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Original Article

The Racial Limits of Disruption: How Race and Tactics Influence Social Movement Organization Testimony before Congress, 1960–1995

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Social movement theory holds that disrupting social and political processes is among the most effective tools social movement organizations (SMOs) use to motivate recognition for themselves and their constituents. Yet, recent research suggests that the political reception of disruption is not racially neutral. Black SMOs face a dilemma in that, although disruption is a powerful tool for change, the public often perceives nonviolent Black disruptive protest as violent. We investigate this bind by analyzing how nondisruptive protest, nonviolent disruption, or violence helps or hinders both Black and non-Black SMOs to gain state "acceptance" as legitimate spokes-organizations for their issues. We combine data on newspaper-reported protest events with data covering 41,545 SMO Congressional testimonies from 1462 SMOs from 35 movement families. In panel regressions, we find that Congress is generally more accepting of nondisruptive protest but that nondisruptive protest is only roughly one-tenth as effective for Black SMOs compared with non-Black SMOs. Furthermore, whereas non-Black SMOs are significantly *more* likely to testify after using nonviolent disruption, Black SMOs using nonviolent disruption are significantly *less* likely to testify before Congress. Regardless of race, violence was associated with fewer congressional testimonies. Collectively, these findings suggest that Black SMOs face a tactical bind: Black SMOs can use nondisruptive tactics that are resource-intensive and slow, or they can use nonviolent disruption that gets media attention but hinders congressional acceptance. These findings contribute to a growing literature on how racial inequality and prejudice impact the outcomes of social movements.

The recognition and public consultation of outside political organizations by the state are central to the definition of pluralistic democracy (Dahl 2020). But exactly how outsider organizations, such as social movement organizations (SMOs), can persuade the state to consult them on their issues and concerns is an ongoing debate (Burstein 2014, 2021; Grossmann 2012; Jones and

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Baumgartner 2005). Classic work on this question argued that SMOs get their claims recognized by state institutions such as Congress primarily by disrupting social, economic, and political processes (McAdam 1983; Piven and Cloward 1979). As Gamson argued, "feistiness works" because disruption imposes costs and pressures decision-makers into recognizing movements (1990, 156; see also: Giugni 1998). More recent work has argued that disruption generally needs to be nonviolent to succeed (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Wang and Piazza 2016; Wasow 2020) or even that nondisruptive protest tactics work better (Hooghe and Marien 2014; Olzak and Soule 2009). Increasingly, moreover, scholars argue that the impact of movement tactics is not racially neutral (Bracey 2016; Oliver 2017; see also: Morris 1999, 2019).

Racial inequality in the United States shapes everyday interactions, how institutions operate, how resources are distributed, and the inclusiveness of political institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Bracey 2016; Minta 2021; Omi and Winant 2014; Saperstein, Penner, and Light 2013), limiting minority, and particularly Black-led, groups' ability to influence politics through more institutional channels such as lobbying, petitions, and persuasion. Indeed, "[m]inority groups may more often need to resort to disruptive strategies to force a complacent majority to pay attention" (Oliver 2017, 409–10). But recent research shows that Black movements using nonviolent disruption are interpreted by the largely White US public as violent (Manekin and Mitts 2022; Peay and Camarillo 2021). These perceptions put Black movements in a bind: disruption may be necessary to draw attention due to their limited institutional access, but it may also deter state actors from accepting their claims and concerns as legitimate. Here, we explore this bind in a comparative study of Black and non-Black movements' invitations to testify before Congress, treating testimony before Congress as a comparative indicator of which organizations are accepted as "valid spokes-organizations for a legitimate set of interests" (Gamson 1990, 28).

Determining whether an SMO's tactical decisions influence their likelihood of giving congressional testimony requires nuanced measures of SMO tactics and congressional appearances across Black and non-Black movements. Previous research has examined the content of congressional testimonies (Burstein and Hirsh 2007), whether the public supports a movement testifying before Congress (Croco, Cunningham, and Vincent 2023), whether organizational resources or expertise increase the likelihood of testifying (Albert 2013; Ganz and Soule 2019), and when protest increases the likelihood of hearings on specific topics (King, Bentele, and Soule 2007). Yet, none have analyzed how events and tactics influence whether specific SMOs testify before Congress. To do so, we couple new data on 1462 SMOs from 35 different social movement families and their presence before Congress (Seguin, Maher, and Zhang 2023) with newspaper measures of SMOs' use of tactics from the Dynamics of Collective Action (DoCA) dataset that covers 1960–1995 (Earl et al. 2004).

Our multimovement analyses show that news reports of SMO actions have different effects on the likelihood of giving congressional testimony depending on the nature of the tactics and the race of the SMO's members. SMOs whose use of violence was covered in the media were significantly less likely to testify overall. The effects of nonviolent disruption and nondisruptive tactics were racially contingent. Both Black and non-Black SMOs whose nondisruptive tactics were reported in the news were more likely to testify before Congress, but the effect for non-Black SMOs was roughly an order of magnitude greater than that for Black SMOs, suggesting that Congress largely ignores nondisruptive Black SMOs. Nonviolent disruption had positive effects on the likelihood of testimony for non-Black SMOs, but Black SMOs were significantly *less* likely to testify before Congress when their use of nonviolent disruption was reported in the media. Thus, we argue that Black SMOs face a tactical bind where they are largely ignored when they advocate through official channels but actively excluded when using nonviolent disruption. Theoretically, our findings contribute to a growing literature on how racial inequality and prejudice impact the outcomes of social movements (Bracey 2016; Manekin and Mitts 2022; McVeigh, Carbonaro, and Cannady 2022). Historically, our results suggest that the impact of the Civil Rights movement, one of the most influential social movements in recent history, was more muted than the size and intensity of its mobilization would have predicted.

Social Movements and Congressional Testimony

Tasked with drafting and passing legislation, Congress (both Senate and House) is a significant target for social movements seeking to influence the state (Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008). Although Congress is only one branch of the US federal government (Morgan and Orloff 2017), its diverse collection of actors and agendas provides a broad view of how the state recognizes movements. Congressional hearings are the primary public mechanism through which Congress consults SMOs and representatives for other groups (Baumgartner and Jones 2015).

Congress holds hearings for several reasons, including discussing bills and legislation, overseeing existing policies, executive oversight, and nominating public officials. Committee members and their staff suggest witnesses, using factors such as organizational focus and constituency, to represent different perspectives or types of expertise (Grossmann 2012; Schlozman et al. 2015) and pass these suggestions to committee chairs who make the final decision (Davis 2015; Heitshusen 2017). Both majority and minority members on House and Senate congressional committees can invite or subpoena witnesses to testify.

Congressional witnesses represent various groups and interests, including local and state politicians, police, industry and business interests, religious groups, and SMOs. Congress members use hearings to draw on witnesses' technical expertise for the bill-writing process and to make sense of diverse information (i.e., "entropic information") when setting priorities (Baumgartner and Jones 2015, 47) and to signal the importance of an issue to other members of Congress (Ban, Park, and You 2023; Brasher 2006; Diermeier and Feddersen 2000), the news media (Walgrave et al. 2017), or the public (Baumgartner and Jones 2010; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Lewallen, Park, and Theriault 2024). Thus, when SMOs testify before Congress it typically signals that the group is seen as legitimate or is "accepted" as a legitimate spokes-organization, by Congress (Croco, Cunningham, and Vincent 2023; Gamson 1990; Hojnacki et al. 2012).[1]

Our focus on Congressional testimony by SMOs differs from most research on movements and Congressional hearings because we compare how the behavior of organizations within and across several social movement families influences congressional appearances over time. We build on prior work that has used the accumulation of past congressional hearings on a topic as a measure of "taken-for-granted acceptance" (King, Bentele, and Soule 2007, 143) as well as studies that use congressional hearings on movement-related issues as an outcome (Burstein 2014; King, Bentele, and Soule 2007; Olzak and Soule 2009; Soule et al. 1999). Studies of the topics of hearings, however, tell us little about which SMOs Congress invites or when, because many advocacy groups testify about issues that are tangential to their expertise (e.g., the AFL-CIO testified on the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and many topical hearings do not feature relevant SMOs as witnesses. The few studies focusing on which SMOs get invited to testify have studied single movements such as the women's, labor, or environmental movements (Albert 2013; Ganz and Soule 2019; Goss 2020). Our approach is also novel in that it measures tactics and events to determine which interest groups get invited to testify, contrasting with comparative work that focuses on structural attributes such as size, longevity, or membership (Albert 2013; Hojnacki et al. 2012; Leyden 1995).[2]

Disruption, Race, and Congressional Testimony

Congressmembers continuously gather and make sense of information about their constituents and public concerns through several heuristics (Baumgartner and Jones 2015) including the frequency of constituent correspondence (Broockman and Skovron 2018), the perspective of interest groups (Grossmann 2012; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2019), media stories on issues (Herbst 1998), and coverage of protest or other SMO activities and tactics. Thus, news media coverage of SMO tactics likely influences congresspeople's decisions about who to invite to testify.

Many studies suggest that Congress may be more likely to invite SMOs that are covered in the media for using nondisruptive protest tactics. Nondisruptive tactics such as petitions, press

conferences, vigils, or symbolic displays intended to appeal, pressure, or persuade are closer to the traditional political channels of engagement (such as voting, donations, and campaigning) that politicians are comfortable with (Dalton 2013). Olzak and Soule (2009) find that Congress is more responsive to less disruptive tactics when considering environmental legislation. Perhaps as a response, protests targeting the state are more likely to use tactics such as lobbying and lawsuits (Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008). Members of the Belgian Parliament and Swedish officials expect and prefer citizens to use traditional channels (voting, media attention, letters, calls to politicians, etc.) to express opposition (Gilljam, Persson, and Karlsson 2012; Hooghe and Marien 2014). Nondisruptive tactics may also present the organizations' ideas and arguments in ways that allow congressional figures and their staff to anticipate what the group will say when invited to testify, streamlining politicians' messaging in hearings.

Congress may have a more complicated response to SMOs that use disruptive yet nonviolent tactics such as civil disobedience, marches, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and sit-ins (McAdam 1983). These tactics, which are intended to disrupt everyday life while drawing attention to the movement's claims and concerns, have become the central feature of most modern protest campaigns (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004), and many social movement scholars see this nonviolent disruptive capacity as the central mechanism that makes movements effective (Hayward 2020; Piven and Cloward 1979). Contemporary work finds that disruptive nonviolence is persuasive for state actors (such as Congress) when they mobilize large groups of people and use diverse, attention-grabbing tactics (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Kadivar 2018) or when they can amplify positive public opinion (Agnone 2007). Wouters and Walgrave (2017) found that Belgian politicians were more supportive of a hypothetical group's claims when it was depicted as engaged in "calm and peaceful demonstrations." Others find that illegitimate repression of disruptive protests, such as police brutality or arrests, increased federal sympathy and representation for movements (Andrews 1997; Hess and Martin 2006). Thus, disruptive nonviolence may bring SMOs before Congress.

Other work, however, questions the effectiveness of nonviolent disruption. Croco, Cunningham, and Vincent (2023) find that disruption dampens public approval of movement tactics. Burstein found that protests had a limited-to-null effect on bill passage (Burstein 2014). Research on European parliamentarians finds that politicians ignore protests and consider illegal acts and boycotts to be the least compelling tactics (Gilljam, Persson, and Karlsson 2012; Hooghe and Marien 2014; Wouters and Walgrave 2017). More broadly, the disruptive nature of protest and its impacts, especially over time, can deter support from protest targets or the general public (Feinberg, Willer, and Kovacheff 2020; Hayward 2020). As a result, while nonviolent disruption may draw attention and signal widespread support for movement causes, it also risks alienating state actors and the public.

Violent disruption may be the least compelling tactic for Congress, although some literature suggests it may be effective. The logic behind violent disruption, including riots, melees, fights, and property destruction,[3] is that these tactics impose severe costs on targets while symbolizing the degree of injustice movement actors feel (Tilly 2003). Violence is often reactive to acts of repression (Ives and Lewis 2020), and many activists turn to it when they are frustrated with other means of contention and/or the slow process of change (Case 2021; Goldstone 1998; Koopmans 1993). Many point to Gamson's finding that violence was associated with new advantages for pre-1945 organizations (1990). Yet, Gamson did not see violence as a *cause* of new advantages, but rather as a "symptom of success" that arose from impatience, hubris, and encounters with state repression (1989:458). Nevertheless, some do find that violence increases state responsiveness (Enos, Kaufman, and Sands 2019; Fording 1997). For example, McAdam and Su (2002) found that pro-peace roll call votes were more common after violent protests, but violence also depressed the pace of voting (2002). More recently, some have found that a mix of violence and nonviolence increased conservative support for Black Lives Matter police reform goals (Shuman et al. 2022).

Yet, the findings from several more studies suggest that state actors generally, and Congress in particular, finds violent disruption alienating for several social and political reasons. The

public generally sees violent tactics as illegitimate and divisive (Dalton 2013; Feinberg, Willer, and Kovacheff 2020). As a result, violent disruption alienates potential supporters and legitimates repressive responses (Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018; Wasow 2020), especially for those not already committed to supporting the movement (Muñoz and Anduiza 2019). Others find that violent movements and SMOs are generally less likely to achieve their goals because violence reduces aggregate support for the movement (Baggetta and Myers 2021; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Kadivar 2018; Wasow 2020). As public representatives, we should expect that members of Congress would be reticent to support SMOs using unpopular tactics.

The Racially Contingent Perceptions of Disruption

Much of the literature on movement tactics implicitly assumes that tactics have the same effects for minority and majority movements. Yet, recent works argue that protest and other tactics are interpreted differently, particularly for Black movements (Bracey 2016; Manekin and Mitts 2022; Oliver 2017). Nondisruptive tactics may be less likely to lead to acceptance for Black movements. Experimental research finds that politicians are less likely to respond to putatively Black constituents (Butler and Broockman 2011). As a result, where non-Black SMOs may achieve acceptance through more nondisruptive protest tactics, Black SMOs may find that these tactics are comparatively less effective for generating acceptance. In turn, Black SMOs may feel the need to turn to more disruptive tactics to generate attention for their issues (Oliver 2017).

Protests with nonviolent disruption are intended to draw attention to issues, raise the costs of inaction, and pressure officials by disrupting day-to-day activities while avoiding the stigma associated with violence (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Piven and Cloward 1979). The use of sit-ins and street protests produced many of the Black Civil Rights movement's signature legislative, cultural, and economic victories (Andrews 2004; McAdam 1999; Morris 1986), and these campaigns were most effective when they increased pressure on politicians and elites without alienating the public through violence (Skrentny 2006; Wasow 2020). Indeed, much of social movement theory is built on the Black Civil Rights movement's successful use of nonviolent disruption (Bracey 2016, 2021; Morris 1999; 2019).

Yet, by focusing on the successes of the early Black Civil Rights movement without including empirical comparisons to non-Black movements, we risk minimizing how racism shapes the acceptance of Black movements (Amenta 2014, 17; Bracey 2016; Oliver 2017). Theories of group threat in the United States make clear that it is generally ethnic minorities that are perceived as threatening (Quillian 1995). Due to fears of Black people stemming from racist beliefs and stereotypes (Bonilla-Silva 2019), Black movements may be more threatening to political institutions than movements of other minorities who are more likely to be stereotyped as passive or nonthreatening (Chou and Feagin 2015; Ellingson 2001). Recent work shows that the public sees nonviolent Black protests as more violent than identical events organized by White protesters (Manekin and Mitts 2022; Peay and Camarillo 2021) and that Black protests were more heavily policed than others during the peak of movement activism (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011). Similarly, King and his co-authors found that protest had a positive effect on congressional hearings (2007), but when Gillion focused specifically on minority protest, he found null results (Gillion 2013). Thus, finding nondisruptive protest less generative, Black SMOs may turn to disruptive nonviolence as an alternative approach for getting attention. However, this turn may put them in a bind since their contentious tactics may be perceived as threats and, therefore, less acceptable to Congress.

It is less clear whether the use of violence by Black SMOs would be viewed differently by Congress from that used by non-Black SMOs. On the one hand, research shows that violence generally does not lead to acceptance (Baggetta and Myers 2021; Muñoz and Anduiza 2019), so by comparison, Black SMOs using violence might be even less likely to be invited to testify when using violence. But, given that Black SMOs may already be viewed as violent by Congress, violence by Black SMOs may not be as damaging to their relative prospects for testimony as it is for non-Black SMOs. Moreover, perceptions of violence may be less racially contingent. Manekin and Mitts, for

instance, show that "ethnic identity exercises little influence on perceptions of violent protests, but rather it becomes more influential as resistance tactics become less violent" (2022, 175).

Data

We combined longitudinal data on SMOs from multiple movements, media coverage of their pressure campaigns, and the congressional political environment to analyze how the effects of disruption unfold over time in response to events and pressure campaigns, and work differently depending on the racial makeup of the movements. Our data take the form of an SMO panel. We measure hearings and protest events at the daily level and aggregate both by month, giving us a much finer-grained temporal resolution than more common yearly level measures (Shellman 2004). Our unit of analysis is the SMO-month: we have an observation for each SMO in our sample for each month the SMO existed. Our dependent variable is a count of the number of hearings at which an SMO was present each month. Our key independent variables are measures of the frequency of distinct kinds of protest events at which SMOs were present.

Our SMO data come from the *Social Movements in Congress* (SMC) data (Seguin, Maher, and Zhang 2023). The SMC data include lists of SMOs from multiple existing sources such as Political Organizations in the News (Amenta et al. 2009), Gamson (1990), and Minkoff's (1994) Encyclopedia of Associations data and when those organizations testified before Congress. We combine the SMC data with the *Dynamics of Collective Action* (DoCA) dataset. DoCA contains event-level data for all collective action events as reported in the *New York Times* between 1960 and 1995 and any SMOs present at those events (Earl et al. 2004). We use Amenta et al.'s (2009) coding framework (with an additional category for transnational and diaspora movements) to categorize SMOs into 35 mutually exclusive social movement families.[4]

Our analysis includes SMOs that were present for at least three events in DoCA and/or were present at least one congressional hearing in the SMC data. In sum, 659 SMOs were in DoCA and testified at least once (e.g., the NAACP), 321 SMOs were only in DoCA (e.g., the Weather Underground), and 482 SMOs testified but were not in DoCA (e.g., Center on Conscience and War). SMOs that were in DoCA less than three times and were never in Congress were generally small NIMBY organizations. In sum, our analysis sample contains 1462 SMOs across 35 social movement families.

Dependent Variable: Hearings with SMO Testimony

Our dependent variable is a count of the number of congressional hearings at which each SMO appeared during each month. There are several potential limitations to using congressional testimony to measure SMO acceptance. First, some SMO mentions in our data could be trivial rather than substantive recognition. While similar search strategies in newspaper media have found that mentions of SMOs are sometimes minor (Amenta et al. 2012; Seguin 2016), this is less likely with the SMC data because SMOs appear in the data only when a congressional witness is affiliated with an SMO or the SMO was deemed central enough to the hearing topic to include in the summary. Second, not all recognition from the state is affirmative: some hearings delegitimize or stigmatize SMOs. Indeed, some groups may get called before Congress to shame them for using unacceptable tactics (Ferree 2004; Pontikes, Negro, and Rao 2010). These kinds of hearings were removed from the SMC data (see Seguin, Maher, and Zhang 2023: 3).

Third, our quantitative approach may not capture what a more nuanced qualitative case study, like Gamson's original work (1990), would code as acceptance (i.e., recognition without tangible gains). As an out-of-sample check on construct validity, we calculated the number of times each organization in Gamson's original analysis testified in the SMC data (see Appendix I). We find that congressional testimony was significantly more common among SMOs that Gamson had coded as "accepted" than SMOs that were not coded as accepted.

Independent Variables

We draw on DoCA to measure when SMOs engaged in protest events. DoCA is based only on whether these events were reported in the *New York Times*, and relying on media coverage for tactical data introduces bias in several ways because it may reflect the agency and decision-making of the media as much as the agency of SMOs. First, news media selectively cover events, potentially portraying organizations as more or less contentious than they actually are (Davenport and Ball 2002). Second, for the events they do cover, news media do not fully or necessarily accurately describe events (description bias). These biases are not constant over geography, with the *New York Times* more likely to report events on either coast than the middle of the country (Earl et al. 2004; see also: Beyerlein et al. 2018). Nor are biases constant over time, as media are likely to cover events and SMOs that resonate with the attention cycle (Oliver and Maney 2000; Seguin 2016). Ultimately, as we reiterate in the discussion, our results must be thought of as reflecting the effects of protest that is covered in the media (and more specifically, the *New York Times*) rather than as effects of protest as such.

We differentiate between three categories of tactics: *nondisruptive*, *nonviolent disruptive*, and *violent* (Maher et al. 2019; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008). *Nondisruptive* tactics include vigils, ceremonies, dramaturgical demonstrations, motorcades, information distribution, symbolic displays, press conferences/statements, organization formation announcements & meetings, and lawsuits or legal maneuvers. *Nonviolent disruptive* events include rallies and demonstrations, marches, pickets, civil disobedience, strikes, sit-ins, shutdowns, and boycotts. Using these codes, we counted when each SMO was reported as an organizer or participant in an event using the DoCA "event forms" and "SMO names" variables.

Measuring events where an SMO used *violence* was more complex. To code violent events, we began with variables in DoCA that identify SMOs at events and whether the tactics they employed were violent. There are two ways to measure whether tactics were violent within DoCA: through specific protest types (e.g., riots, scuffles, or attacks) in the "event forms" variables or through an indicator variable measuring whether violence was present at an event. Most previous work measuring violence in DoCA uses the event forms variable (e.g., Maher et al. 2019; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008), but some work also uses the violence indicator variable (Piazza and Wang 2020). We have found serious issues with both strategies for measuring violence. First, less than half of the violent events with SMOs present that are identified by the violence indicator variables can be identified by the event forms variables. Thus, focusing solely on event form would miss violent actions (confirmed through DoCA's "what" variable), such as when the KKK "Severely beat 4 Negro Integration Leaders for Crashing KKK Rally." Second, for both the violence indicator and events forms variables, in some cases, SMOs coded as *perpetrators* of violence were actually *victims*, such as when an assault on the Freedom Riders in Florida by two White men was coded as if the Freedom Riders had committed the violence. Third, in other cases, events coded as violent, such as when the ACLU "threatened legal action," did not appear violent by any definition. These coding issues were serious and lead to some implausible results, such as that the NAACP was the third most violent organization of the period. Out of an initial 841 violent-coded events, we retained 574 events.

When a single event was coded in DoCA as having multiple tactics we coded the event's tactic as the most contentious of the tactics reported. For instance, a vigil that also featured a protest march would be coded as nonviolent disruption, and a march where counter-protesters were physically assaulted would be coded as violence.

We use twelve-month lagged moving averages of our tactical count variables to test when Congress potentially reacts to protest events. These variables reflect the mean number of events over the past twelve calendar months. We use a moving average because the effects of tactical decisions should be most evident in the recent wake of the events. Congress is trying to make sense of information on several disparate topics, and its attention to (and memory of) most SMOs and their behavior is likely short-lived. Our *Black Organization* measure is a dummy variable indicating the SMOs belonged to the Black Civil Rights Movement in the SMC data.

Controls

We use the DW-Nominate measure of *Congresspersons' political ideology* to measure the political context that movements face. DW-Nominate is a scaling procedure that calculates congressional members' ideological positions within an issue space over time based on members' roll-call voting (Lewis et al. 2019). We created scores for Congress each year for the mean of the first dimension of the DW-nominate score, which is commonly treated as a liberal-conservative ideology score for views on the role of the government in the economy and predicts voting behavior by congresspeople well.[5] DW-nominate scores are higher for more conservative congresspeople, so we reverse-coded the measure for more "liberal" movements.[6] Matching DW-Nominate to the movement family gives us a rough indicator of the alignment of the mean congressperson's ideological agreement with the movement. Our measure is highly correlated with the percentage of democratic Congresspeople ($r = .84$).

We control for additional aspects of the political context in several ways. First, we include year-level fixed effects in our models (equivalent to including dummy variables for each unique year in the data), which captures trends at the year level, such as the party of the president party, which might make SMOs more or less likely to testify before Congress overall. We also control for the total number of hearings convened by Congress each month, a measure of the number of hearings at which SMOs could testify. Jointly, these controls capture the effects of larger structural changes over time, such as the "Great Expansion" of hearing topics (Jones, Theriault, and Whyman 2019), which made it more likely for SMOs to testify over time. We do not model committee assignments because SMOs testify across a wide and unpredictable number of committees, so it is neither theoretically nor empirically clear which committees are potential venues for which SMOs. We also do not control for public opinion because most contemporary movements and issues do not have relevant public opinion polling data (Burstein 2014). Finally, we include a count of *Black Members of Congress* taken from the appendix of Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone (2003) to account for the increasing representation of Black people in government and the political opportunities they represented for Black SMOs.

Analysis and Results

Our data show that descriptively Black SMOs engaged in more nondisruptive and nonviolent disruptive events on average but testified less than non-Black SMOs (table 1). Black SMOs averaged .329 nonviolent disruptive events each year, roughly 3.5× the average amount of non-Black nonviolent disruption (0.09). Yet, the average yearly testimony for Black SMOs (.445) was less than one-third the frequency of non-Black SMO testimony (1.475). Black SMOs and non-Black SMOs engaged in similar amounts of violence (0.018 and 0.011, respectively).

Table 1 suggests that the returns to protest for Black SMOs may be lower than that for non-Black SMOs. We assess this here with more sophisticated models by modeling SMO congressional testimony (i.e., the count of SMO hearings each month) as a function of SMO event characteristics and the political environment. We estimate fixed and random effects panel models. SMO-level fixed effects are equivalent to including dummy variables in the analysis for each SMO, meaning that we exploit changes over time for each SMO, controlling away any unmeasured time-invariant SMO-specific effects. Fixed effects are necessary to realize many of the advantages of panel data and are generally preferred to the typical strategy of conditioning on observables (Halaby 2004: 525). In our case, fixed effect models are ideal for controlling for the many (both observable and unobservable) comparative differences between SMOs while leveraging the variability in SMO pressure campaigns and congressional reception over time. Fixed effects also help us account for the "spokes-organization" structure of Congressional testimony, which is dominated by a very few SMOs (Seguin, Maher, and Zhang 2023). Using SMO fixed effects, however, means we *cannot* estimate effects for variables that do not vary significantly over time, so we supplement these analyses with random effects models that exploit comparative differences in SMOs. We estimate

Table 1. Yearly Black & Non-Black SMO Activity & Congressional Hearings

	Mean	Min	Max	St. Dev.	SD (Between)	SD (Within)
Black SMOs						
Yearly Congressional Testimony	0.445	0	30	1.745	1.178	1.137
Nondisruptive Events (One Year M.A.)	0.166	0	28.417	1.086	0.764	0.629
Nonviolent Disruptive Events (One Year M.A.)	0.329	0	120.42	3.189	1.245	2.847
Violent Events (One Year M.A.)	0.018	0	6	0.201	0.064	0.189
Non-Black SMOs						
Yearly Congressional Testimony	1.475	0	139	5.507	4.029	2.72
Nondisruptive Events (One Year M.A.)	0.078	0	23.5	0.521	0.334	0.33
Nonviolent Disruptive Events (One Year M.A.)	0.09	0	52.583	0.634	0.328	0.553
Violent Events (One Year M.A.)	0.011	0	12.083	0.199	0.094	0.169

all models using OLS. All models include fixed effects for each year to control for time trends and cluster standard errors at the SMO level. We present the results from these analyses in Table 2.

We conduct several analyses regressing social movement tactics and several control variables on SMO acceptance by Congress (i.e., the count of SMO hearings each month). In our base models (Table 2, 1&2), we find that, net of total hearings and congressional ideology, SMOs that used nondisruptive tactics in the past 12 months testified more often ($p < .001$), but SMOs that used nonviolent disruption ($p < .001$) or violence ($p < .05$) in the past 12 months testified less often. We also find that total hearings were significant in models 1 & 2, and across each of our extended models ($p < .001$), indicating that a more active Congress increased the likelihood of SMO invitations. Congressional ideology was not significant across any of our models, likely because minority party members can invite witnesses, muting the effect of party control on the composition of hearing panels. Finally, we find that an increase in the number of Black congressmembers had a net positive effect overall on SMO testimony ($p < .001$), but the negative interactions with Black SMOs ($p < .01$) offset the main effect, so that the direction of the effect for Black SMOs was inconsistent across our models, but generally close to zero, consistent with previous work that finds that Black representation reduced the likelihood of Civil Rights protest during this time period (Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003; Maher et al. 2019).

Models 3 & 4 introduce an interaction term for nondisruptive events by SMOs that are part of the Black Civil Rights Movement. In both models, we find that nondisruptive events by Black Civil Rights SMOs are significantly ($p < .001$) less likely to lead to congressional hearings than nondisruptive action by non-Black SMOs, while nondisruptive protest continues to be significant independent of these effects ($p < .001$). As visualized in figure 1, nondisruptive protest is associated with some additional hearings for Black SMOs but an order of magnitude fewer than for non-Black SMOs[7]. To put this in perspective, an additional nondisruptive protest event that was covered in the *New York Times* is associated with being invited to one additional Congressional hearing for non-Black groups on average, but only for about one-tenth of a hearing for Black organizations.

We introduce an interaction term for nonviolent disruptive events by SMOs that are part of the Black Civil Rights Movement in Models 5 & 6. In both models, we find that nonviolent disruptive events by Black Civil Rights SMOs are significantly ($p < .001$) less likely to lead to congressional hearings than nondisruptive action by non-Black SMOs. As visualized in figure 2, nonviolent disruptive protest is associated with greater hearings for non-Black SMOs, but fewer hearings for Black SMOs. For example, an additional 12 nonviolent disruptive protest events, or one monthly event over a year, would be associated with an average of one additional congressional hearing for a non-Black SMO, but with roughly one *fewer* hearing for a Black SMO.

Table 2. Panel Regressions of Tactics on Monthly Congressional Hearings

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Nondisruptive Tactics	0.65***	0.64***	0.90***	0.88***	0.65***	0.64***	0.65***	0.64***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Nonviolent Disruption	−0.04***	−0.04***	0.00	0.00	0.07***	0.07***	−0.04***	−0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Violent Disruption	−0.11*	−0.10*	−0.13**	−0.12**	−0.14**	−0.14**	−0.08	−0.08
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Black SMO	−0.06*		−0.04		−0.05*		−0.06*	
	(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.02)	
Black SMO*Nondisruptive Tactics			−0.83***	−0.82***				
			(0.04)	(0.04)				
Black SMO*Nonviolent Disruption					−0.13***	−0.13***		
					(0.02)	(0.02)		
Black SMO*Violent Disruption							−0.16	−0.16
							(0.12)	(0.12)
Congressional Ideology	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Black Congresspeople/100	0.09***	0.09***	0.10***	0.10***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Black Congresspeople*	−0.07**	−0.08**	−0.11***	−0.11***	−0.09***	−0.09***	−0.07**	−0.08**
Black SMO	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Total Congressional Hearings/100	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SMO Fixed Effects	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	−0.08***	−0.07***	−0.09***	−0.07***	−0.09***	−0.07***	−0.08***	−0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
SMO-Month Observations	411,042	411,042	411,042	411,042	411,042	411,042	411,042	411,042
Unique SMOs	1460	1460	1460	1460	1460	1460	1460	1460

Standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

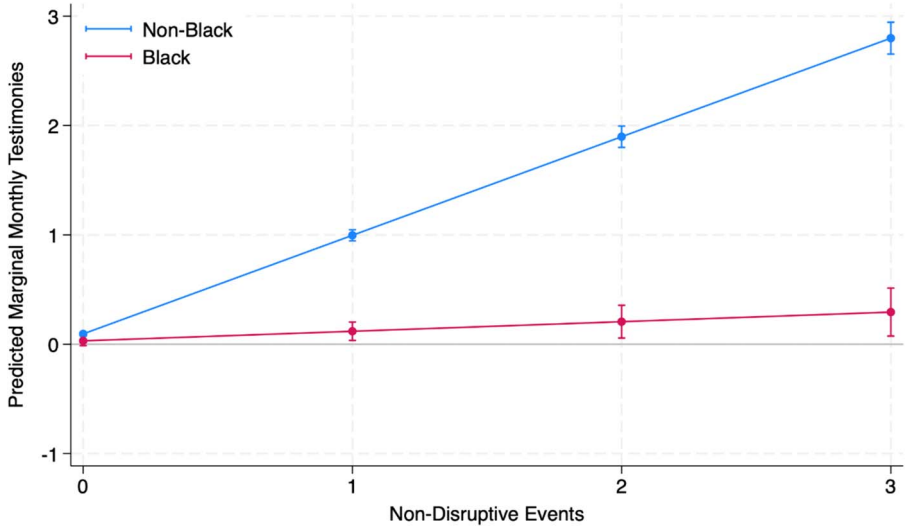

Figure 1. Black and Non-Black SMO testimony marginal effects by nondisruptive events

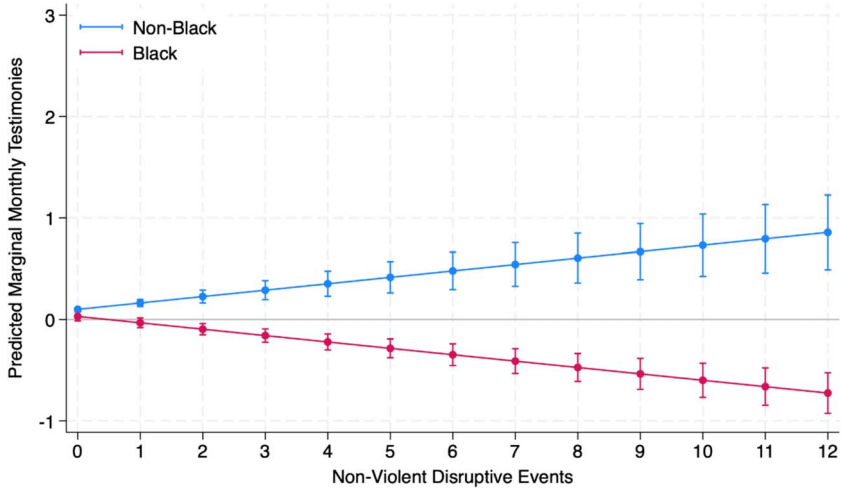

Figure 2. Black and non-Black SMO testimony marginal effects by nonviolent disruption

Finally, we introduce an interaction between Black Civil Rights SMOs and violent events in Models 7 & 8. These interactions are not significant, which may either be due to an insufficient number of cases of violence in our data or to Congress not distinguishing between violent and nonviolent disruption when instigated by Black SMOs. We must note two things about these models. First, in the random effects model (Model 7), violence continues to be significant and negative suggesting that violence broadly hinders SMO testimony, but there is no significant difference for Black and non-Black SMOs. Second, the interaction between Black*Violence, although not significant, is similar in size to the Black*Non-violence interaction, and so we cannot entirely rule out a greater violence penalty for Black SMOs.

Our methods thus far cannot rule out the possibility that nonviolent disruption by other SMOs from groups that are widely stigmatized (e.g., communists, white supremacists, etc.) would be similarly received by Congress (Schneider and Ingram 1993). We test this directly by estimating

Table 3. Movement Family Specific Panel Regressions of Tactics on Monthly Congressional Hearings

Movement	Violent Disruption	Nonviolent Disruption	Nondisruptive Tactics
Civil Rights Black	0.021	−0.026***	0.079***
Anti-War	−0.157	0.010	0.066
Labor	−1.176	0.607***	0.685***
Nativist Supremacist	0.006	−0.007	0.015
Civil Liberties	−0.051	0.070	0.850***
Environment Or Conservation	0.000	0.292	2.826***
Civil Rights Jewish	0.065	−0.040	0.046
Feminism Or Women's Rights	0.000	0.908***	1.200***
Communist	−0.017	−0.003	0.049*
Welfare Rights	0.000	0.122	0.091
Anti-Abortion	1.416	0.078*	−0.204
LGBTQ Rights	0.000	0.093**	−0.146
Civil Rights Hispanic	−0.067	0.130	0.540***
Abortion And Reproductive Rights	0.000	0.045	0.126
Veterans Rights	0.000	−0.337	1.29*

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$ (two-tailed tests). Note that each row is a movement-family specific regression that controls for total hearings and congressional ideology.

separate OLS regressions with SMO-level fixed effects for each movement family with the tactics and control measures included in the models above. Table 3 shows the results and significance for the tactics measures for the top fifteen social movement families ranked by frequency of coverage in DoCA. Note that the Black Civil Rights movement is the only social movement family with a negative and significant effect for nonviolent contention.

Robustness Checks

Our findings are robust to several different modeling and coding decisions, which we report in Appendix II, including logging the dependent variable (see the online supplementary material for table II.A), and using nine or fifteen-month lags for the moving averages of our tactics variables (see the online supplementary material for tables II.B and II.C), although the coefficients for the violence measure are not consistently significant in the nine-month models.

Our findings are also generally robust to alternative coding of events for our tactics variables. We address substantive concerns about what types of actions constitute violence (Kadivar and Ketchley 2018) by including scuffles/fights with our violent disruption measure (see the online supplementary material for table II.D). We also removed the three rarest event forms (motorcades, dramaturgical demonstrations, and ceremonies, see the online supplementary material for table II.E). The results for both are substantively identical. Our results are also robust to including all three interaction terms in the same model (see the online supplementary material for table II.F).

Our results hold when we measure Black SMOs as all Black SMOs, rather than only Black Civil Rights SMOs (see the online supplementary material for table II.G). Results are also robust to including a measure of other non-Black minority groups (Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans) and interactions with our tactics measures (see the online supplementary material for table II.H). Here, we find that, while our Black SMO variable and interactions remain significant, the non-Black minority measure is only significant in interaction with the non-disruptive tactics measure. These results (and the results from table 3) suggest that minorities in general may be ignored when employing nondisruptive tactics, but the penalty for nonviolent disruption is specific to Black organizations.

It is possible that our results are driven by the SMOs which testify the most before Congress. We re-ran our results with the top three Black SMOs organizations removed (see the online supplementary material for table II.I) with substantively identical results. It is also possible that the returns to protest are stronger for less represented SMOs that have not been accepted into the polity. We therefore re-ran our analyses with any SMOs that were below the median congressional representation (three total testimonies). The disruption measures are less consistent, but our results (particularly the interactions) are robust (see the online supplementary material for table II.J).

Finally, our analyses cover multiple decades of significant social changes. We tried to address whether these time effects influenced our analyses by splitting the sample into before and after the midpoint of our study, June-1977 (see the online supplementary material for tables II.K and II.L), covering much of the peak of the Black Civil Rights movement before 1977, and the events that signaled the tail end of the Civil Rights wave (e.g., Bakke v. Michigan) after 1977. The results are mostly the same, with two nuances. First, in the post-1977 sample, the Black*nondisruption interaction is no longer significant. Second, the post-1977 Black*nonviolent disruption interaction is much larger in magnitude, suggesting that Congress was relatively less welcoming of Black nonviolent disruption post-1977, consistent with the history of the movement (McAdam 1999). In sum, our results are robust to a multitude of alternative measurement and modeling approaches.

Discussion and Conclusion

We drew on data from 1462 SMOs from 35 different social movement families to determine whether SMO disruption leads to more appearances at congressional hearings. Although nondisruptive protest has a significant and positive effect on testimony for Black and non-Black SMOs, the effect for Black SMOs is an order of magnitude smaller than for Non-Black SMOs. Following stories of participation in nonviolent disruption, Non-Black SMOs were *more* likely to testify before Congress, but Black SMOs were *less* likely to testify. Both Black and non-Black SMOs were less likely to be invited when they were in the news media for violent disruption.

Thus, it is not simply that Black SMOs face higher hurdles to testifying in the face of racist constructions, but that Black SMOs face a strategic bind. Efforts to advocate through nondisruptive tactics are somewhat effective but far less effective than when employed by non-Black SMOs. Thus, Black SMOs may understandably feel compelled to turn toward disruption to gain attention (Oliver 2017; Morris 2019), as these tactics are effective ways for marginalized movements to generate media coverage (e.g., Amenta et al. 2019; Amenta and Caren 2022) and achieve many policy victories (e.g., Biggs and Andrews 2015). But, by doing so, they hinder their opportunities for congressional acceptance. This also suggests that the impact of the Civil Rights movement, one of the most influential social movements in recent history, was more muted than the size and intensity of its mobilization would have predicted. Prior work suggests that these effects result from widespread racist constructions of Black people as violent and threatening. Congress, like the public (Manekin and Mitts 2022; Peay and Camarillo 2021), may interpret peaceful Black protest as violence.

There are several limitations to our analyses here. First, we focus solely on the first-order effects of tactical decisions, and disruption may instead work through a radical flank that legitimates more moderate groups (Chenoweth 2023; Haines 1984; Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2022), which could mean that what drives the representation of individual SMOs does not drive the representation of their respective movements. Second, our data on events come from media accounts, so our analysis demonstrates the effects of protest covered in the *New York Times*, and our results are unlikely to generalize to protest which is not covered in the media. We note that SMOs' reliance on news media to spread their messages introduces other binds for movements that are beyond the scope of our study (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Sobieraj 2011). Third, our models do not fully capture how Black SMOs move from outsiders to polity members over our period of analysis. While some prior case-oriented research has documented these

changes (Minta 2021), more work is needed to document the fitful shift toward a fully realized pluralistic democracy. Finally, our tactics data are historical (1960–1995), and our results may be an artifact of a bygone racialized system. Systems of racial oppression changed during the latter half of the twentieth century (Bonilla-Silva 2006), and the tactical binds of the past may operate differently as a result. Although some experimental evidence supporting a tactical bind for Black movements is quite recent (Manekin and Mitts 2022; McVeigh, Carbonaro, and Cannady 2022; Peay and Camarillo 2021), more research is needed.

Despite these limitations, our results demonstrate how Congress is particularly conservative in its acceptance of disruptive tactics and how Congress's view of the acceptability of tactics is racially contingent. Future research should more thoroughly explore how models of social movement behavior are contingent on race as well as other axes of inequality such as class, gender, sexuality, and age. Furthermore, prior research on interest groups argues that the combination of political engagement and resource availability shapes political influence and media coverage (Albert 2013; Andrews and Caren 2010; Grossmann 2012; Leyden 1995) and understanding how these factors shape (and are shaped by) tactical decisions may yield further insights into how marginalized groups can influence the political process.

Endnotes

1. Acceptance is similar to Schumaker's (1975) notion of "access responsiveness," or the willingness of a government to hear interest organizations' concerns, and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's (2001, 145) notion of "certification" or "the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities." Acceptance is different from "new advantages" such as legislative success, or other "middle level" outcomes such as "access" or "inclusion" that are more than acceptance and representation but short of structural change (Amenta and Young 1999; Gamson 1990; Hansen 1991). Of course, not all congressional testimony signals acceptance. Congressional testimony may sometimes be stigmatizing (Pontikes, Negro, and Rao 2010). We address these concerns when discussing how we construct our dependent variable.
2. The lines between interest groups, advocacy groups, and SMOs are blurry at best (Andrews and Edwards 2004; Burstein 2021). Here, we are deliberately inclusive of all organizations that are outside (nongovernmental) actors that challenge or defend existing structures or systems of authority primarily through tactics such as protest, boycotts, or information campaigns (as opposed to electorally oriented activities) in our dataset (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004). We are inclusive because we are interested in how Congress responds to noninstitutional pressure from all sources, and because we want to capture the many advocacy organizations who shift tactics and characteristics over time.
3. Whether property destruction is a form of violence is controversial (Kadivar and Ketchley 2018). We treat property destruction as a form of violence because we expect that congressmembers' predisposition toward order and institutional politics will lead them to see property destruction as violence. We conduct robustness checks to determine if alternative conceptualizations affect our results.
4. This framework treats SMO families as mutually exclusive and groups organizations with those with which they are most ideologically aligned. The 35 social movement families include: Abortion and Reproductive Rights, AIDS, Animals, Anti-Abortion, Anti-Alcohol, Anti-Smoking, Anti-War, Children's Rights, Christian Rights, Civic, Civil Liberties, Civil Rights Asian, Civil Rights Black, Civil Rights Hispanic, Civil Rights Jewish, Civil Rights Native American, Communist, Conservative, Consumer, Disabled Rights, Education, Environment or Conservation, Farmers, Feminism or Women's Rights, Gun Control, Gun Rights, Labor, LGBTQ Rights, Nativist Supremacist, Old Age, Prison Reform and Prisoner's Rights, Progressive, Veterans Rights, Welfare Rights, and Transnational and diaspora movements.

5. The second dimension picks up regional differences in policy issues such as slavery, Jim Crow, and bimetallism. We do not include this dimension because it declined in importance after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent party realignment.
6. These were all movement families except the Conservative, Nativist/Supremacist, Gun Rights, Christian Rights, and Anti-Abortion movements. The Conservative movement category is a generic category that captures taxation, individual freedoms, and other conservative causes.
7. The x-axes for figures 1 and 2 are based on the empirical ranges of the data. We do not normalize them to one another because it would require either extrapolating beyond the range of what we can observe or censoring observed data.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online.

Data availability

The data underlying this article are available here: https://osf.io/cqsh6/.

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