, is needed to purchase weapons, protective equipment, vehicles, and other travel devices that allow offenders access to viable targets (Freilich et al., 2018). While most offenders' places of residence remain relatively close to their target (Griffiths et al., 2017), especially when referring to political protests,

offenders that travel to a new location more effectively avoid law enforcement detection because they engage in less suspicious behavior (Gruenewald et al., 2019). Internet use is additionally a vital tool utilized by politically-motivated offenders, increasingly becoming a main facet of radicalization processes and mobilization to violence. The Internet allows for instant sharing of information, thus prompting political extremists the ability to recruit potential offenders. Identifying how these and other tools shape the nature of ideologically motivated crimes, and specifically escalation to violence, could assist law enforcement in applying situational interventions and altering opportunities for protest violence.

Facilitating Conditions

Facilitating conditions are another pillar of criminal opportunity thought to situationally shape the likelihood of terrorism and violent extremism. Clarke and Newman's (2006) SCP approach employs the acronym *ESEER* to capture facilitating conditions that are *easy* (e.g., lax government standards on supervising protest events), *safe* (e.g., low presence of law enforcement), *excusable* (e.g., overreactions by law enforcement that play to the offenders' advantage), *enticing* (e.g., community support for offenders' actions), and *rewarding* (e.g., political policy changes). To elaborate, the environment of a protest event may prove favorable for violence if it is considered safe through low chances of judicial punishment, as can be seen in BLM offenders in Portland, Oregon. Of the many arrests made from May to December 2020, 91 percent were not prosecuted, with law enforcement often employing a "catch and release" methodology, that is, detaining offenders with the purpose of not pursing formal charges (Lambert, 2021). This strategy tends to embolden protesters in adhering to mentality that violence caries little risk, which therefore justifies their behavior. Violence additionally excusable when tied to perceived grievances by the protesters. When the cost of violence

overcomes the cost of non-violence, violent behavior can be justified as a necessary evil to facilitate policy change. This leads to the concept of violent action leading to rewarding outcomes. Prior research on the situational dynamics of protest violence maintains that individuals most always experience confrontational tensions and fears that can inhibit aggression from turning into violence (Bowman et al., 2018; Collins, 2008; Nassauer, 2018). It is the overcoming of those tensions and fears in the context of specific situations through specific emotional paths that may motivate an offender to act violently. Therefore, while humans naturally fear the possibility of being harmed or harming others, political actors often believe their actions will create immediate policy change (Nassauer, 2018). Thus, aggressive behavior may be perceived as necessary and rewarding given situational circumstances, especially when presented with a situation that overwhelms the emotions.

SCP and Ideologically-Motivated Violence

Especially relevant to the current study, one of SCP's key tenets is that criminal opportunity structures are crime-specific (Clarke & Newman, 2006). This is also to say that offenders' perceptions and judgements of the risks, effort, and potential rewards may vary dependent upon crime type (Clarke, 1995). As such, effectively responding to various forms of ideological crimes, whether non-violent or violent, must also be crime-specific. In one of the more relevant studies for the research, Mandala and Freilich (2017) address how various situational factors, including target types, weapons types, total fatalities, and injuries, contribute to successful assassinations. Using assassination data dating back to 1970, they discovered the assassination attempts with the highest likelihood of success are those that were conducted against government officials using a firearm. Further, assassination attempts with the highest probability of success were events that resulted in multiple fatalities and no injuries. However,

unlike conventional forms of terrorism, assassinations that resulted in the actor's suicide or inside city limits produced the least likelihood to success. The authors concluded that because the actor would most likely be using explosive devices, suicide attacks prevented access to high-value targets, a practice that is prevented by metal detectors and CCTV. Further, while conventional forms of terrorism aim for the highest kill-ratio, assassinations are typically driven towards killing one specific person. Therefore, an attack outside city limits proves to be more beneficial in isolating the target and circumventing protective measures.

Freilich and Chermak (2009) apply SCP to deadly encounters between law enforcement and American far-rightist extremists. When comparing two case studies of fatal attacks, the authors found that, unlike the international terrorist strikes, many far-right killings of police officers were not planned prior to the deadly encounter. Instead, most altercations began as a routine event, like traffic stops or routine calls for service, that escalated due to situational surges in motivation by the defendants. In concurrence with SCP, the authors recommended strategies for humanizing law enforcement and training officers on how to specifically handle violent far-rightist extremists in routine situations.

Similarly, Gruenewald et al. (2019) address how certain risk factors, when combined, compare across two types of ideological crime -- unsuccessful (i.e., failed or foiled plots) and successful (or completed) terrorist attacks. Comparatively examining terrorism and violent extremism in the United States over the last forty years, they found that the most successful terrorist events were conducted by lone-actor, radical environmentalists using non-sophisticated weapons. Conversely, the least successful events were likely to be committed by far-right, far-left, and Islamic terrorist cells with two or more members using more sophisticated weapons. The authors concluded that environmental terrorists were more successful because they typically

targeted businesses and other government entities deemed harmful to the environment, actively avoiding injury or death to humans (see also Gruenewald et al., 2015; Joosse, 2007; Varriale-Carson et al., 2012), while lone-actors using non-sophisticated weapons were more successful because they presented the fewest opportunities for law enforcement intervention.

Gaps in Prior Research

While there has been extensive research on collective violence and the processes associated with political crime, there has been little to no empirical findings on the opportunity structure related to political violence in the context of contemporary social movements, such as Black Lives Matter protests and the Stop the Steal rally. Further, what remains to be explored are the precipitating risk factors to violence within these manifestations of collective violence. Specifically, while SCP has been applied to acts of terrorism and violent extremism, it has yet to be used by researchers to study protest-related violence. By focusing on the situated risk factors associated with related to modern-day collective violence, and how these factors combine in patterned ways across time and place, the study will advance our understanding of the situational dynamics most likely to lead to violence in the context of political protests.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data and Method

This study seeks to comparatively examine violent and non-violent crimes committed at Black Lives Matter protests within the United States from May 25, 2020 to December 31, 2020 and the Stop the Steal rally on January 6, 2021. For the purposes of this study, a violent protest, or riot, is defined as a political demonstration where one or more members were arrested and charged for a crime relating to disruptive behavior while attending the event. As discussed in the last chapter, I will draw from the environmental criminology, more broadly, and situational crime prevention (SCP) perspective, specifically, to explore what risk factors, and combinations of risk factors, are most associated with certain protests movements and the escalation to protest-related violence.

United States Protests Database (USPDB)

The data used in this study will come from the U.S. Protests Database (USPDB)[2], an opensource database that contains information on individual criminal acts committed at political demonstration events in which they were formally arrested and charged. The USPDB includes incident, defendant, and legal data for all defendants, regardless of whether the defendant was ultimately convicted of committing a crime. To be included in the USPDB, defendants must be arrested within the United States while attending a BLM or STS political demonstration and federally indicted. Once a case is identified, all information related to the case is garnered from relevant court documents, news articles, voting and donation records, and defendants' social

[2] The USPDB is housed at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York Graduate Center, New York, New York, USA. The database was founded by Joshua D. Freilich, Ph.D. and Ph.D. candidate Emily Greene-Colozzi.

media accounts.[3] Once catalogued, each incident description is categorized to represent specific data inputs to help further the analysis of the database.

Measurement

The dependent variable in this study is *crime type* (0=Non-Violent, 1=Violent). Non-violent crimes include defendants charged with violations where no bodily harm or injury was enacted upon a person. Examples of non-violent crimes are theft, arson, and the destruction of government property. Conversely, violent crimes encompass defendants charged with offenses that involve the use of force or threat of force, either directly or indirectly (FBI, 2019). Examples of violent crime include civil disorder, assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers, and conspiracy to riot and cause civil disorder.

There are nine independent variables. The first independent variable is *ideological focus* (0=Black Lives Matter, 1=Stop the Steal). The second variable is *extremist group* (0=Not a Member, 1=Member) capturing if there is evidence that the defendant is tied to an extremist organization, such as Antifa, Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, QAnon, and Three Percenters. The third variable is *weapon(s)* (0=None, 1=Repurposed Object, 2=Weapon) measuring the type of weapon used during the event, if any. A repurposed object is any item that is repurposed to be used in a violent attack, such as baseball bats, bricks, fire-starting materials, handheld lasers, and vehicles. Conversely, a weapon is any item that was created to cause harm to others, such as explosives, firearms, knives, and mace or pepper spray. Fourth, *travel* (0=No, 1=Yes) measures whether defendants traveled to the protest. Fifth, *media engagement* (0=No, 1=Yes) measures

[3] The search file contains a copy-and-pasted listings of each source used to code the specific case and serves as a central location for all references to be cross-checked and validified. Additionally, a secondary coder reads through each source to ensure accuracy among the references. If the secondary coder discovers variations in the data entered, a verification check is employed by the research team to eliminate inconsistencies.

whether there is evidence that defendants engaged with social media prior to their arrest. Finally, defendant gender (0=Male, 1=Female), *race* (0=White, 1=Non-White), and *age* (in years; 0=18-34, 1=35+) are measured.

Methods of Analysis

Data from the U.S. Protests Database (USPDB) are first quantitatively analyzed using IBM SPSS statistics software. Descriptive statistics, bivariate (chi-square) analysis, and binary logistic regression analysis are employed to examine how *individual* risk factors compared across protest movements and are associated with escalation to protest violence. Last, a Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations ("conjunctive analysis") is employed to determine how individual factors produce the highest likelihood to violence at a political protest when *combined*, in addition to how the combinations vary between BLM and STS movements.

Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations ("Conjunctive Analysis")

Similar to qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) techniques created by Ragin (1987), conjunctive analysis was introduced to criminology by Miethe et al. (2008) as a technique for exploring causal crime relationships and patterns across categorical crime data. Conjunctive analysis explores how combinations of variable attributes (i.e., case configurations) are causally related to particular outcomes of interest (Hart & Miethe, 2009, 2011, 2015). Unlike traditional statistical approaches of bivariate and multivariate analyses focused on the main effects (or interactions) of a single predicting factor or correlations between variables, conjunctive analysis is used to better understand the complex relationships between combinations of variable attributes and outcomes.

Conjunctive analysis provides a visual representation of the nature, diversity, and distribution of variable attribute combinations (Miethe et al., 2008). To conduct a conjunctive analysis, a data matrix table is first created with all possible variable combinations (i.e., case configurations). Counts of variable configurations are then calculated. The number of possible configurations relies on the number of categories associated with each variable included in the analysis. For example, a conjunctive analysis exploring the combined relationship of three dichotomous and one trichotomous variables would result in 24 potential configurations (2 x 2 x 2 x 3). Once the configurations are identified across variable attributes, the conjunctive analysis aggerates the data by exploring its relative distribution across outcome variables, thereby clustering a smaller number of observed configurations versus the total number possible (Miethe et al., 2008). For a configuration to be considered dominant, Hart (2014) maintains the minimum number of cases per configuration is five with sample sizes smaller than 1,000. Any configuration of less than five is eliminated from the study to identify the most prominent combinations. Further, any cases with “Missing” or “Unknown” values for the associated variables are excluded from analyses to maintain variable consistency.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

In the following sections, I will discuss the empirical results of the analyses utilizing data from the United States Protests Database (USPDB). The first portion presents descriptive statistics and bivariate findings, noting significant findings when applicable. The second section provides the results of the binary logistic regression analysis. Both the first and second section address how *individual* risk factors are associated with contemporary forms of protest violence across ideologies. The final section displays the results of the Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations ("conjunctive analysis") that capture which combined risk factors produce the highest likelihood or risk of violence.

Results I: Descriptive Statistics/Bivariate Findings

This analysis draws from 564 total defendants from the USPDB.[4] To be included in this analysis, the defendants must have been federally charged with any crime while attending a political demonstration event or involved in an incident linked to a political protest. The analysis includes 299 BLM defendants, of which only 66 (22.1%) were charged with a violent crime. However, it should be noted that the vast majority were arrested for using a repurposed object (50.2%) or a weapon (25.5%). The reason for this anomaly is that most of the BLM defendants committed a property crime, such as arson or vandalism, and the possession and/or use of a repurposed object (i.e., fire starting material) or weapon (i.e., unregistered explosive device) reflects a commitment to cause damage to property, rather than harm human targets. Further, very few individuals within the sample identify as a member of an extremist group (5.7%). Most

[4] See Appendix B.

of the BLM defendants have a social media presence (66.9%) and did not travel outside their city of residence to engage in a protest event (58.4%). Finally, the sample population is primarily male (86.2%), non-White (51.8%), and aged 18-34 (88.3%).[5]

Table 1: Bivariate Findings for Risk Factors by Ideological Focus (N=564)

		Black Lives Matter (BLM)[6]	Stop the Steal (STS)[7]	Sig.
Age	18 – 34	88.3%	32.9%	.000
	35+	11.7%	67.1%	
Gender	Male	86.2%	87.2%	.727
	Female	13.8%	12.8%	
Race	White	48.2%	92.8%	.000
	Non-White	51.8%	7.2%	
Weapons	None	24.4%	78.5%	.000
	Object	50.2%	18.5%	
	Weapon	25.5%	3.0%	
Travel	No	58.4%	6.5%	.000
	Yes	41.6%	93.5%	
Extremist Group	Not a Member	94.3%	78.1%	.000
	Member	5.7%	21.9%	
Media Engagement	No	33.1%	20.9%	.002
	Yes	66.9%	79.1%	
Crime Type	Non-Violent	77.9%	75.5%	.491
	Violent	22.1%	24.5%	

Of the 564 total cases in the USPDB, there are 265 STS defendants, of which 65 (24.5%) were charged with participating in violent behavior. Contrary to BLM defendants, most STS defendants did not use a repurposed object or weapon (78.5%), and those that did commit violence relied primarily on the bodily weapons (e.g., hands, feet).[8] Additionally, one-fifth of the

[5] Of the White BLM defendants, 14.7 percent were Hispanic/Latino (Appendix C).
[6] BLM (n=299) population sample across independent variables; age (n=298), gender (n=289), race (n=299), weapons (n=275), travel (n=281), extremist group (n=299), media engagement (n=275), and crime type (n=299).
[7] STS (n=265) population sample across independent variables; age (n=252), gender (n=265), race (n=265), weapons (n=265), travel (n=261), extremist group (n=265), media engagement (n=254), and crime type (n=265).
[8] Of the violent STS defendants, 43.1 percent had no weapon (Appendix D).

STS sample identify as a member of an extremist group (21.9%), like Proud Boys or Oath Keepers. Almost all individuals arrested attending the STS riot traveled to Washington, D.C. from a different city or state (93.5%) and most have a social media presence (79.1%). Further, most perpetrators are male (87.2%), aged 35+ (67.1%), and overwhelmingly White (92.8%).[9]

There are several significant differences in risk factors across ideologies. In terms of age, BLM defendants are significantly younger (88.3%) compared to STS defendants (67.1%), while the vast majority of both BLM and STS defendants are male, 86.2 percent and 87.2 percent, respectively. BLM defendants are much more racially diverse than STS defendants. Slightly over half of BLM defendants are non-White (51.8%), while nearly all (92.8%) of STS defendants are White.

In terms of incident level variables, BLM defendants were much more likely to bring a weapon or use a repurposed object or weapon than STS defendants, as 75.7 percent of the total 299 BLM defendants were charged for committing a crime while in possession of a weapon. This differs from STS, as only 21 percent of defendants were charged with committing a crime in possession of a weapon or object. Regarding travel, BLM consists of a much more local population, with less than half traveling from their residing city/state (41.6%), whereas approximately nine out of every ten STS defendants traveled to the rally in Washington, D.C. from an outside location (93.5%). While relatively few individuals identify as part of an extremist group, STS defendants are significantly more likely to maintain a group affiliation (21.9%) than BLM defendants (5.7%). Additionally, while both BLM and STS have high rates of social media presence, STS defendants are significantly more likely to maintain a social media account (79.1%) than BLM defendants (66.9%). Finally, the rate of violence between

[9] Of the White STS defendants, 8 percent were Hispanic/Latino (Appendix C).

movements is similar, with 22.1 percent of BLM defendants and 24.5 percent of STS defendants being charged with a violent crime. In this case, non-significance ($p \leq .491$) is substantively significant because it suggests that while the risk factors associated with either movement vary in multiple ways, similar rates of violence are evident for STS and BLM defendants.

In addition to examining the similarities and differences between BLM and STS defendants, I comparatively examine the risk factors most associated with committing non-violent or violent crimes while attending a political protest event. Of all independent variables, only race ($p \leq .014$) and weapons use ($p \leq .000$) resulted in statistically significant differences. While most of the defendants are White, the proportion of White individuals who committed violence (91.3%) is significantly higher than the proportion of white individuals who committed non-violent crimes (72.5%). Additionally, the majority of non-violent and violent defendants are between 18 and 34-years-old (61.6%, 67.2%) Further, both non-violent and violent defendants are overwhelmingly male (86.2%, 87.2%).

Table 2: Bivariate Findings for Risk Factors by Crime Type (N=564)

		Non-Violent[10]	Violent[11]	Sig.
Age	18 - 34	61.6%	67.2%	.253
	35+	38.4%	32.8%	
Gender	Male	85.2%	91.3%	.076
	Female	14.8%	8.7%	
Race	White	72.5%	91.9%	.014
	Non-White	27.5%	8.9.1%	

[10] Non-violent (n=443) population sample across independent variables; age (n=422), gender (n=427), race (n=433), weapons (n=412), travel (n=419), extremist group (n=433), media engagement (n=408), and ideological focus (n=433).
[11] Violent (n=131) population sample across independent variables; age (n=128), gender (n=127), race (n=131), weapons (n=128), travel (n=123), extremist group (n=131), media engagement (n=121), and ideological focus (n=131).

Table 2: Bivariate Findings for Risk Factors by Crime Type (N=564) (cont.)				
		Non-Violent	**Violent**	Sig.
Weapons	None	56.1%	34.4%	.000
	Repurposed Object	28.9%	53.1%	
	Weapon	15.0%	12.5%	
Travel	No	35.3%	26.8%	.079
	Yes	64.7%	73.2%	
Extremist Group	Not a Member	86.6%	87.0%	.902
	Member	13.4%	13.0%	
Media Engagement	No	26.7%	28.9%	.631
	Yes	73.3%	71.1%	
Ideological Focus	Black Lives Matter (BLM)	53.8%	50.4%	.491
	Stop the Steal (STS)	46.2%	49.6%	

Aside from weapons use ($p \leq .000$), incident-level variables do not vary significantly between non-violent and violent defendants. Interestingly, while the majority of the non-violent defendants did not possess a repurposed object or weapon at the time of arrest (56.1%), still a rather large proportion (43.9%) did, indicating they were likely used to commit a property crime, or perhaps suggestive of a failed intent to commit violence. Additionally, of those who committed violence, a repurposed object was the most common tool used to precipitate violent behavior (53.1%), followed by no object/weapon (34.4%), and weapon (12.5%). The combined percentages of repurposed objects and weapons within violent defendants is 68.7 percent, whereas the combined percentages of repurposed objects and weapons between non-violent individuals is 45.2 percent, meaning that if someone was in possession of a weapon, they may be more likely to use it to commit violence. The percentage of those arrested during a political protest who traveled only neared statistical significance ($p \leq .079$), with the proportion of violent defendants who traveled (73.2%) being higher than non-violent defendants who traveled

(64.7%). Further, neither non-violent nor violent defendants are known members of an extremist group (13.4%, 13.0%) and the majority of both types of defendants engaged in social media (73.3%, 71.1%). Lastly, the results indicate no significant differences ($p \leq .491$) in the likelihood of being associated with one ideological movement or another across crime type.

Results II: Binary Logistic Regression

Findings from the multivariate logistic regression analysis predicting the odds of committing non-violence or violence at a political protest are presented in Table 3. Race, weapons, and ideological focus were significantly related to the outcome of interest. I found that non-White defendants were significantly ($p \leq .000$; Exp(B)=.208) less likely to escalate to violence in comparison to White defendants. Further, weapons use was significantly associated with escalation to violence ($p \leq .000$; Exp(B)=5.455), as those without any sort of weapon or repurposed object were significantly less likely to be indicted for committing a violent crime. Finally, the relationship between ideological focus and protest violence only nears statistical significance ($p \leq .088$). We can cautiously interpret this as suggestive of STS defendants being more likely to commit violence than BLM defendants. It should also be noted that when race is taken out of the binary logistic regression model, ideological focus emerges as a statistically significant predictor of violence, net the effects of other variables, again suggesting that STS defendants are statistically more likely ($p \leq .05$; Exp(B)=2.964) to commit violence than BLM defendants.[12]

Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Findings Predicting Crime Type (1=Violent)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Age (1=35+)	-.337	.306	.714	.270
Gender (1=Female)	-.063	.411	.939	.879
Race (1=Non-White)	-1.569	.428	.208	.000

[12] Findings based on additional models are available upon request.

Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Findings Predicting Crime Type (1=Violent) (cont.)				
	B	**S.E.**	**Exp(B)**	**Sig.**
Weapons (1=Any Weapon)	1.697	.326	5.455	.000
Travel (1=Yes)	.472	.329	1.603	.152
Extremist Group (1=Member)	.135	.346	1.144	.697
Media Engagement (1=Yes)	-.047	.286	.954	.870
Ideological Focus (1=Stop the Steal)	.657	.385	1.928	.088
Constant	-2.523	.455	.080	.000
Nagelkerke R Square		.187		
Chi Square		57.438		
-2 Log Likelihood		407.138		

Results III: Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations ("Conjunctive Analysis")

While the bivariate and multivariate analyses identify which individual variables are most associated with increasing the likelihood of violence in contemporary political protests, the conjunctive analyses of cases configurations identify which individual variables increase the probability of violent behavior when combined. Using a step model, I examine the likelihood of violence across demographic variables and incident-level independent variables, while also presenting a full model of all risk factors. Each conjunctive analysis begins with an aggregated compilation of all possible combinations of risk factors considered simultaneously (Miethe et al., 2008). The number of case configurations within the analyses depends on the number of independent variables and their associated categories. So, for a conjunctive analysis including 4 dichotomous independent variables, there would be 16 potential configurations. However, if an independent variable contains three categories (i.e., weapons), there would be 24 configurations. In each analysis, the study focuses on dominant configurations ($n \geq 10$) to identify the most prominent combinations of risk factors across all defendants. Once dominant configurations are identified, the conjunctive analysis aggregates the configurations by exploring their relative distribution across the outcome variable, which in the current study is percent of violent defendants (Miethe et al., 2008). Non-Violent is coded as "0" and Violent is coded as "1", so as

the outcome variable approaches 1, particular configurations are more likely to contain violent defendants. Additionally, the percentage of violence is calculated using "n," so if a configuration contained ten defendants and 50 percent of the cases ended in violence, then five out of ten defendants who meet that configurative profile were arrested for violent charges.

While the USPDB currently maintains data for 564 defendants federally indicted for "protest-related" crimes, only 446 defendants for which there was no missing data were ultimately included in the conjunctive analysis. Any individual with "Missing" or "Unknown" values on a particular variable were excluded from analyses as is required to conduct a conjunctive analysis.

Table 4 contains the findings of the first of three conjunctive analyses, specifically identifying which demographic attributes, when considered in combination with ideological focus, result in the highest likelihood of violence. Of 16 potential configurations for this set, eight are empirically observed in this analysis (50% of total), which accounts for 95.5 percent of the overall cases (426/446). The most common demographic configuration of persons in the USPDB (n=128) is 35+, White, male, and associated with the STS movement. Individuals in this configurative category tend to participate in violent behavior only 22 percent of the time. The two configurations with the highest likelihood to violence are female and male, White, 18 to 34-year-olds associated with BLM, of which 38 and 32 percent were arrested for violence, respectively. Conversely, the demographic profiles associated with the least likelihood of violence are male and female, non-White, 18 to 34-year-olds associated with BLM (7%; 0% – respectively). STS configurations account for configuration ID's three, four, and five, and range between 14 percent and 31 percent of defendants being associated with violence. Finally, there

are no dominant configurations that include 18 to 34-year-old female STS defendants or non-White STS defendants.

Table 4: Demographics Conjunctive Analysis (N=446)

ID #	Age	Gender	Race	Ideological Focus	Percent Violent	n
1	18 - 34	Female	White	Black Lives Matter	.38	13
2	18 - 34	Male	White	Black Lives Matter	.32	88
3	18 - 34	Male	White	Stop the Steal	.31	67
4	35+	Male	White	Stop the Steal	.22	128
5	35+	Female	White	Stop the Steal	.14	22
6	35+	Male	White	Black Lives Matter	.13	15
7	18 - 34	Male	Non-White	Black Lives Matter	.07	81
8	18 - 34	Female	Non-White	Black Lives Matter	.00	12

Beyond the prominent findings from the demographic conjunctive analysis, several other interesting results emerged and are also shown in Table 4. According to the data, 18 to 34-year-old, White, females associated with BLM are the most likely configuration to participate in violent behavior (n=13). This is interesting given that bivariate and multivariate results that indicate males associated with STS have the highest likelihood of violence. Further, BLM accounts for the most and least violent sub-groups in the analysis, indicating variation within federal BLM cases. The one constant held across findings are that White defendants are more likely commit violence than non-White defendants regardless of how combined with age, gender, and ideological focus attributes.

Conjunctive analysis findings for incident-level attributes are shown in Table 5. With five variables, and weapons including three categories, there are 48 potential configurations possible. Fourteen incident profiles meet the threshold of prominence ($n \geq 10$), accounting for 85.2 percent of the overall cases (380/446). The most dominant incident configuration (n=>107) includes defendants who do not use a weapon, travel to a city/state outside their residency, are not members of an extremist group, maintain a social media presence, and are associated with the STS movement. The rate of violence for this configurative category is 11 percent. The

configurations with the highest likelihood to violence were profiles one and two, with 76 and 60 percent of defendants being federally indicted for violent protest related crimes, respectively. Defendants captured in these incident configurations were in possession of a repurposed object, travelled, were not members of an extremist group, and were associated with STS. The differentiating factor between configurative profiles 1 and 2 is media engagement. Those who engaged social media were more likely to become violent. In contrast, profile 14 is associated with the least likelihood of violence, involving defendants with no weapons, who did not travel, were not members of an extremist group, did not have a social media presence, and who were affiliated with BLM.

Table 5: Incident Characteristics Conjunctive Analysis (N=446)

ID #	Weapons	Travel	Extremist Group	Media Engagement	Ideological Focus	Percent Violent	n
1	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.76	21
2	Object	Yes	No	No	Stop the Steal	.60	10
3	Weapon	Yes	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.43	14
4	Object	Yes	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.33	18
5	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.28	32
6	None	No	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.27	11
7	Weapon	No	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.20	10
8	None	Yes	No	No	Stop the Steal	.19	27
9	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Stop the Steal	.18	28
10	Object	No	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.15	20
11	Weapon	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.14	22
12	Object	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.12	41
13	None	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.11	107
14	None	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.05	19

Several patterns also emerged from the results presented in Table 5, including repurposed objects being included in four of the six configurations in which more than 25 percent of the incidents resulted in violence. Further, five of the same six configurations indicated that defendants travel to a new city or state to participate in the protest event. From this, it is evident

that those in possession of a repurposed object and who traveled outside their residence were more likely to commit violence. Only a single configuration included defendants involved in an extremist group (n=>28), of which only 18 percent were violent. Finally, media engagement and ideological focus are very evenly split in rates of violence, indicating that neither has a particular influence in prompting a defendant to participate in violent behavior when combined with the other variables. Specifically, configurations one through five are very uniform regarding weapons use, travel, and extremist group membership, varying only in media engagement and ideological focus. When combined with the other variables, media engagement and ideological focus altered the likelihood that protest violence would occur.

The final conjunctive analysis included in the general step model demonstrates how all of the individual risk factors when combined are associated with the likelihood of violence. Because the analysis includes seven dichotomous and one trichotomous variables, there are 384 potential configurations. Table 6 includes 15 empirically observed configurations that account for 59.6 percent of the males aged over 35, who are not in possession of a weapon, who travel to the protest event, who are not members of an extremist group, and who have a social media presence, and who is associated with STS. Further, only 12 percent were indicted for violent crimes. The profiles with the highest likelihood of violence were configurations one and two, which included White males in possession of repurposed object, who travel, are not members of an extremist group, have a social media platform, and who are associated with STS. The only variation across these configurations is age, with profile one including 18 to 34-year-olds and configuration two accounting for those aged 35+.

Table 6: Risk Factors by Ideological Focus and Crime Type Conjunctive Analysis (N=446)

ID #	Age	Gender	Race	Weapons	Travel	Extremist Group	Media Engagement	Ideological Focus	Percent Violent	n
1	35+	Male	White	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.82	11
2	18 - 34	Male	White	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.70	10
3	18 - 34	Male	White	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.50	14
4	18 - 34	Male	White	Object	Yes	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.33	12
5	35+	Male	White	None	Yes	No	No	Stop the Steal	.25	20
6	18 - 34	Male	White	Object	No	No	No	Black Lives Matter	.25	12
7	18 - 34	Male	White	Object	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.23	13
8	18 - 34	Male	White	None	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.15	27
9	35+	Male	White	None	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.12	60
10	18 - 34	Male	Non-White	None	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.08	13
11	35+	Female	White	None	Yes	No	Yes	Stop the Steal	.08	13
12	18 - 34	Male	Non-White	Object	Yes	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.08	12
13	18 - 34	Male	Non-White	Object	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.06	17
14	18 - 34	Male	Non-White	Weapon	No	No	Yes	Black Lives Matter	.06	16
15	35+	Male	White	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Stop the Steal	.00	16

The configuration with the lowest likelihood of violence included White males over the age of 35 that did not have a weapon or object, who traveled, who are members of an extremist group, who have a social media presence, and who identify with STS.

Table 6 presents dominant combinations of risk factors associated with violence at contemporary protest demonstrations. First, supporting prior bivariate and multivariate analyses, violence is predominantly associated with White male defendants. Of the 15 configurations included in the analysis, only incident profile 11 encompasses female defendants (8% violent). White defendants additionally make-up profile one through nine (82% – 12% violent), suggesting that White defendants have a much higher likelihood of being involved in a violent protest-related case. Findings for weapons use and travel are consistent with prior analyses (see Table 5) in which defendants are in possession of a repurposed object and traveled to a new city/state and have a higher probability of committing violence. Supporting the results of bivariate and multivariate analyses, an individual who is a member of an extremist group has the lowest likelihood to participate in violent behavior (0%) when combined with the other relevant situational variables.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory, comparative analysis of defendant-level and incident-level risk factors associated with the escalation of protest-related violence within the contexts of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Stop the Steal (STS) demonstrations. This study was guided by the tenets of environmental criminology, situational crime prevention (SCP), and prior theoretical and empirical work on risk factors associated with violent extremism. To my knowledge, this is the first empirical study to examine questions of why protest-related violence occurs in some situated places and times and not others in the context of modern-day protests. By analyzing data from the U.S. Protests Database (USPDB), the quantitative and contextual findings have implications for both policymakers and law enforcement officials interested in informing measures to reduce the likelihood of violence occurring at political protests. This chapter elaborates the implications for key findings regarding individual risk factors associated with violent behavior at protest events, and how these risk factors interact with other risk factors to increase (or decrease) the likelihood for violence. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Review of Key Findings

The first research question asked which *individual* risk factors are most associated with contemporary protest movements in the United States. The results indicated there were several significant differences across the BLM and STS movements. BLM defendants were typically comprised of non-White males aged between 18 and 34, whereas the majority STS defendants

consisted of White males over the age of 35. One could argue that these differences reflect broader differences in demographic makeup of political orientations in the U.S. That is, we know that the political left is younger and more racially diverse than the political right, which is older and less racially diverse (Zingher, 2014). Contrastingly, there were no significant differences in the gender makeup of defendants, with most of all included defendants being male. So, it is clear that regardless of political ideology, males are disproportionately more likely to be federally indicted for protest-related crimes than females.

Findings also demonstrated variation in the situated nature of protest-related crimes across protest movements. In particular, BLM defendants were much more likely to be arrested while in possession of a repurposed object or weapon than STS defendants. This makes sense as the vast majority of BLM defendants were arrested for damage to property (e.g., arson and defamation of public property), while STS defendants were more likely to be federally charged with entering the Capitol building on January 6th without a weapon. More specifically, most STS defendants were charged with crimes associated with trespassing on federal grounds following the former President Trump's speech, rather than causing any damage to property within the Capitol building using a repurposed object or weapon. Therefore, preventing future criminal acts like arson and defamation of public property at BLM protest events will require increasing the amount of effort required to cause damage by hardening targets, such as through protective measures to businesses. Moreover, because STS represents a single event where defendants targeted the U.S. Capitol building, we can conclude that in effort to prevent future incursions, law enforcement personnel and riot control measures must be bolstered on Capitol grounds in response to potentially violent protest events.

Significant differences in travel and social media presence reflect key differences in the ideological grievances of each protest movement regarding usage of tools. Specifically, the majority of BLM defendants did not travel outside their city or state of residence, usually aggrieved by incidents of police brutality that occurred in close proximity to them. Conversely, nine out of ten STS defendants traveled to the Capitol building from outside of Washington, D.C., as STS grievances were rooted in a perceived fraudulent national election. Further, while most of both BLM and STS defendants have a social media presence, the rate of STS media engagement is significantly higher than for BLM, perhaps indicative of how movements are organized, both online and physically, and the need for STS to rely on social media to communicate with others on a larger scale. Information about the differences in the usage of tools can be used to inform situational crime prevention strategies and alter defendants' opportunity structures. Because most BLM defendants consisted of a much more local population, future violent BLM protests could be adverted by increasing local law enforcement to identify quickly and efficiently those engaging in suspicious behaviors. However, the vast majority of STS defendants traveled to Washington, D.C. from an outside location, yet had significantly higher rates of social media usage. Therefore, law enforcement should consider how social media can be used as a tool for counterextremism efforts, especially as it pertains to preventing far-right extremist violence.

Further, while the majority of BLM and STS defendants are not members of formal extremist groups, STS defendants have a much higher likelihood to be affiliated with one (22.9% STS; 5.7% BLM). This concept is supported by the notion that most STS extremist groups (i.e., Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, etc.) are strongly organized with an established hierarchy and financial system, whereas the primary BLM group ANTIFA is very loosely organized. The

difference in level of group membership and type of extremist group creates varying opportunity structures for protest related crime. For instance, group affiliation may promote higher levels of ideological commitment and higher rates of attendance at coordinated political demonstrations capable of spawning violence. The organizational structure of such groups may also present unique opportunities for law enforcement. Specifically, by arresting one member of a specific organization, law enforcement can identify all associates and trace their individual activities to a singular location or organizational structure. Loosely organized groups like ANTIFA, however, with no specific membership standards, established hierarchy, or financial structure present challenges for law enforcement responsible for investigating protest-related crimes.

Path to Violence and Incident Configurations

I was able to address the second and third research questions by employing a multi-stage analytical approach to identify dominant individual risk factors and combinations of risk factors most associated with escalation to protest violence. Collectively, findings from the bivariate, multivariate, and conjunctive analyses suggest that most of the individual and situational attributes included in this study were not significantly related to the decision to use violence during a protest. One key finding of this study was that ideological affiliation does not appear to be a significant predictor of escalation to protest violence. Individuals associated with both BLM and STS are just as likely to resort to violence

On the other hand, race and weapon use were associated with protest violence. Regarding race, White defendants were disproportionately associated with violence. This means that despite political ideology, most violent defendants are White. Further, of violent defendants, the most common weapon used was a repurposed object (53.1%), followed by no weapon at all (34.4%), and finally designated weapon (12.5%). In other words, most violent defendants (87.5%) did not

use an object designated to cause harm (e.g., firearms, knives, O.C. spray, etc.), perhaps suggesting that violent defendants did not initially attend the protest events with the intention to commit violence. While conventional weapons may be choice weapons for other forms of violent extremism, they negate the core tenants of *MURDEROUS* in the context of protest-related crimes. Conventional weapons like guns are only designed for one purpose, are highly detectable by law enforcement, are hard to remove, are often unattainable and complicated, and can be unsafe to the user. Instead, protesters tend to gravitate towards repurposed objects, using what is readily available and in their immediate vicinity, ranging from flag poles to police barricades. Such cases present defendants with suitable weapons that are safe, destructive, uncomplicated, and reliable.

How opportunities for violence were structured around repurposed objects as weapons were further contextualized by the results of the conjunctive analysis. That is, dominant configurations with the highest likelihood of escalating to violence consistently involved the use of repurposed objects. Of the seven configurations with the highest percentage of violent defendants (23%-82% violent), six profiles included defendants that used a repurposed object.[13] While varying in age, travel, media engagement, and ideological focus, the use of repurposed objects remained consistent in determining the likelihood of violence. This finding has implications for law enforcement. Specifically, concern for conventional weapons in the context of protest events is not enough to deter violence. Instead, prevention measures should also focus on screening for inconspicuous objects that could potentially be used as weapons.

Limitations and Future Research

[13] Configuration #5 of Table 6 used no weapon.

While this project expanded previous research regarding collective violence in the United States, this study is limited in some ways. Namely, the USPDB only contains information of persons arrested and federally indicted for participating in unlawful behavior while attending a protest event. Those persons who committed crimes at these protests who were not arrested for various reasons are excluded from the sample. How those acts of deviance are different remains unknown. Also, because BLM is a much more localized social movement, many BLM arrests could be made at the municipal or state level and thus are not included in the USPDB. This caveat should be considered when interpreting comparative findings. Not all federal indictments of BLM and STS defendants have been coded by the USPDB as many of these cases are still unfolding. The USPDB is updated on a continuous basis regarding changes to existing entries and inclusion of new cases. Further, because the data associated with the study are primarily from open sources, like the U.S. Attorney's listing and local news reporting, inconsistencies and missing information are possible.

Further empirical investigations are needed to identify and analyze the precipitating factors most associated with protest-related violence given the relative increase in collective violence at political demonstration events since the death of George Floyd. Specifically, future research could use the systematic protest data included in the USPBD to explore online mobilization habits among indicted individuals and how their social media presence contributed to a commitment to participate in protest-related crimes. Additionally, using the open-source court documents and records housed in the USPDB, future research could evaluate law enforcement evidence collection practices to compile the best approaches for defendant identification and criminal justice responses. Finally, a qualitative, comparative case study could

be used to gain deeper insight into the thought processes of violent defendants and the associated predominant risk factors across the multiple stages of protest-related criminal events.

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Appendix A: Twenty-Five Techniques of SCP (http:www.popcenter.org/25techniques/)

Increase the Effort	Increase the Risks	Reduce the Rewards	Reduce Provocations	Remove Excuses
1. Target harden • *Steering column locks and immobilizers* • *Anti-robbery screens* • *Tamper-proof packaging*	6. Extend guardianship • *Take routine precautions: go out in group at night, leave signs of occupancy, carry phone* • *"Cocoon" neighborhood watch*	11. Conceal targets • *Off-street parking* • *Gender-neutral phone directories* • *Unmarked bullion trucks*	16. Reduce frustrations and stress • *Efficient queues and polite service* • *Expanded seating* • *Soothing music/muted lights*	21. Set rules • *Rental agreements* • *Harassment codes* • *Hotel registration*
2. Control access and facilities • *Entry phones* • *Electronic card access* • *Baggage screening*	7. Assist natural surveillance • *Improved street lighting* • *Defensible space* • *Support whistleblowers*	12. Remove targets • *Removable car radio* • *Women's refuges* • *Prepaid cards for pay phones*	17. Avoid disputes • *Separate enclosures for rival soccer fans* • *Reduce crowding in pubs* • *Fixed cab fares*	22. Post instructions • *"No Parking"* • *"Private Property"* • *"Extinguish camp fires"*
3. Screen exits • *Ticket needed for exit* • *Export documents* • *Electronic merchandise tags*	8. Reduce anonymity • *Taxi driver IDs* • *"How's my driving?" decals* • *School uniforms*	13. Identify property • *Property marking* • *Vehicle licensing and parts marketing* • *Cattle branding*	18. Reduce emotional arousal • *Controls on violent pornography* • *Enforce good behavior on soccer field* • *Prohibit racial slurs*	23. Alert conscience • *Roadside speed display boards* • *Signatures for customs declarations* • *"Shoplifting is stealing"*
4. Deflect tools/weapons • *Street closures* • *Separate bathrooms for women* • *Disperse pubs*	9. Utilize place managers • *CCTV for double-deck buses* • *Two clerks for convenience stores* • *Reward vigilance*	14. Disrupt markets • *Monitor pawn shops* • *Controls on classified ads* • *License street vendors*	19. Neutralize peer pressure • *"Idiots drink and drive"* • *"It's OK to say No"* • *Disperse troublemakers at school*	24. Assist compliance • *Easy library checkout* • *Public lavatories* • *Litter bins*
5. Control tools/weapons • *"Smart" guns* • *Disabling stolen cell phones* • *Restrict spray paint sales to juveniles*	10. Strengthen formal surveillance • *Red light cameras* • *Burglar alarms* • *Security guards*	15. Deny benefits • *Ink merchandise tags* • *Graffiti cleaning* • *Speed bumps*	20. Discourage imitation • *Rapid repair of vandalism* • *V-chips in TVs* • *Censor details of modus operandi*	25. Control drugs and alcohol • *Breathalyzers in pubs* • *Server intervention* • *Alcohol-free events*

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics (N=564)			
		Frequency	**Percent**
Age	18 - 34	346	61.3
Missing = 14	35+	204	36.2
Gender	Male	480	85.1
Missing = 10	Female	74	13.1
Race	White	390	69.1
Missing = 55	Non-White	119	21.1
Weapons	None	275	48.8
Missing = 24	Object	187	33.2
	Weapon	78	13.8
Travel	No	181	32.1
Missing = 22	Yes	361	64.0
Extremist Group	Not a Member	489	86.7
Missing = 0	Member	75	13.3
Media Engagement	No	144	25.5
Missing = 35	Yes	385	68.3
Ideological Focus	Black Lives Matter (BLM)	299	53.0
Missing = 0	Stop the Steal (STS)	265	47.0
Crime Type	Non-Violent	433	76.8
Missing = 0	Violent	131	23.2

Appendix C: Defendant Ethnicity Bivariate Analysis

Defendant Ethnicity Bivariate Analysis (N=470)			
	Black Lives Matter (BLM)[14]	**Stop the Steal (STS)[15]**	Sig.
Non-Hispanic/Latino	85.3%	92.0%	.022
Hispanic/Latino	14.7%	8.0%	

[14] n=232
[15] n=238

Appendix D: Stop the Steal (STS) Violent Defendants Weapons Use

Stop the Steal (STS) Violent Defendants Weapons Use (N=265)			
	Non-Violent[16]	**Violent**[17]	Sig.
None	90.0%	43.1%	.000
Object	7.5%	52.3%	
Weapon	2.5%	4.6%	

[16] n=200
[17] n=65