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The public, the protester, and the bill: do legislative agendas respond to public opinion signals?

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ABSTRACT
Legislators adapt their policies and agendas to public priorities. Yet research on dynamic representation usually focuses on the influence of public opinion through surveys leaving out other public opinion signals. We incorporate mobilization of the public through protest. Combining insights from social movement studies and political science, we expect protest not to have a direct effect on attention change in legislative agendas. If anything protest should have an amplification effect on public priorities. Using a new and unique data set covering collective action, public opinion and legislative agendas across almost 40 years in four Western democracies, we confirm the effect of public opinion through surveys but find no support for a direct effect of protest. Protest rarely moves legislators: only in very specific issues will protest interact with public priorities and affect attention change in legislative agendas. Our results have important implications for policy representation.

Introduction

Responsiveness of policymakers to the issue priorities of the public is an important aspect of democratic representation (e.g., Bevan & Jennings, 2014). Yet, since attention is scarce, policymakers frequently cannot attend to all incoming information by their citizens (e.g., Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). This leads policymakers to focus their attention on issues citizens care most about while ignoring others the public is less concerned with (e.g., Mortensen *et al.*, 2011). In political science, an impressive body of research has put these basic ideas of democratic representation to test and confirms that policymakers tend to respond on issues that are important to the public (e.g., Burstein & Linton, 2002).

Far less attention, however, has been paid to different types of opinion signals and how they might affect, thwart or reinforce each other. Although

numerous accounts show that politicians attend to a variety of sources when trying to figure out what the public cares about – for instance, from mass media (Herbst, 1998), over contact with constituents (Fenno, 1978), opinion polling (Geer, 1996) to different forms of advocacy (Burstein, 2014) – this variety of signals has not been adequately reflected in the empirical literature on democratic representation. Our study addresses this research gap. Besides public opinion through surveys, we add one other expression of public opinion to the puzzle: protest. We ask: Do policymakers react to issues primed by protest? And, how does the influence of protest compare to the cues presented by public opinion in the polls?

Studying responsiveness to protest and how protest and public opinion signals relate to each other is important for a number of reasons. First, in the last few decades, mobilization of public opinion through protest has increased across Western democracies (Dalton, 2017), challenging the role of political parties as traditional channels of representation. Social movement scholars and comparativists speak of 'demonstration democracies' and 'social movement societies' (Dalton, 2008; Norris, Walgrave, & Van Aelst, 2005). From a democratic theory perspective, thus, this rise in protest brings about the question of whether governments should be responsive to this other, mobilized form of public opinion.

Second, this rise in protest has renewed attention to the political consequences of protest as well, although primarily in sociology (for a review, see Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010). Although comparative scholarship has identified an agenda-setting effect of protest – i.e., when protest activity relating to an issue increases, political elites start to devote more attention to that issue (Vliegenthart et al., 2016, p. 838) – contrary to the political science research on democratic linkage, studies on the impact of protest have produced mixed findings (Giugni, 2007; Uba, 2009). One reason for these inconclusiveness is that the lion's share of protest impact studies are case studies, focusing on one movement or issue in a single country, giving researchers little leverage to tease out potential contingencies (but see: Hutter & Vliegenthart, 2018; Vliegenthart et al., 2016; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012).

Third, how the impact of protest relates to alternative expressions of public opinion known to determine policy making – like opinion polls – has so far received only scant empirical attention (Burstein & Linton, 2002). Work by Agnone (2007) and Giugni (2007) points towards an interaction effect of protest and public opinion. While Agnone proposes an 'amplification model', whereby the impact of public opinion on legislative action is greater depending on the level of protest, Giugni argues for a 'joint-effect model', where movement impact on policy change is forthcoming when public opinion intervenes together with movement mobilization. However, such ideas have only been tested on a limited number of countries or issues.

With this study, we seek to contribute to both political science and sociology. We expand the limited comparative studies of dynamic agenda representation by adding protest to the mix of incoming signals; and we contribute to the literature on protest impact by scrutinizing multiple issues across multiple countries. To date, we are unaware of comparative studies that jointly consider the impact of public opinion through surveys and public opinion through protest on policymakers' legislative agendas.

We hypothesize that public priorities, as expressed through surveys, have a stronger impact on legislative agendas compared to public priorities as expressed through protest. The main signaling function of protest, we suggest, lies in sensitizing legislators to certain issues that are already quite dominant across the general public, as such amplifying the impact of general public opinion signals (Agnone, 2007; Giugni, 2007).

Based on a novel assembled dataset, we present a series of error correction models of time-series cross-sectional data on legislative agendas collected by the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), public issue priorities from a variety of national opinion polls, and protest from three different data sources across almost 40 years (1974–2011) in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Our study is the first that combines data on public opinion polls, protest and legislative agendas across countries and for such a long time span.

Our pooled analysis confirms established findings on long-term effects of public issue priorities on policy agendas and reveals that protest does not have any impact on change in legislative agendas. This general pattern is largely supported in issue-specific analyses, whereby protest only has a significant effect on one issue – social welfare. However, we find support for an amplification mechanism in cases of domestic policy that touch citizens' life more directly like education, housing and unemployment.

On the one hand, we find that protest does not play much of an important role in changing policymakers' attention in legislative agendas, legitimizing political scientists' ignorance of this democratic input signal allegedly on the rise. On the other hand, our findings do suggest that protest *can* be an influential informational resource for policy-making. The impact of protest, however, is highly contingent and only rarely materializes. Only if protesters' signal is strong and supported by public priorities will protest matter for attention changes.

Our findings have important implication for mass-elite linkages and social movement strategies. Our finding that policymakers follow signals from the public at large but not to specific groups in the society confirms that democratic governments tend to represent and respond to the concerns of the general public rather than to the priorities of a particularly active segment of the public. Our finding is thus reassuring for those who see demonstration democracies as a threat to the representation of the silent majority in favor of the representation of a loud minority. On the other side, the very limited

influence of protest may be disappointing for those who, instead, hoped for a more profound influence on agenda dynamics of more engaged parts of the public.

Our result that protest has a larger influence on issue attention in legislation when the priorities of protesters are strong and aligned to the priorities of the general public, even if for a limited number of issues, is important for social movement strategies and confirms previous findings of a limited impact of protest on policy (e.g., Burstein & Linton, 2002; Giugni, 2007). Our findings are to some extent in line with Agnone's (2007) amplification mechanism and suggest that the context in which protest takes place is crucial in determining the power of protest itself. The protest's role in influencing policymakers' attention would be more successful if understood as a salience-raising element rather than an independent signal.

How legislative agendas adapt to external stimuli

Political science research on the opinion-policy nexus is old and venerable. The common denominator of the incredible amount of studies on the opinion-policy relationship is that public opinion has been essentially studied as a monolithic entity, namely the mean voter, measured through public opinion polls (for an overview, see Manza & Cook, 2002).

In general, research suggests that public opinion sends two signals to policymakers. First, the public reveals its opinion through expressing their policy preferences – e.g., asking for more or less spending (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995). Second, the public also signals the importance or priority of policy issues – e.g., by naming the most important issue facing the nation (Jennings & Wlezien, 2011; Wlezien, 2005). This duality has generated two strands of research. The first perspective looks at responsiveness in terms of *position* and investigates whether citizens' preferences have an impact on policy outputs (e.g., Lax & Phillips, 2009; Lax & Phillips, 2012; Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). The second perspective looks at responsiveness in terms of *attention* and investigates whether policymakers adapt their agendas to citizens' issue priorities (e.g., Bevan & Jennings, 2014; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Mortensen *et al.*, 2011).

Importantly, governments first need to pay attention to public issue priorities for policy responsiveness to preferences can happen (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). The former is a precondition for the latter. We analyze whether attention change in legislative agendas responds to changes in issue priorities of the public. We know from previous research that different policy issues promote different levels of policy representation – e.g., responsiveness on domestic issues is found to be higher than on foreign policy issues (e.g., Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2005; Miller & Stokes, 1963) – and that the latter also depends on issue salience (e.g., Page & Shapiro, 1983; Soroka &

Wlezien, 2010). If dynamic agenda representation works, then when an issue becomes salient to the public, it is more likely that the government will respond on that issue by paying more attention to it in its agendas. For our purposes, this implies that a change in public opinion's priorities would be followed by a change of government priorities in its legislative agenda.[1]

Two mechanisms are understood to drive legislators' responsiveness on salient issues: policymakers' desire of being re-elected and attention scarcity. On the one hand, salient issues should be decisive at the ballot box. Since legislators have a tremendous interest in seeking re-election they cannot afford to neglect voters' concerns and demands (Downs, 1957; Stimson, Mackuen, & Erikson, 1995; Strøm, 1990), and this also applies to citizens' issue priorities. On the other hand, given the complexity and the amount of public demands, attention is scarce and this has severe consequences for agenda representation (Bevan & Jennings, 2014; Jennings & John, 2009; Jones & Baumgartner, 2004; Kingdon, 1995). Hence, policymakers prioritize those issues on their agendas which are most important to the public and pay less attention to the ones the public is less concerned with (Mortensen et al., 2011).

We note that most of the previous work on agenda responsiveness (and congruence) focuses on rhetorical agendas and research based on legislative agendas is mostly made of single-country studies (Brunner, 2013; Chaqués Bonafont & Palau, 2011; John, Bevan, & Jennings, 2011; Jones & Baumgartner, 2004; Lindeboom, 2012; Visconti, 2018). Thus, we believe that a comparative test on the effect of public priorities on change in legislative agendas is still important, not only in comparison with protest priorities but also for enlarging existing empirical evidence. In summary, we agree with previous research and suggest that policymakers adapt their legislative priorities to public priorities:

Public Opinion Hypothesis: Public issue priorities have an effect on attention change in legislative agendas.

Whereas evidence for the translation of public issue priorities to policy priorities is robust, there is less consensus regarding the role of political protest in democratic linkage processes (for a recent overview see: Amenta et al., 2010). For long, the power of protest to shape the legislative agenda has been left empirically unexplored. Whereas sociologists presumed social movement activity to be an important force of social change and, therefore, studied processes of protest emergence and mobilization (McAdam, 1982), political scientists regarded protesters as 'beggars at the policy gates', not even considering protest when studying democratic linkage.

Since the turn of the century, however, the legislative impact of protest has become increasingly empirically scrutinized, albeit primarily by sociologists (Amenta, Caren, & Olasky, 2005; Andrews, 2001; Soule, McAdam, McCarthy, & Su, 1999; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012), less so by political scientists (but see: Costain & Majstorovic, 1994; Gillion, 2013). Moreover, most of

these studies tend to be case studies, focusing on a single movement or issue, hindering generalization (for multiple issue studies, see Hutter & Vliegenthart, 2018; Vliegenthart et al., 2016). The standing conclusion of this literature is that protest can matter, but that it does so rarely independently or directly. Rather, the impact of protest is contingent upon the context in which it is organized. In the next few paragraphs, we elaborate on this argument from a policymakers' perspective.

Why would policymakers be responsive to protest signals? Skeptics hold that there is little incentive for elected officials to respond to protest. As gaining re-election is the main goal for elected officials, their actions should especially be guided by what occupies the majority of the public (Arnold, 1990). So, only when protest succeeds to make a powerful assertion of popular sovereignty, it might directly influence policymakers (Wouters & Walgrave, 2017). Most often, however, protest is staged by disenfranchised actors with more extreme, minoritarian stances and select, deviating priorities compared to the median voter (Lohmann, 1993). Giugni (2007:, p. 54) underscores the limited signaling strength of protest when he describes movements as 'minority actors that have little power'. Burstein and Linton (2002) hold that the potential political impact of protest is probably only moderate at best, and likely to decline or even disappear when measures of public opinion are taken into account. Amenta (2014) goes even a step further and posits that protests are often counterproductive because protesters frequently mobilize in response to threatening political circumstances.

Two empirical findings further ground the claim of no direct link between protest and legislation. First, several studies find that especially organizational capacity and institutional strategies of movements (for instance, lawsuits and other legal actions, petitioning, letter-writing, lobbying, press conferences) matter in shaping policy outcomes, far less so the extra-institutional strategy of protest (Johnson, Agnone, & McCarthy, 2010; Soule & Olzak, 2004). Second, research suggests that the influence of protest is most likely at the early agenda-setting stage and decreases dramatically along the policy cycle (King, Bentele, & Soule, 2007; McAdam & Su, 2002). In sum, there are reasons to expect that protest has no direct effect on attention change in legislative agendas, or at best weaker compared to that of public opinion through polls. Here, for the first time, we formally test such a hypothesis across a multitude of issues and countries:

Protest Hypothesis: Protest does not have a direct effect on attention change in legislative agendas.

Social movement scholars have developed more comprehensive frameworks to account for the impact of protest, however. In line with the dominant political opportunity perspective and the political mediation model (Amenta, 2005; Kriesi, Koopmans, Dyvendak, & Giugni, 1995), these studies hold that especially a favorable context is decisive for movement success (Amenta

et al., 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Soule & Olzak, 2004; Vliegenthart, 2016). Without supportive external resources presented by a favorable context, protest is toothless; given the right circumstances, however, protest can make a difference. For instance, the presence of political allies and the composition of governments (Amenta *et al.*, 2010; Lipsky, 1968) or favorable media attention (Vliegenthart *et al.*, 2016; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012) is expected to boost protest power.

Here, we focus on one other key characteristic of the political context: the issue priorities of the general public. We expect the impact of public opinion on legislative agendas to increase when also protest activity on that particular issue increases. Our argument is straightforward. Protest amplifies the effect of public opinion on policy as it raises the salience and visibility of an issue for legislators. As attention is scarce and politicians operate in a complex and volatile information environment, situations in which protest cues are congruent with citizens' priorities are more likely to induce legislative action. We know only of two studies that test this moderating role between public opinion and protest. Both Giugni (2007) and Agnone (2007), in what they respectively call a 'joint-effect model' and 'amplification model', mount evidence that protest indeed sensitizes legislators to public opinion. We formalize this reinforcing link between public opinion and protest in our third hypothesis:

Amplification Hypothesis: The effect of public issue priorities on attention change in legislative agendas rises with increasing protest.

Data and methods

We are interested in the relationship between public priorities, protest and legislative agendas. Ideally, our data should ensure a measure of these concepts across a large sample of countries and time in order to estimate pooled time-series cross-section analyses. Unfortunately, comparable cross-national data for all three concepts are scarce. However, we managed to compile comparable data for Germany (1986–2011), Spain (1983–2011), the United Kingdom (1980–2011) and the United States (1974–1995).

To measure legislative agendas, we rely on the data stemming from the collection efforts by the CAP (Breunig & Schnatterer, 2018; John, Bertelli, Jennings, & Bevan, 2013).[2] The CAP team collects legislative agendas across a total of 20 countries. Based on an exhaustive codebook, human coders allocate legislation to major topics as displayed in Table 1.

We rely on the Statutes of the American Congress and on UK Acts of Parliament to measure legislative agendas in the US and the UK respectively. In all cases, the coded time point is the date upon which a bill was signed into law. For Germany and Spain we used data on legislative bills adopted by parliament. While the regulations of who introduces legislation and how it is

Table 1. CAP issue codes.

1. Macroeconomics	12. Law, Crime
2. Civil Rights	13. Social Welfare
3. Health	14. Housing
4. Agriculture	15. Banking, Finance*
5. Labor and Employment	16. Defense + 19. International Affairs
6. Education	17. Science*
7. Environment + 8. Energy	18. Foreign Trade*
9 Immigration	20. Government Operations*
10. Transportation*	21. Public Lands*

Notes: * indicates major topic excluded from our analysis due to missing protest and/or public priorities data.

adopted vary across our sample, in most countries legislation is crucially depending on support by the government. Instead of using the counted number of laws for each country and time period, we calculated the share of legislation for each year and country – similar to previous research based on CAP data (Bevan & Jennings, 2014; Jennings & John, 2009).

To measure public priorities – the set of policy issues to which the public attends (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004) – we use surveys inquiring the 'most important problem/issue' (MIP/MII) facing the country. Although some discussion exists on the unclear definition in the most important problem/issue – i.e., whether an issue is really a problem, whether salience and importance are the same thing and whether variation in problem status can be correlated with importance over time (for details see: Jennings & Wlezien, 2011; Wlezien, 2005) – Jennings and Wlezien (2011:, pp. 554–555) find that MIP and MII series 'capture many of the same things, both at particular points in time and over time'. Hence, we use the aggregated MIP/MII responses to quantify public priorities. To guarantee comparability to the legislative agendas outlined above, we recoded all answers into the CAP's major topics described in Table 1.[3] We then calculated the percentage of respondents listing a problem/issue the most important for each major CAP topic.

We merge three different datasets on collective action to retrieve the necessary information on political protest. First, we use the European Protest and Coercion dataset (EPCD) to measure protest in Germany, the UK and Spain from 1980 until 1995 (Francisco, 1995, 1996, 2004). Unfortunately, the EPCD dataset does not cover the time period after 1995. Thus, starting in 1996 we relied on a dataset collected by Swen Hutter (2014) which largely continues the research undertaken by Kriesi and colleagues (e.g., Kriesi et al., 1995). For the United States we employ the Dynamics of Collective Action (DCA) database for the entire period of observation (1974–1995) (McAdam & Su, 2002). Full information about the protest datasets and their assemblage is reported in Section A2, while summary statistics of all variables and protest by CAP issue are reported in Tables A1–A2 of the Online Appendix.

In Figure 1 we illustrate the structure of our data and provide a face validity check by using a smoothed local function (splines) to visually test if our data reports distinct and crucial breaks in the time trend (outliers with values larger than 0.6 are omitted). If such breaks are visible and align with the time period for which we use a different data source for the European countries (1996) it would suggest that the datasets are reporting significantly different protest trends across time. As shown in Figure 1, however, protests follow a comparably smooth trend between datasets. To be sure that coding differences between datasets are not worrying for our analyses, we also tested for breaks by estimating a time-series model differentiating the three data sources we are relying on. The major difference we are interested in is whether the continuation of Kriesi's work by Hutter reveals significant time trend differences. To do so we coded a dummy variable which is '1' for all time periods for which we use Swen Hutter's dataset. Again, we do not find a significant break in our time-series ($\beta = 5.9e^{-10}$; $P = 0.114$). This suggests that using percentages of protest frequency is a reliable measure across datasets.[4]

Figure 2, next, provides face validity for the quality of our data focusing on one crucial issue in our data: the environment. Notice that the scaling of the y-axes varies across countries to ensure readability of the US case. For instance, a clear peak of environmental protests in Germany is visible after the meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear plant starting around 1986 and ending towards the 1990s. A comparable peak is visible for the US after the Three Mile Island accident in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania (1979). Finally,
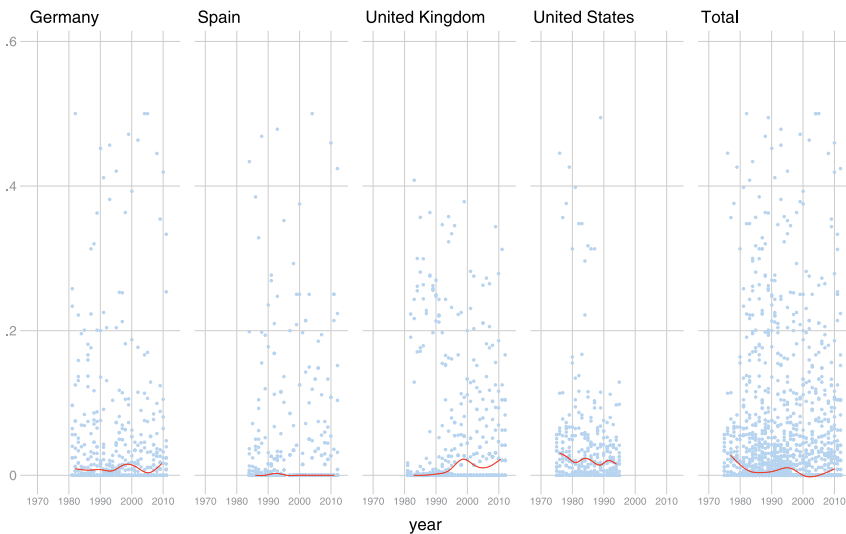

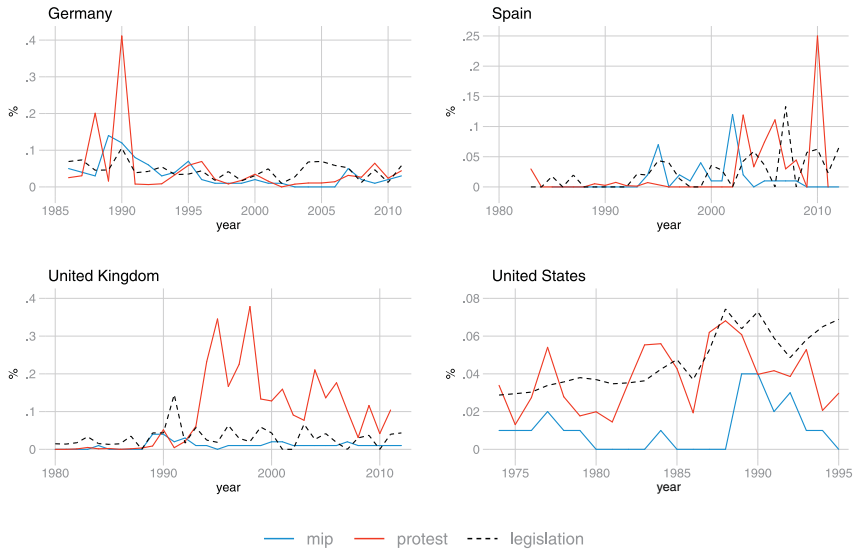**Figure 1.** Development of protest across time, per country.

Figure 2. Development of protest and MIP agenda for environmental concerns.

differences between public priorities and protesters' priorities are visible both across time and countries. While environmental concerns are of low salience both for the public and protesters' in the US, strong discrepancies are visible especially for Spain in the 2000s.

Modeling strategy

Similar to previous research on dynamic agenda representation, we use an error correction model to analyze our data. More specifically, we estimate the following model (Equation 1) in order to test our first two hypotheses (the Public Opinion Hypothesis and the Protest Hypothesis):

$$\Delta LegislativeAgenda_{i,t} = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LegislativeAgenda_{i,t-1}$$
$$+ \beta_2 \Delta PublicPriorities_{i,t} + \beta_3 PublicPriorities_{i,t-1} \tag{1}$$
$$+ \beta_4 \Delta ProtestPriorities_{i,t} + \beta_5 ProtestPriorities_{i,t-1} + \zeta_{i,t} + s_{i,t}$$

with the dependent variable being $\Delta LegislativeAgenda_t$, which denotes change in issue attention in legislative agendas between time t and time $t - 1$, α the intercept, ζ a set of control variables outlined below, and s the error term. Since we do not have strong theoretical reasons for restricting our model and we are interested in testing both short- and long-term effects of public priorities and protest, we follow De Boef and Keele's (2008) advice and estimate an unrestricted model. Hence, $\Delta PublicPriorities_t$ and $\Delta ProtestPriorities_t$ denote the change in public opinion priorities and protest frequency between time t and time $t - 1$, respectively, whereas

$PublicPriorities_{t-1}$ and $ProtestPriorities_{t-1}$ denote previous levels of public priorities and protest frequency, respectively. The coefficient on the variable $LegislativeAgenda_{t-1}$ denotes policymakers' long-term attention and evaluates whether policymakers that increased legislation on a given issue in the previous time period tend to legislate less on that issue in the current time period.

If the Public Opinion Hypothesis is supported, we should expect a positive and statistically significant coefficient on either the $\Delta PublicPriorities_t$ or the $PublicPriorities_{t-1}$ variables. If the Protest Hypothesis is supported, we should, instead, expect an insignificant coefficient on both the $\Delta ProtestPriorities_t$ and the $ProtestPriorities_{t-1}$ variables.

To evaluate the Amplification Hypothesis, we test the conditional effect of public opinion and protest by including two interaction terms, one for the short- and one for the long-term effects: $\Delta PublicPriorities_t \times \Delta ProtestPriorities_t$ and $PublicPriorities_{t-1} \times ProtestPriorities_{t-1}$.

If the hypothesis is supported, we should expect a positive and statistically significant coefficient in either of the two variables. The model is presented in Equation (2):

$$
\begin{aligned}
\Delta LegislativeAgenda_{i,t} = {} & \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LegislativeAgenda_{i,t-1} \\
& + \beta_2 \Delta PublicPriorities_{i,t} + \beta_3 PublicPriorities_{i,t-1} \\
& + \beta_4 \Delta ProtestPriorities_{i,t} + \beta_5 ProtestPriorities_{i,t-1} \\
& + \beta_6 \Delta PublicPriorities_{i,t} \times \Delta ProtestPriorities_{i,t} \\
& + \beta_7 PublicPriorities_{i,t-1} \times ProtestPriorities_{i,t-1} \\
& + \zeta_{i,t} + s_{i,t}
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

To efficiently use our data and to increase our statistical power, we rely on a stacked dataset. Our models are based on country-year observations, which are stacked by issue. Each country-year observation, hence, can appear 12 times, as there are 12 different issues in our dataset. Thus, the Gauss Markov assumptions of standard OLS regression analysis are likely to be violated. Indeed, autocorrelation tests reveal that the null hypothesis of no serial correlation needs to be rejected.[5] Further test-statistics provide evidence that the error terms are heteroscedastic and stationary.[6] The lagged dependent variable controls for autocorrelation. Given that the dataset is stacked by issues, we multi-way cluster our standard errors by country × years in the pooled analysis. In the country- and issue-specific models, we use robust standard errors due to the small clusters included in these analyses. Furthermore, as unobserved heterogeneity potentially infringes the results, we include country fixed effects in most models.

As it is common in time-series-cross-section analysis using lagged variables, it is difficult to judge how long an introduced lag should be. Law-making is a cumbersome process, it can take time for legislators to prepare, discuss, draft, re-draft and to adopt legislation. Therefore, a lag of one year seems plausible

and has been also used in most earlier research about legislative agendas and its adaptation to public opinion and protest (e.g., Bevan & Jennings, 2014; Soule & Olzak, 2004; Stimson *et al.*, 1995).[7]

Results

Table 2 reports the findings from these model specifications using country fixed effects. Column 1 presents our baseline model, where the direct effect of public priorities and protest is tested. Column 2 interacts the short-term effect of protest and public priorities. Column 3 interacts the long-run effect of protest and public priorities. Column 4 presents the full model with both short-term and long-term interaction variables.

Before turning to effects pertaining to public priorities, note that the coefficient on the variable $LegislativeAgenda_{t-1}$ is negative and significant in all analyses, while the coefficient on the intercept is positive and significant, implying a 'regression to the mean' in legislative attention. That is, when legislative attention was unusually high (low) during the previous time period, then attention tended to subsequently decline (increase) in the current period.[8]

In line with previous research, we find support for our Public Opinion Hypothesis, whereby we observe substantively meaningful effects of public priorities on legislative agendas. A one percentage point increase of public priorities is associated with a 6 per cent higher chance of drafting a corresponding legislation. This suggests that, in general, legislators in our countries

Table 2. Does protest influence attention change in legislative agendas? No.

	Δlegislative agenda$_{i,t}$			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
legislative agenda$_{i,t-1}$	−0.325***	−0.325***	−0.326***	−0.326***
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Δprotest$_{i,t}$	−0.017	−0.015	−0.017	−0.016
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Δpublic priorities$_{i,t}$	0.059	0.054	0.060	0.054
	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.032)
protest$_{i,t-1}$	−0.009	−0.009	−0.013	−0.013
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
public priorities$_{i,t-1}$	0.064*	0.063*	0.060*	0.059*
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Δpublic priorities$_{i,t}$ × Δ protest$_{i,t}$		0.390		0.382
		(0.653)		(0.665)
public priorities$_{i,t-1}$ × protest$_{i,t-1}$			0.058	0.054
			(0.086)	(0.092)
constant	0.023	0.023	0.023	0.023
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.157	0.158	0.157	0.158
adj. R^2	0.151	0.151	0.150	0.150
N	1111	1111	1111	1111

Notes**:** pooled (12 topics × 117 country/years).
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

are responsive to public priorities in the long-run. Similar to previous studies, we do not find a significant short-term effect of public opinion priorities on attention change in legislative agendas. We think that this finding is plausible, for the outcome we care about is legislation. As outlined above, adopting legislation can take time which plausibly rules out short-term responsive reactions by legislators to changes in public priorities.

Turning to our Protest Hypothesis that protest does not have a direct effect on legislation, we again find support for our hypothesis. In our analyses we do not find a significant effect of protest on legislation. We estimate the protest effect to be negative, suggesting that, if anything, protest is negatively associated with attention change in legislative agendas. As described in some research above cited, protest is frequently perceived as a signal from protesting minorities and not perceived as a relevant source of information driving the legislative agenda. The coefficient on the protest variables is smaller in size than the one on public priorities and not statistically significant.

Finally, looking into columns 2–4 of Table 2, we do not find any support for amplification mechanisms. Both short-term and long-term interactions are positive and point in the direction of an amplification mechanism, but they are not significant on conventional statistical thresholds.[9]

In short, our findings suggest that legislative agendas respond to public agendas but not protest agendas and we also find no evidence for an amplification effect of protest and public opinion. The robustness of this evidence has been thoroughly tested while adding additional controls and providing alternative model specifications accounting for issue salience, level of protest and speed of responsiveness. All these analyses are reported in Section A3 (Tables A3–A6) of the Online Appendix and keep supporting our substantive conclusions.

Analyzing cross-issue variation

To better understand our findings, we re-estimated our models at the issue level. It might be the case that the association between protest and legislative agendas varies across issues with some issue domains being more plausibly affected by protest than others. Figure 3 reports the coefficients stemming from issue-based models with 95 per cent confidence intervals using the same estimation strategy as outlined above.[10] The upper panel reports the direct effect of protest on legislative agendas. The bottom panel reports the long-running interactions between protest and public priorities.

The upper panel supports our previous results of no direct effect of protest on change in legislative agendas for most issues covered in our data. The only issue reporting a positive association is social welfare. Here, protest seems to be an important source of information to develop legislation. We also find negative and significant but small effects of protest on legislation on issues
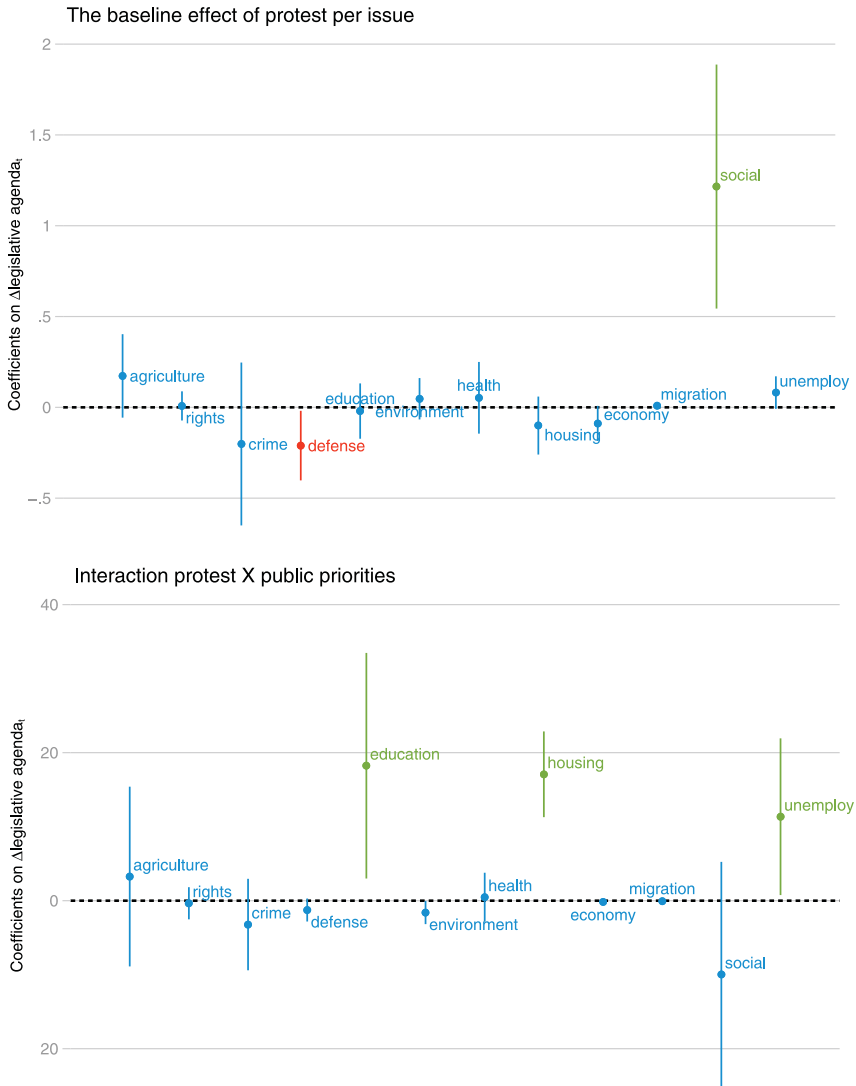
The baseline effect of protest per issue

Interaction protest X public priorities

Figure 3. Does the effect of protest vary across issues? Yes.

on defense. However, these effects are substantively negligible and confidence in the point estimates is small as indicated by the large confidence intervals.

Turning our attention to the bottom panel, we find substantively meaningful and positive significant effects for the interaction between public priorities and protest for legislation on educational, housing and unemployed issues. Protest frequency on these obtrusive issues tends to upscale at various points in time in our data. Interestingly, however, questions of housing and
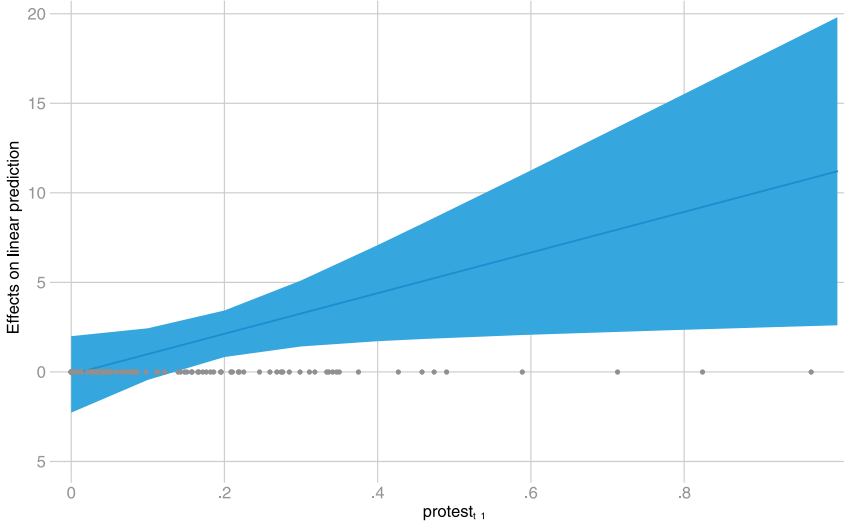
Marginal effect of public opinion

Figure 4. Amplification effect of protest and public opinion for unemployment.

education tend to rank low in public priorities. It seems that for these issues legislators nevertheless tend to listen more closely when protesters are active on the policy domain. This might be because politicians anticipate potential public reactions given the obtrusive nature of the issue when executing their legislative work. Finally, unemployment ranks high both for the public and protesters throughout various points in time. Here, we clearly observe an amplification mechanism as outlined by Agnone (2007).

Figure 4 reports the marginal effect of this interaction with 95 per cent confidence intervals. It becomes visible that the amplification mechanism seems to be working throughout most values of political protest. The effect is substantive in size making legislation more likely by 11 per cent. Given the high protest activity on the issue, particularly in Spain (throughout time), the United Kingdom (throughout time) and Germany (in the 1990s), an amplification effect seems most plausible on this issue instead of low-salience issues, such as the environment, which face infrequent protest activity throughout most periods we analyze.

Conclusion and discussion

Responsiveness to the issue priorities of the public is an essential part of democratic representation. According to democratic theory, what elected officials pay attention to should be in tune with what the public cares about. Yet how legislators respond to different kinds of public opinion signals is still an open question. Given the rise of protest in Western

democracies as a means to express public grievances (Norris *et al.*, 2005), we considered two types of public opinion signals: public issue priorities as measured through surveys and public issue priorities as expressed through protest.

Bridging political science and social movement literature, we hypothesized that both public opinion and protest signals present legislators with different informational cues about what (a particular segment of) the public considers important. We, therefore, expected the political consequences of both to be different as well. Based on a novel assembled dataset, encompassing four countries and 12 issues over a 20 years' time span, we find public priorities as expressed through surveys to have a strong and positive impact on legislative attention. This finding is robust and confirms much of the previous research on dynamic representation. Protest, the alternative signal, has no significant effect on legislative attention. Moreover, the direction of the non-significant protest effect is negative. This confirms the classic image held by political scientists of protesters as beggars at the policy gate.

It is very likely, as we have put forward, that elected officials consider survey-based public issue priorities as more legitimate representations of the priorities of the general public. Priorities as expressed through protest, on the other hand, are considered as only the priorities of a particularly active segment, offering a biased view of the true public's priorities. Moreover, if protest is especially reactive, triggered by political disadvantages, the negative effect of protest is easily explained by the stickiness of the legislative agenda. Earlier policy stages might be more sensitive to protest cues, as previous research has shown, but once policy has changed and protest is triggered, chances of adaptation decrease.

The stronger effect of public opinion's priorities also might be a consequence of the clarity of the survey-based priority agenda. Public priorities are more clearly articulated through surveys, with some issues capturing the lion's share of attention and many issues staying well below the radar. In case of protest, many different issues capture only a moderate share of the agenda. This makes it much easier for elected officials to read, interpret and respond to the general public opinion agenda.

Protest signals are not entirely without legislative consequences, however. Contrary to the effect of public priorities, the effect of protest proves to be extremely contingent. This finding resonates with accounts of sociologists, who argue that protest especially can make a difference when staged in the right context. We find that only protest tackling social welfare issues has a direct and positive effect on change in legislative agendas. And, we find that protest amplifies the effect of public priorities – but only for the issues of housing, education and unemployment, i.e., issues that are very much of a 'bread and butter' nature. These are issues that strongly impact citizens' lives. They are all quite obtrusive and, if not solved or accommodated,

might play out as central issues in upcoming elections. It is reasonable for legislators to avoid further politicization of such issues, and drafting legislation might be one way to get the noisy protesters off the public radar before they cause even more harm.

Our data do not allow us to exactly put our finger on *why* the impact of protest materializes only under these specific circumstances, yet allows us to speculate about such conditions, which might inspire future research. For instance, the direct positive effect of protest on social welfare legislation might be a consequence of protest being staged by strong sponsoring organizations. These organizations often occupy insider positions and are well embedded within civil society and the policy-making machinery. On the other hand, a more fine-grained lag structure than the one our data allows is important to better address the 'timing' issue of agenda responsiveness.

Additionally, we expect that a focus on both characteristics of the signal and elements of the context will help researchers to disentangle the complex knot of diverse democratic linkage across public opinion signals. For instance, the institutional characteristics of the political system might moderate the impact of both public opinion and protest on legislation. In fact, Vliegenthart *et al.* (2016) find that the impact of protest is moderated by features of the political system via media attention on parliamentary questions; with stronger impact of protest in majoritarian compared to consensus democracies.

Finally, another specification of our general model might alter the temporal structure of the responsiveness chain. Although evidence is slim, several studies suggest that the impact of protest on legislation might be sequential, as in a two-step process, with protest first raising the attention of the public, and public opinion subsequently affecting legislators (e.g., Giugni, 2007; McAdam & Su, 2002). Similar specifications can be thought of for the receiver side of public opinion signals as well: it might be that protest and public opinion signals, in general, or on some issues, fare much better with particular parties, or if certain parties are in power. Although these specifications probably apply to earlier stages of the legislative process, opposition parties might be more responsive to protest compared to governing parties or parties that are issue-owner might be more prone to react to protest on that issue compared to others (Hutter & Vliegenthart, 2018). A crucial finding in the recent wave of political impact studies of protest is that exactly the presence of so-called elite allies in power is crucial for the success of protest. This is a difficult task that future research will have to deal with, as it implies classifying issue ownership across a large number of parties, issues and time.

In all, how different public opinion signals translate into legislation turns out to differ strongly across signals and presents researchers with a complex puzzle. The analyses presented in this paper made a significant step forward by, for the first time, integrating public issue priorities and protest priorities across issues and countries and associating these with

legislative attention. Whereas adaptation of legislation to public priorities as measured through surveys appears to be the default, routine, business as usual procedure in politics, the impact of protest shows to be more a matter of the rare, exceptional shock to the system. Our analyses straightfor-wardly confirm decades of research on democratic linkage, and substantiate the use of public priorities through surveys as an essential control when estimating the effects of other signals. With respect to these other signals, like protest, future research will need to flesh out the contingencies of its impact.

Notes

1. Of course, law-making process is not always motivated by changes in public pri-orities. For instance, institutional friction matters (e.g., Bevan & Jennings, 2014; Jones, Larsen-Price, & Wilkerson, 2009). Further, while some research suggests that governing parties tend to also focus on the issues they own in their legis-lative agendas (e.g., Egan, 2013; Green & Jennings, 2019), government partisan-ship seems to matter less (e.g., Bevan & Jennings, 2014) compared to compulsory issues or pressing problems that demand legislative action (e.g., Adler & Wilkerson, 2012).
2. The data were originally collected by Laura Chaqués-Bonafont, Anna M. Palau and Luz M. Muñoz, with the collaboration of graduate students and the financial support of the Spanish Ministry of Innovation and Science and the Agència de Gestió d'Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca (AGAUR). Neither these public institutions nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analysis reported here. *Public Laws*. The Policy Agendas Project at the Uni-versity of Texas at Austin, 2017. www.comparativeagendas.net. Accessed Sep-tember 26, 2017.
3. We adapted MIP series compiled by the Politbarometer for Germany, the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) for Spain, Gallup and Ipsos-MORI for the UK and Gallup for the US. While we recoded the German and Spanish data our-selves, thankfully the CAP team made the UK and US data available online, under: http://www.comparativeagendas.net. Since data for the Gallup's MIP question in the UK are not available after 2001, Ipsos-MORI's MII data are also used; when overlapping, the two series are combined and averaged.
4. To be sure the findings presented below are not driven by one country, we re-estimated our analyses separately for each country. Our findings are robust to these modeling strategies (see Table A7 and Figure A1 in the Online Appendix).
5. A Wooldridge test for serial correlation in panel-data models is highly significant.
6. A Fisher-type unit roots test is highly significant and a Cameron & Trivedi's decomposition of IM-test rejects the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity.
7. However, in the robustness checks Section 3A of the Online Appendix we discuss and test for alternative lag structures.
8. This interpretation holds when the error-correction term is negative and falls between 0 and −1, when equilibrium shocks are corrected at a gradual rate (Jen-nings & John, 2009, pp. 841–842).
9. Notice that we also estimated further combinations of interactions between the short and long run- ning effects of protest and public priorities without finding

any significant conditioning effect by protest on public priorities. E.g. $protest_t$ 1 × Δ public $priorities_t$: $β=-0.40$; $P = 0.113$. Δ $protest_t$ × public $priorities_t$ 1: $β=-0.30$; $P = 0.008$. Even though this latter effect is statistically significant on conventional levels, we do believe that this might be a finding due to chance: we did not theorize upon such an effect and the effect is not in the expected direction.

10. Note that in these analyses we no longer cluster on the issue level but use robust standard errors for countries.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Harvard Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/O4SHWQ, reference number UNF:6: Colvm7dH7u0gJBZL2i/fXg==.

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