Does Decentralization Alleviate Malcontent? Territorial Distribution of Power and Protest Events

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Abstract

Does decentralization affect the frequency of social and political unrest? Although some studies address this specific question in the context of ethnic or secessionist conflict, results are mixed and it is still unclear whether these findings generalize to more regular mobilizing tactics, such as protests, in the absence of group-based grievances. While satisfaction with governmental institutions via enhanced competition and 'closer' governance is normatively implicit in almost any theoretical approach to political decentralization, we here argue that, *ceteris paribus*, the multiplication of elected governmental authorities via decentralization increases the potential opportunities to express disagreement with how things are managed. We test the main implications of our argument with an original protest event data in all world geographic regions from 1990 to 2010. We find that, on average, countries with local political decentralization have approximately 33% more protest events per year, though this effect varies across levels of democracy.

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Like the taxi drivers' strikes and the Dongzhou incident, the vast majority of these protests are targeted at abusive or incompetent local governments.

Huang (2009,33)

1   Introduction

Federalism and the decentralization of authority have often been deemed as mechanisms for achieving socially desirable governance. The shift of policy decision-making downwards has found a broad variety of economic and political justifications, ranging from the efficient allocation of intergovernmental responsibilities to the better representation of societal preferences, to the accommodation of minorities. While it is widely assumed that such benefits exist and are theoretically attainable, the survey in detail of these purported outcomes has led to mixed results, suggesting that under certain circumstances (unclear responsibilities, opportunism or partisan/electoral externalities) the effects could be otherwise. In many instances, this debate is far from settled and still requires further empirical refinement.

In this project, we depart from this general theoretical conundrum in order to test a specific assumption that seems to be implicit in this normative discussion: whether, ceteris paribus, decentralization minimizes the frequency of political unrest. Much is written about secessionist conflict in the context of territorial distribution of power; yet, such forms of political unrest do not occur in a vacuum, less confrontational forms of dissent manifest first. Moreover, as it has been pointed out by Brancati (2006, 2008), not all federations suffer from ethnically rooted secessionist conflicts, but there is plenty of evidence showing how these countries still experience exceedingly high levels of mobilization. Then, it is necessary to take a step back and follow Chenoweth's (2015) recent call to improve our understanding of the general influence that institutions, such as decentralization, have on protest. To our knowledge, this is a novel attempt within both decentralization and protest literatures; as the latter author suggests, this dearth in research could largely be motivated by the "lack of global data on protest and mobilization that could yield generalizable empirical findings" (Chenoweth 2015, 363).

To overcome this hurdle, we use original protest event data from 1990 to 2010 in all world geographic regions [Mass Mobilization Data Project] (Clark and Regan 2016). The dataset records protest events in 162 countries with at least 50 participants that are specifically directed against the government. In this sense, the data provide an idyllic opportunity to disaggregate events by country and region, and by categories of demands that are relevant to our line of inquiry (fiscal, political and administrative issues (Falleti 2005)). We focus specifically at the country level to analyze if, other things being equal, political decentralization (the existence of locally and regionally elected legislatures) influences the total number of protests that a country experiences in a year.

Using this dataset, we show that local decentralization significantly increases the total number of protests a country experiences in a year. Moreover, by estimating the separate

predicted event counts of protests in locally and regionally decentralized and centralized countries across different levels of democracy, we demonstrate that the positive effect of decentralization on protests is quite strong in autocracies, and that this effect decreases as countries become more democratic. The results present counterintuitive insights challenging normative implications in decentralization literature and pushing further analysis of this phenomenon.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we present our argument about the effect of political decentralization on protests. Second, we discuss the anti-governmental protests dataset and the research design strategy in order to test our hypotheses. Third, we test the empirical implications of our theoretical expectations. Finally, we conclude with suggestions for future research.

2   Political Decentralization and Social Unrest

The later half of the 20th century ushered in a trend toward political and fiscal decentralization that has reshaped governmental organization across the globe. Efforts to bring government closer to the 'people' have come from many directions: from central governments themselves, in democratic and autocratic polities, to international organizations and development agencies, which have at times conditioned their economic assistance on developing countries' commitment to undertake decentralization programs.[1] Without neglecting the strategic component of many of these reforms (Riker 1964, Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova 2004, Bednar 2009), an important portion of the literature has accompanied this tendency through case studies and anecdotes in which the decentralization of decision-making power and the resulting effects have been presented as possible remedies to a wide range of economic and political challenges (among others, see Kincaid (1995), Fisman and Gatti (2002), Amoretti and Bermeo (2004)). Paradoxically, however, many of these endogenous and quasi-endogenous reforms have ended up showing exogenous and undesired effects (Shvetsova 2003). Despite the good intentions, as Treisman (2007, 164) points out, "in states where corruption is common and politics unruly, giving power to local governments will probably just spread these vices to other levels". To put it differently, many of these strategic institutional choices have performed as if, at the time of designing the rules, designers were not in a position to control the outcome of their effects.

Extent scholarship appears to know little about this specific outcome of decentralization processes. While there are many attemps to analyze the direct or mediating effect of decentralization (and its many conceptualizations) on ethnic or secessionist conflict (Cohen 1997, Saideman et al. 2002, Brancati 2006, Brown 2009, Deiwiks, Cederman and Gleditsch 2012), most of these works suffer from selection bias (a specific group of minorities, democracies, federations, or types of civil conflict manifestations). Besides, the evidence on whether decentralization fosters peace, or not, in multiethnic countries is mixed. Furthermore, existing scholarship does not satisfactorily elucidate the extent to which the presence or absence of these institutions inform the conditions for protest nor extreme levels of discontent such as

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[1]Specifically, Treisman (2007, 3-4) cites loans to support decentralization and subnational government development and formation from, among others, the Inter-American Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and various United Nations's agencies.

civil conflict. For instance, both Cohen (1997) and Saideman et al. (2002) found 'federalism' to be negatively correlated with ethnic rebellion but positively related to protest; however, the causal mechanism for such a pattern is not entirely clear in their papers, neither is the robustness of some of their results.[2] Ultimately, not all decentralized polities have geographically concentrated ethnic minorities and grievance based rebellion and civil resistance are conceptually distinct from discrete protest events, which represent just one of the many tactics through which citizens manifest their general discontent. Public protests and demonstrations are one of the most elemental ways in which societal discontent with the *status quo* exteriorizes through mobilization (Tilly 1978). As such, protests have been identified as mechanisms for dissent that are largely dependent on the existing political opportunity structure in a country. Then, if mobilization occurs where it can (Regan and Norton 2005), institutional contexts could create, and even spread, popular collective action (Adam, Doug and Tilly 1997, Chenoweth and Ulfelder 2015). Our intuition here is simple: if political decentralization multiplies the number of elected governmental authorities, it should also multiply the number of potential opportunities to express disagreement with how policies are managed. And, multiply the number of potential 'targets' of protesters' demands. Protests play a critical role in improving our understanding of the effect of decentralization on political discontent. Even in the current era of increased politically decentralized decision-making, we lack a generalized understanding of how these institutional reforms influence dissidents' collective action.

We depart from the aforementioned intuition about the effect of political decentralization on protests to survey if, other things being equal, the existence of elected subnational governments makes a significant difference. In this regard, though the presumption of a higher degree of satisfaction with governmental institutions via enhanced competition is normatively implicit to any political decentralization attempt, we believe there are theoretical motives to hypothesize a mismatch between purported and observed outcomes. Mainly, two. On the one hand, decentralization increases the number of potential 'targets' of discontent, and thus, the burden of effective governance. The multiplication of elected governmental authorities via decentralization increases the potential opportunities to express both, agreeement and disagreement, with how things are managed. On the other hand, *status quo* institutions define the incentives, costs and expectations of protesters (Tarrow 1998, 85), and dissidents are more likely to engage in protests as the political environment becomes more permissive (Reese, Vega and Geidraitis 2005). Because decentralization places the loci of authority more geographically proximate, the costs of mobilization are substantially reduced enabling a greater number of dissatisfied constituents to organize low-level collective action in the form of public protests. More formally:

Hypothesis 1: Politically decentralized countries have more protest events than non-decentralized ones.

Though counterintuitive, especially if approaching the decentralization literature from a normative perspective, recent anecdotal evidence and academic works support the observa-

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[2]Saideman et al. (2002) admit in footnote 34 that the effect of federalism vanishes with different model specifications.

tion of this hypothesized empirical relationship. In the case of China, for instance, protests are found to primarily target local government malpractices, and the toleration of such mobilization in this autocracy is argued to be strategically designed by the central rulers to monitor local government standards (Guo 2001, Huang 2009, Lorentzen 2013). The case of South Africa exemplifies a less sophisticated institutional process: after the empowering transformation that local governments experienced in 1994, there has been a surge in protests against these administrations, mostly as a response to municipal inefectiveness in service delivery and the poor responsiveness of these governments to citizens' grievances (Atkinson 2007). Moreover, the experience of the Great Recession suggests that even if public malcontent has been primarily directed against the macroeconomic policies of national governments, the advanced decentralized governmental structure in countries like Spain laid the groundwork for the multiplication of regional level demonstrations.[3] In any case, and as it follows from the generalized lower number of regional divisions compared it to municipal ones, we expect the difference between decentralized and centralized countries in this respect to be more evident when analyzing the effect of local political decentralization.

The magnitutude of the effect of decentalization on protest frequency should be strongest in countries where alternative political opportunity strucutres are less permissive or do not exist. That is, as previous research suggests, protests increase as the costs associated with mobilization decrease, therefore, the effect of decentralization should be most evident in autocracies. In a scenario of limited opportunities for public dissent, political decentralization presents a fragmentation of the governmental authority that facilitates political mobilization. Protests can serve two alternative functions; in non-democratic societies, protests can be a substitute for electoral power, whereas, in democratic countries, protests can compliment formal electoral claim making (Dunning 2011). Protest are increasingly likely when regimes signal, at least minimal, tolerance for varrying opinions and preferences (Meyer 2004). Particularly in regimes with a centralized or authoritative executive that restricts or represses popular opinion, decentralized authority signals a sufficient minimal tolerance for sub-national dissent. Therefore, political decentralization should have a greater positive effect on protest frequency in non-democratic countries; higher levels of democratic performance should decrease the average differences. More formally:

Hypothesis 2: The effect of decentralization is conditional on regime type; the average number of protests in decentralized polities tends to marginally decrease as they become more democratic, moderating the average difference with respect to centralized polities.

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[3]http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/12/world/europe/spain-protests/

3 Research Design

3.1 Data

We rely on protest event data generated from the Mass Mobilization Data Project [MM Data] (Clark and Regan 2016).[4] The dataset records protest events with at least 50 participants that are specifically directed against the government and take place within the national borders of the targeted government. Inter-communal incidents, both nonviolent and violent, are not included in the dataset. Neither are labor strikes or work stoppages that do not manifest into public collective action by at least 50 participants. The dataset also excludes political rallies where the objective is to gather support for a specific political candidate or party. And, lastly, excludes armed attacks or resistance by rebel groups engaged in armed conflict with the state. This coding scheme allows us to exclusively focus on those events it which citizens mobilize to express their dissent with governmental activities.

For our purposes, isolating political protests targeting the government is critical. We do not discriminate between tiers of government; we account for any protest event against the state authority or any of its agents. MM Data records the beginning and end date of a protest (typically the same date), the number of participants, the location, protester violence, protesters' demand(s), if there was an organizing group, the group's name, and, the state's response(s). The data are recorded at a country-day unit of analysis. In all, MM Data report 10,133 protest events in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and MENA from 1990-2014.[5] Because we are interested in how decentralization impacts the frequency, i.e. the number of protests, the records of specific independent protest events seems ideal. This is a unique difference with respect to existing datasets, such as NAVCO (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013), which records opposition campaigns rather than specific events. MM Data codes a seven point nominal scale of demands including: 1) fiduciary, tax and price issues; 2) social restrictions; 3) labor or wage complaints; 4) land or farm demands; 5) police brutality; 6) the removal or resignation of corrupt or reviled political elite(s); and 7) frustration with political processes or behavior. The MM Data records up to four protester demands. In 1,457 protests, approximately 14.4%, there are two protester demands recorded; in 213 protests, or approximately 2.1%, and 11 protests, approximately 0.1%, record three and four protester demands respectively. Of the 11,803 demands we include in our analysis, 59.2% of protester demands reflect frustration with political processes or behaviors. Approximately 7.4% of demand the removal or resignation of corrupt or reviled political elite(s), 8.5% of demands involve fiduciary issues, 6.2% challenge police brutality, 2.8% involve land or farm issues, and, 13% reflect labor or wage issues.

3.2 Dependent Variables

For our analysis, we aggregate the country-event observations into a country-year level of analysis. This creates a dataset with 3,282 country-year observations from 1990-2010. There

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[4]For more details on the Mass Mobilization Data Project see http://www.binghamton.edu/massmobilization/about.html and (Klein and Regan 2016) have a manuscript introducing the dataset in Revise & Resubmit at International Organization.

[5]The United States of America and Israel, Australia and New Zealand are not coded.

are 1,307 country-years where no protest is recorded, approximately 39% of the observations. There are 1,975 country-year observations with at least 1 protest. We are primarily interested in evaluating the institutional effect of vertical shifts on decision-making power. Since this can follow different routes, the detailed coding of protesters' demand(s) is important. To this end, we create two dependent variables. The first is a count of the Number of Protests per country-year. The variable ranges from 0 to 63. Of the 1,975 country-year observations that record protests, 96% of the observations have 15 or fewer protests. Approximately 29% record 1 protest and 59.1% record no more than 3 events in the year.

We create an additional dependent variable – Number of Political Protests. To reflect this specific distinction, we consider disputes about the political process, political behavior complaints, or claims for the removal or resignation of political elite(s) as political protests. Number of Political Protests ranges from 0 to 54; 1,696 country-years involve a political demand. Of the 1,696 country-years, 32.8% have one protest, 80.5% have 5 or fewer, and, 96% have 13 or fewer.

3.3   Explanatory Variables

We test the effect of Local and Regional Decentralization on the frequency of protests. Following our theoretical expectations, we rely on the World Bank's Decentralization Indicators – municipal and state – to generate our explanatory variables. Using both measures provides us with the necessary leverage to understand our hypothesized effect comprehensively. Local decentralization is more widespread but is less intense in terms of decision-making power shifts. The World Bank indicators are ordinal scales ranging from 0-2 that code countries from 1975 to 2009. The scales, in ascending order, correspond to the diffusion of electoral processes in a country. A value of 0 indicates no local [regional] executive or legislature elections; a 1 indicates the local [regional] legislature is elected, but the executive is appointed; and, countries are assigned a value of 2 when both the local [regional] legislature and executive are elected. From the original World Bank dataset, the Regional Decentralization ordinal scale has a mean of 0.789; 45.97% of observations are no executive or legislature elections, 29.26% are only legislature elections, and 24.77% are both executive and legislative elections. The Local Decentralization ordinal scale reflects an opposite distribution; the mean value is 1.27, 24.27% of observations are no executive or legislature elections, 24.82% are legislature elections, whereas, 50.91% are both legislature and executive elections.

Since we are primarily interested in the existence of an elected legislative body at a lower level, we recode the two ordinal scales into two binary measures of decentralization assigning a 1 to those country-year observations that were originally assigned a 1 or 2 for Local or Regional Decentralization. Otherwise, the binary measures are assigned a value of 0.

We then interact each of the explanatory variables with a a country's level of democracy – one of our control variables. Using a multiplicative function between our two constituent terms, we create the interactive variables necessary to test hypothesis 2. Importantly, our measures of decentralization are not exclusive to democratic states. Regional Decentralization and Local Decentralization, and a country's level of democracy are correlated at 0.223 and 0.394, respectively. Table 5 in the Appendix A visualizes the distribution of our explanatory variables across countrys' level of democracy.

3.4   Control Variables

We control for several alternative explanations for both the variation in the frequency of protests in a country and the likelihood of grievances, or, motivations for protest actions (Cunningham 2011, Collier 2000, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Wimmer, Cederman and Min 2009, Chenoweth and Ulfelder 2015). Polity and Polity2[6] (Marshall, Jaggers and Gurr 2010) serve as our measures for a country's level of democracy; to ease post-estimation interpretation purposes, we recode the measures to reflect a 0-20 scale. Polity is the second constituent term in all of our interactive variables. Human Rights measures a county's respect for individuals' physical integrity rights; the variables ranges from 0-8 where higher values correspond to greater respect (Cingranelli, Richards and Clay 2014). Economic activity and employment prospects are additional conditions likely to define protest frequency and motivation; we control for Unemployment and the natural log of GDPpc (World-Bank 2016c). Additionally, we account for two population dynamics that scholarship demonstrates to be important determinants of political conflict – Excluded Population and Youth Bulge. Excluded Population is a measure of the relative share of the excluded population to the ethnopolitically relevant population (Wimmer, Cederman and Min 2009) and Youth Bulge is the ratio of 15-24 year olds to the adult population (United-Nations 2016, Urdal 2006). We also control for Land Area as the natural log of a country's area in kilometers (World-Bank 2016b) because country size could influence decisions to decentralize, the ability to mobilize protesters and the ability for media outlets to report on protests. Lastly, we include a one-year lag of our dependent variable to account for autocorrelation, 'natural' protest trends in countries thereby better isolating the effect of decentralization on protest frequency. Summary statistics for all variables are found in Table 6 in the Appendix A.

3.5   Estimation Method

Our outcome of interest – the frequency of protest actions – is measured as an event count. Event count models measure the rate at which an event occurs making it an appropriate methodology for testing our expectations. Using a country-year level of observation conforms to the technique's important assumption that all units of observation are equivalent; variation and independence should reside in the number of events within each unit of observation. For our data, the negative binomial regression family of count models is appropriate because the conditional variance is greater than the conditional mean. The 'extra-poisson' distribution, or over dispersion, of our dependent variables is likely caused by excess of zero-counts. That is, the distribution and variance of protest events is skewed by country-year observations where zero protest events occur. We believe that two different processes create the zero-count observations. In some country-years with zero protests, the population may lack incentive or motivation to protest, whereas, in other observations, grievances may exist, but opportunity, or, the ability for collective action may be curtailed. Because our dependent variable could capture either process, or, a different cause of no observed protests, we must account for distinctions between "certain zeros" and "non-certain zeros" (Box-Steffensmeier

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[6]We include the squared version of Polity to account for the possibility of a none linear effect. It is common in literature to assume that the relationship between protests and democracy is curvilinear, being especially intense within anocracies.

and Jones 2004, Cameron and Trivedi 2013). The Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial allows the specification of both theoretical arguments such that we can determine the extent to which zeros (opportunities) are determined by a process diferent from the one that determines whether or not protest occurs. We perform Vuong tests to confirm our modeling decision; all values are statistically significant evidencing a zero-inflated count of protest events. In the inflated stage of our models, we again account for potential effects of Unemployment and Youth Bulge; both are expected to decrease the odds of a "certain zero" observation. We also account for a country's Total Population (World-Bank 2016a) because we assume the more people in a country, the easier it is for activists to mobilize at least 50 like-minded individuals to protest. Lastly, we control for two institutional variables that impede, or, benefit activists' efforts to organize collective action – Freedom of Association and Freedom of Press/Speech (Cingranelli, Richards and Clay 2014).

4 Results

We report the results of our statistical models in Tables 1 and 2. The following discussion focuses primarily on the Negative Binomial stage of the model, as the hypotheses about the effect of decentralization comprise the greatest interest of this section. At a first glance at 1, and in line with our theoretical expectations, results endorse both our hypotheses, presenting an interesting scenario that deserves a more detailed analysis.

Table 1 focuses specifically on local decentralization, i.e. the existence of locally elected legislative bodies, in a country. Interestingly, our main explanatory variable increases both the total number of protests per year (0.298-0.964, p≤0.05) and the frequency of political protests per year (0.363-0.872, p≤0.05). On average, from Models 1^a and 2^a countries with local political decentralization have approximately 35.25% more total protest events than local non-decentralized countries. With respect to political protests, Models 1^b and 2^b, the estimated count of protests is predicted to increase by approximately 44.75%.

Table 1: Local Political Decentralization

	Model 1[a]	Model 1[b]	Model 2[a]	Model 2[b]	Model 3[a]	Model 3[b]
DVs:	Number of Protest Events[a] & Number of Political Protests Events[b]					
Local Dec.	.307* (.141)	.376* (.168)	.298* (.141)	.363* (.166)	.964*** (.297)	.872** (.377)
Polity	.043***(.012)	.045** (.014)	.103* (.053)	.123* (.059)	.128** (.050)	.141** (.060)
Local Dec. *					-.062** (.021)	-.048* (.028)
Polity						
Polity^2			-.003 (.002)	-.004 (.003)	-.002 (.002)	-.003 (.003)
Human Rights	-.109*** (.026)	-.123*** (.031)	-.105*** (.025)	-.116*** (.030)	-.100*** (.024)	-.111*** (.029)
Unemployment	-.017** (.006)	-.014* (.008)	-.018** (.006)	-.016* (.008)	-.016** (.006)	-.015* (.008)
GDPpc (ln)	-.056 (.072)	-.059 (.081)	-.040 (.070)	-.038 (.081)	-.022 (.071)	-.025 (.083)
Excluded Pop.	.006 (.038)	.019 (.044)	.005 (.038)	.018 (.044)	.002 (.038)	.016 (.044)
Youth Bulge	-.031** (.011)	-.039** (.013)	-.034** (.012)	-.44*** (.013)	-.036** (.012)	-.045*** (.014)
Country Size (Km, ln)	.003 (.038)	-.027 (.043)	.010 (.040)	-.019 (.045)	.019 (.038)	-.010 (.044)
Protests (t-1)	.097*** (.856)	.095*** (.012)	.096*** (.011)	.093*** (.012)	.094*** (.011)	.091*** (.012)
constant	1.71* (.856)	1.96*. (.993)	1.41 (.893)	1.58 (1.06)	.831 (.938)	1.14 (1.13)
Inflation Stage						
F. of Association	-.429 (.392)	-.297 (.400)	-.444 (.397)	-.337 (.428)	-.438 (.393)	-.328 (.422)
F. of Press/Speech	.227 (.562)	.659 (.803)	.272 (.109)	.717 (.743)	.266 (.511)	.700 (.692)
Unemployment	-.247** (.106)	-.312*** (.113)	-.251* (.109)	-.322** (.116)	-.261* (.114)	-.329** (.114)
Total Pop. (ln)	-1.51*** (.275)	-1.63*** (.339)	-1.51*** (.274)	-1.63*** (.345)	-1.48*** (.268)	-1.60*** (.354)
Youth Bulge	-.423*** (.115)	-.530*** (.167)	-.435*** (.109)	-.542*** (.154)	-.441*** (.102)	-.546*** (.148)
constant	20.76*** (3.40)	23.25*** (4.27)	20.91*** (3.37)	23.44*** (4.33)	20.81*** (3.32)	23.30*** (4.41)
Observations	1750	1750	1750	1750	1750	1750
Zeros	629	775	629	775	629	775
Non-zeros	1121	975	1121	975	1121	975
Alpha	.792 (.123)	.967 (.143)	.793 (.123)	.963 (.141)	.773 (.122)	.950 (.139)
Vuong T. (Pr>z)	4.28 (0.000)	4.29 (0.000)	4.29 (0.000)	4.28 (0.000)	4.39 (0.000)	4.32 (0.000)
Wald X^2(Pr>X^2)	410.10 (0.000)	369.88 (0.000)	442.42 (0.000)	371.88 (0.000)	493.36 (0.000)	401.49 (0.000)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ | Standard errors clustered by country

As hypothesized, the positive effect of decentralization on the frequency of protests decreases as countries become more democratic. The interactive term in Models 3^a and 3^b prevents a straight-forward interpretation of the results; Figures 1a and 1b illustrate the predicted event count of total protests and political protests in a year, respectively, for decentralized and centralized polities as democracy level varies. The difference seems clear for autocracies, that is, for those polities ranging from 1 to 5 in our rescaled measure of Polity. Across these five categories of non-democratic countries, locally decentralized polities are predicted to experience approximately one additional protest event during the year. This is not an abstract or theoretical scenario. There is local decentralization in non-democratic states. 31.7%, 13.5%, 69.8%, 43.4%, and 33.3% of corresponding country-year observations were decentralized autocracies ranging from Polity 1 to 5 respectively.

In Figure 1a the frequency of protests in locally decentralized autocracies resembles the frequency in democracies; this is particularly interesting. Generally, autocracies experience fewer protests then democracies, this is nearly an assumed rule. Yet, our results indicate that once localized political opportunity structures are accounted for, difference in protest frequency between autocracies and democracies is minimal.

(a) Number of Protests   (b) Number of Political Protests
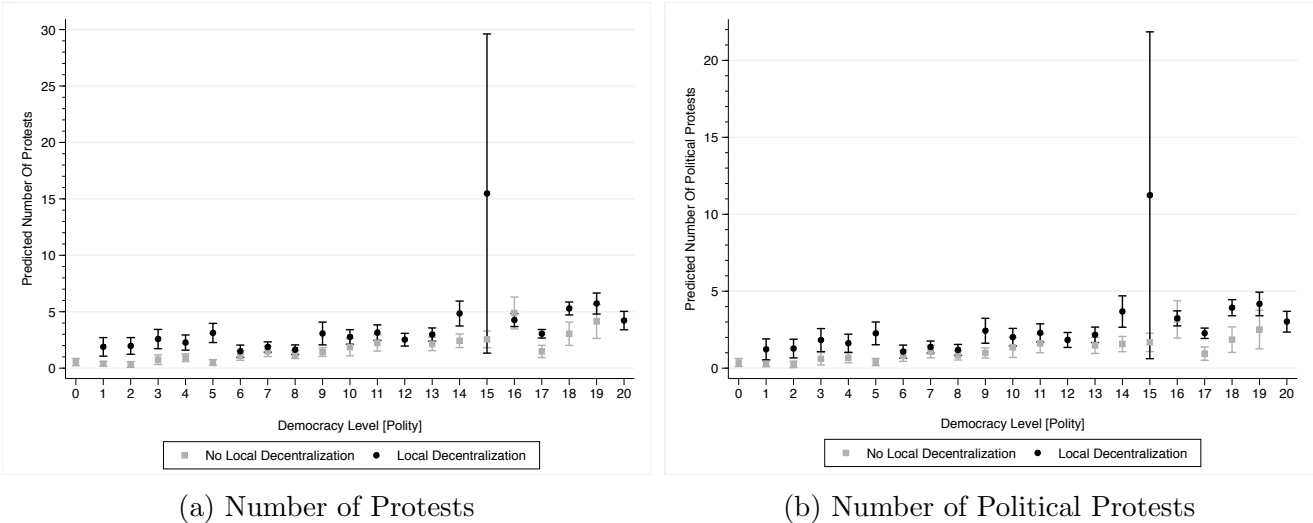
Figure 1: The Effect of Local Decentralization on Predicted Protest Events as the Level of Democracy Varies, Marginal Effects with 95% Confidence Intervals

When analyzing the effect of regional decentralization, a similar pattern is not as apparent. We do not find support for hypotheses 1 or 2 in 2. Table 2 focuses specifically on regional decentralization, i.e. the existence of regionally elected legislative bodies, in a country. Our main explanatory variables have a mixed effect on the frequency of protests and never gain statistical significance.

Table 2: Regional Political Decentralization

	DVs: Number of Protest Events[a] & Number of Political Protests Events[b]					
	Model 4[a]	Model 4[b]	Model 5[a]	Model 5[b]	Model 6[a]	Model 6[b]
Regional Dec.	.005 (.109)	-.033 (.130)	-.004 (.108)	-.041 (.129)	.393 (.287)	.193 (.310)
Polity	.037***(.012)	.040***(.013)	.061 (.057)	.063 (.062)	.066 (.059)	.064 (.063)
Regional Dec. * Polity					-.031 (.019)	-.018 (.021)
Polity²			-.001 (.002)	-.001 (.003)	-.001 (.002)	-.001 (.003)
Human Rights	-.112*** (.023)	-.131*** (.029)	-.111*** (.023)	-.129*** (.029)	-.112*** (.022)	-.130*** (.028)
Unemployment	-.008 (.007)	-.003 (.008)	-.008 (.007)	-.003 (.008)	-.008 (.007)	-.003 (.008)
GDPpc (ln)	-.024 (.070)	-.015 (.081)	-.015 (.066)	-.007 (.079)	-.005 (.067)	-.005 (.080)
Excluded Pop.	-.021 (.037)	-.011 (.042)	-.022 (.037)	-.012 (.042)	-.037 (.038)	-.020 (.043)
Youth Bulge	-.023* (.012)	-.029* (.013)	-.024* (.013)	-.030* (.014)	-.032* (.013)	-.030* (.014)
Country Size (Km, ln)	-.003 (.040)	-.044 (.047)	-.001 (.042)	-.041 (.049)	-.002 (.042)	-.040 (.049)
Protests (t-1)	.108*** (.012)	.106*** (.012)	.108*** (.012)	.105*** (.012)	.107*** (.012)	.105*** (.012)
constant	1.60* (.786)	1.88* (.893)	1.46* (.806)	1.75* (.945)	1.15 (.819)	1.59* (.953)
Inflation Stage						
F. of Association	-.632* (.381)	-.433 (.432)	-.642* (.384)	-.443 (.437)	-.610 (.390)	-.423 (.428)
F. of Press/Speech	.223 (.541)	.407 (.866)	.241 (.539)	.419 (.858)	.266 (.520)	.430 (.844)
Unemployment	-.238* (.096)	-.263** (.101)	-.238** (.097)	-.263** (.102)	-.233* (.094)	-.259** (.099)
Total Pop. (ln)	-1.51*** (.263)	-1.59*** (.305)	-1.51*** (.263)	-1.59*** (.307)	-1.53*** (.261)	-1.60*** (.304)
Youth Bulge	-.462*** (.137)	-.546* (.267)	-.468*** (.137)	-.550* (.267)	-.470*** (.128)	-.548* (.257)
constant	21.43*** (3.30)	23.20*** (4.84)	21.53*** (3.29)	23.27*** (4.88)	21.64*** (3.18)	23.26*** (4.67)
Observations	2029	2029	2029	2029	2029	2029
Zeros	745	913	745	913	745	913
Non-zeros	1284	1116	1284	1116	1284	1116
Alpha	.847 (.117)	.988 (.146)	.848 (.117)	.988 (.145)	.838 (.115)	.983 (.142)
Vuong T. (Pr>z)	4.32 (0.000)	4.26 (0.000)	4.31 (0.000)	4.26 (0.000)	4.34 (0.000)	4.28 (0.000)
Wald X²(Pr>X²)	326.55 (0.000)	278.44 (0.000)	329.62 (0.000)	276.31 (0.000)	351.18 (0.000)	285.28 (0.000)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ | Standard errors clustered by country

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Decentralization could be a government response to protest actions; that is, countries with a higher frequency of protests may be more likely to decentralize. Therefore, to measure a strong causal arrow from decentralization to protest frequency, we lag our independent variables one year. As Tarrow (1998) articulates, protesters understand the risks, costs and incentives for dissdent in relation to the established political environment, which we account for and model using a one-year lag of our independent variables. By lagging a country's decentralization status one year and including a one-year lag of our dependent variable, we isolate the effect of political opportunity structures. We re-run each model from 1 and 2 with the one-year lag of our indepent variables, key interactive term, Polity and Polity^2; the results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

When accounting for potential issues of endogeneity and isolating the effect of political opportunity structures, our hypotheses continue to find support. The results are robust to the new model specification; when we lag the key explanatory variables, our interaction term and our measures of democracy, the positive substantive effect of local decentalization on the number of protests and political protests per yhear marginally increases. Table 3 reports the effect of local decentralization, i.e. the existence of locally elected legislative bodies, on the frequency of protests. Our main explanatory variable increases both the total number of protests per year (0.286-0.954, p≤0.05) and the frequency of political protests per year (0.378-0.876, p≤0.05). On average, from Models 7^a and 8^a countries with local political decentralization have approximately 33.35% more total protest events than local non-decentralized countries. With respect to political protests, Models 7^b and 8^b, the estimated count of protests is predicted to increase by approximately 46.35%.

Table 3: Local Political Decentralization

	DVs: Number of Protest Events[a] & Number of Political Protests Events[b]					
	Model 7[a]	Model 7[b]	Model 8[a]	Model 8[b]	Model 9[a]	Model 9[b]
Local Dec. (t-1)	.289* (.132)	.383** (.158)	.286* (.132)	.378** (.156)	.954*** (.279)	.876** (.356)
Polity (t-1)	.040*** (.012)	.042** (.014)	.082* (.049)	.097* (.054)	.104* (.045)	.112* (.055)
Local Dec. (t-1) * Polity (t-1)					-.062*** (.019)	-.047* (.025)
Polity^2 (t-1)			-.002 (.002)	-.003 (.002)	-.001 (.002)	-.002 (.002)
Human Rights	-.103*** (.025)	-.115*** (.030)	-.099*** (.025)	-.110*** (.030)	-.094*** (.023)	-.106*** (.029)
Unemployment	-.015* (.007)	-.014* (.009)	-.016** (.006)	-.016* (.008)	-.015* (.006)	-.015* (.008)
GDPpc (ln)	-.058 (.071)	-.061 (.080)	-.048 (.068)	-.047 (.079)	-.029 (.069)	-.034 (.081)
Excluded Pop.	.006 (.036)	.019 (.042)	.005 (.036)	.016 (.042)	.004 (.036)	.017 (.043)
Youth Bulge	-.031** (.011)	-.039*** (.013)	-.034** (.012)	-.042*** (.013)	-.035** (.012)	-.043*** (.013)
Country Size (Km, ln)	.002 (.038)	-.029 (.045)	.007 (.040)	-.023 (.046)	.016 (.039)	-.015 (.046)
Protests (t-1)	.101*** (.011)	.099*** (.011)	.100*** (.011)	.098*** (.011)	.097*** (.010)	.095*** (.011)
constant	1.75* (.857)	1.98* (.990)	1.53 (.890)	1.71 (1.05)	.959 (.917)	1.28 (1.09)
Inflation Stage						
F. of Association	-.392 (.395)	-.176 (.402)	-.393 (.397)	-.193 (.397)	-.393 (.391)	-.196 (.403)
F. of Press/Speech	.146 (.519)	.504 (.851)	.172 (.506)	.539 (.804)	.177 (.470)	.546 (.729)
Unemployment	-.231** (.093)	-.296** (.105)	-.233** (.094)	-.301** (.109)	-.242** (.098)	-.310** (.108)
Total Pop. (ln)	-1.56*** (.267)	-1.67*** (.312)	-1.56*** (.265)	-1.66*** (.181)	-1.53*** (.258)	-1.64*** (.319)
Youth Bulge	-.434*** (.123)	-.511** (.192)	-.441*** (.118)	-.518*** (.181)	-.447*** (.110)	-.527*** (.170)
constant	21.32*** (3.43)	23.20*** (4.17)	21.38*** (3.40)	23.26*** (4.17)	21.31*** (3.35)	23.25*** (4.24)
Observations	1842	1842	1842	1842	1842	1842
Zeros	655	815	655	815	655	815
Non-zeros	1187	1027	1187	1027	1187	1027
Alpha	.772 (.119)	.953 (.144)	.772 (.119)	.952 (.142)	.752 (.117)	.942 (.138)
Vuong T. (Pr>z)	4.41 (0.000)	4.36 (0.000)	4.42 (0.000)	4.37 (0.000)	4.54 (0.000)	4.42 (0.000)
Wald X^2(Pr>X^2)	470.44 (0.000)	405.89 (0.000)	486.56 (0.000)	396.18 (0.000)	544.16 (0.000)	435.44 (0.000)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ | Standard errors clustered by country

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As expected, the positive effect of decentralization on the frequency of protests decreases as countries become more democratic. Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the predicted event count of total protests and political protests per year, respectively, for decentralized and centralized polities as democracy level varies. We focus on 2a, the plot on the left. When considering all protest events, irregardless of the demand levied at the government, local decentralization has distinct effect on protest frequency. The difference is clearest for autocracies, that is, for those polities ranging from 1 to 5 in our rescaled measure of Polity. Across these five categories of non-democratic countries, locally decentralized polities are predicted to experience approximately one additional protest event during the year. This is not an abstract or theoretical scenario. There is local decentralization in non-democratic states. 31.9%, 6.1%, 72.5%, 43.2%, and 51.4% of corresponding country-year observations were decentralized autocracies at time t-1, ranging from Polity 1 to 5 respectively.

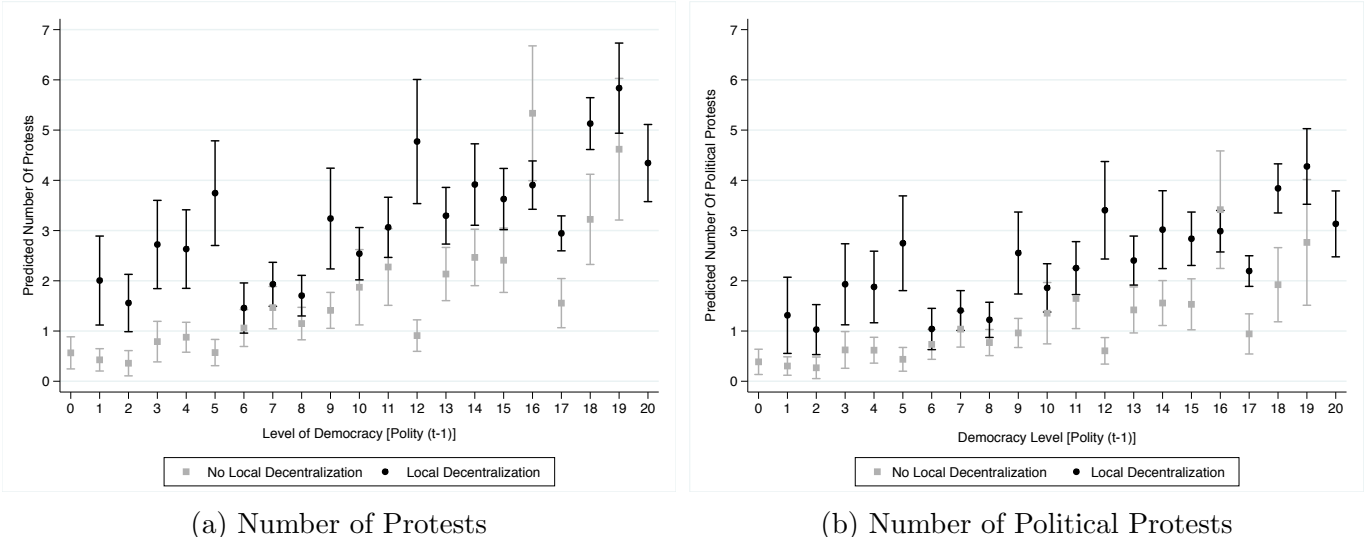(a) Number of Protests   (b) Number of Political Protests

Figure 2: The Effect of Local Decentralization on Predicted Protest Events as the Level of Democracy Varies, Marginal Effects with 95% Confidence Intervals

Additionally, the significance of the effect of local decentralization vanishes as the democratic standards of countries in the sample increase. As an exception, decentralized democracies with a Polity values of 17 and 18 show a significant positive difference, but this is likely driven by a lack of variance in the country-year: only 9 out of 130 and 24 out of 204 observations, respectively, are not locally decentralized. The results suggest that when authoritarian governments implement local sources of bureaucracy and political representation, dissidents are more likely to express frustration with local governance rather than with the national government. Perhaps protesters see this as a lower level conflict that insulates them from the state's repression apparatus. Alternatively, authoritarian governments may utilize local bureaucracies as a litmus test for national policies and a feeling thermometer for the community's preferences (Huang 2009). The results lend support to the premise that political institutions, in this case, local elections and legislatures, divert threats from the

masses toward confrontation with local authorities rather than challenges against central government institutions (Gandhi 2008, Levitsky and Way 2010).

Again, when we test our hypotheses using a one-year lagged regional decentralization measure, we do not find a statistically significant effect on the frequency of protests or political protests per country-year. For consistency with the non-lagged analysis we report the results in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4: Regional Political Decentralization

	DVs: Number of Protest Events[a] & Number of Political Protests Events[b]					
	Model 10[a]	Model 10[b]	Model 11[a]	Model 11[b]	Model 12[a]	Model 12[b]
Regional Dec. (t-1)	.029 (.108)	-.007 (.132)	.025 (.107)	-.011 (.133)	.391 (.272)	.207 (.310)
Polity (t-1)	.035** (.012)	.037** (.013)	.046 (.052)	.048 (.058)	.049 (.054)	.048 (.059)
Regional Dec. (t-1) * Polity (t-1)					-.029 (.018)	-.017 (.020)
Polity^2 (t-1)			-.001 (.002)	-.0005 (.002)	-.0001 (.002)	-.0001 (.002)
Human Rights	-.104*** (.022)	-.123*** (.029)	-.099*** (.025)	-.122*** (.029)	-.106*** (.022)	-.124*** (.028)
Unemployment	-.008 (.007)	-.003* (.008)	-.016** (.006)	-.003 (.008)	-.008 (.007)	-.003 (.008)
GDPpc (ln)	-.026 (.035)	-.017 (.079)	-.023 (.064)	-.014 (.076)	-.003 (.065)	-.003 (.077)
Excluded Pop.	-.023 (.035)	-.015 (.041)	-.024 (.035)	-.016 (.040)	-.038 (.036)	-.023 (.042)
Youth Bulge	-.022* (.011)	-.028* (.013)	-.022* (.012)	-.028* (.014)	-.022* (.012)	-.028* (.014)
Country Size (Km, ln)	-.003 (.040)	-.044 (.049)	-.002 (.042)	-.043 (.051)	-.0000 (.041)	-.043 (.050)
Protests (t-1)	.111*** (.011)	.109*** (.012)	.111*** (.011)	.108*** (.012)	.111*** (.011)	.108*** (.012)
constant	1.56* (.793)	1.87* (.905)	1.49* (.814)	1.81* (.960)	1.21 (.817)	1.66* (.955)
Inflation Stage						
F. of Association	-.509 (.366)	-.285 (.360)	-.510 (.367)	-.287 (.361)	-.484 (.373)	-.273 (.357)
F. of Press/Speech	.071 (.479)	.162 (.805)	.077 (.479)	.166 (.805)	.101 (.464)	.180 (.776)
Unemployment	-.233* (.084)	-.250*** (.081)	-.233** (.084)	-.250** (.082)	-.228** (.082)	-.247*** (.080)
Total Pop. (ln)	-1.54*** (.254)	-1.60*** (.277)	-1.54*** (.254)	-1.60*** (.278)	-1.55*** (.252)	-1.61*** (.276)
Youth Bulge	-.460*** (.136)	-.519* (.267)	-.462*** (.136)	-.520* (.268)	-.461*** (.125)	-.519* (.251)
constant	21.62*** (3.21)	23.01*** (4.55)	21.64*** (3.20)	23.03*** (4.57)	21.69*** (3.11)	23.03*** (4.31)
Observations	2142	2142	2142	2142	2142	2142
Zeros	777	960	777	960	777	960
Non-zeros	1365	1182	1365	1182	1365	1182
Alpha	.819 (.110)	.963 (.143)	.819 (.110)	.963 (.143)	.810 (.108)	.959 (.138)
Vuong T. (Pr>z)	4.45 (0.000)	4.41 (0.000)	4.44 (0.000)	4.41 (0.000)	4.47 (0.000)	4.43 (0.000)
Wald X^2(Pr>X^2)	379.79 (0.000)	305.38 (0.000)	381.80 (0.000)	302.80 (0.000)	414.21 (0.000)	317.90 (0.000)

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ | Standard errors clustered by country
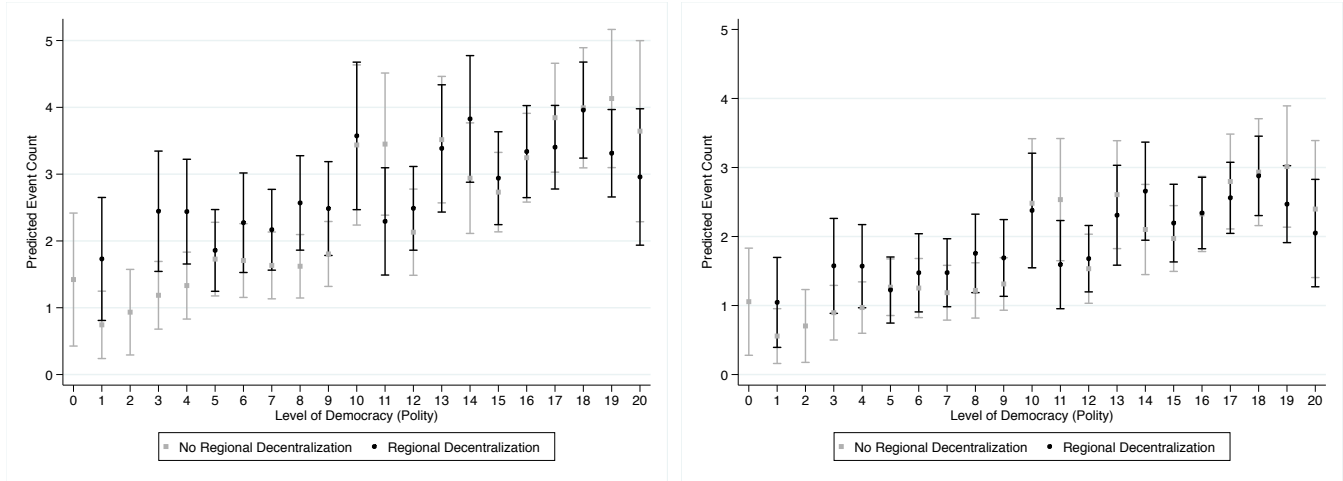
(a) Number of Protests

(b) Number of Political Protests

Figure 3: The Effect of Regional Decentralization on Predicted Protest Events as the Level of Democracy Varies

Although our results do not fully capture an effect from regional decentralization or the reversion point in the effect of decentralization (both local and regional) on protests within democracies, some argue that the existence of multiple, overlapping, and highly functional political, social, and economic institutions in very democratic decentralized countries could provide the mechanism for the provision of effective policy combinations, correspondingly increasing the degree of satisfaction with governance. For instance, in Appendix B, where we use as a robustness check a more restrictive measure of regional decentralization (regional governments holding authoritative competencies in at least one policy) in a self-selected group of democracies, the effect of our main explanatory variable shows a negative significant effect on protests. These results invite future development, reinforcing the relevance of accounting for the institutional heterogeneity in democracies.

5   Conclusion

This paper is an initial exploration of the effect of political decentralization on the frequency of protest events. The analyses shed particularly interesting light on the impact of political opportunity structures in autocratic states. Typically, autocratic systems lack political institutions that provide dissidents' permissive opportunity structures, but when autocrats implement localized decision-making processes, i.e. local elections, the effect of the created political opportunity structures is evident with regard to the frequency of protest events. In fact, local political decentralized autocracies experience a similar number of protests per year as democratic countries. Our results provide clear evidence that a government's political decision-making and institutional design have a direct impact on dissidents' collective action. Our results do also suggest that the effect of decentralization on democracies, if appropriately captured, could even be inverse of the one on autocracies, though the later

claim needs further empirical validation. At the moment we are working on a complementary quasi-experimental research design (difference-in-difference) to reinforce empirically our theoretical causal expectation.

Appendix

A   Descriptive Statistics

Table 5: Level of Democracy and Decentralization for the 162 countries in the sample from 1991 to 2010

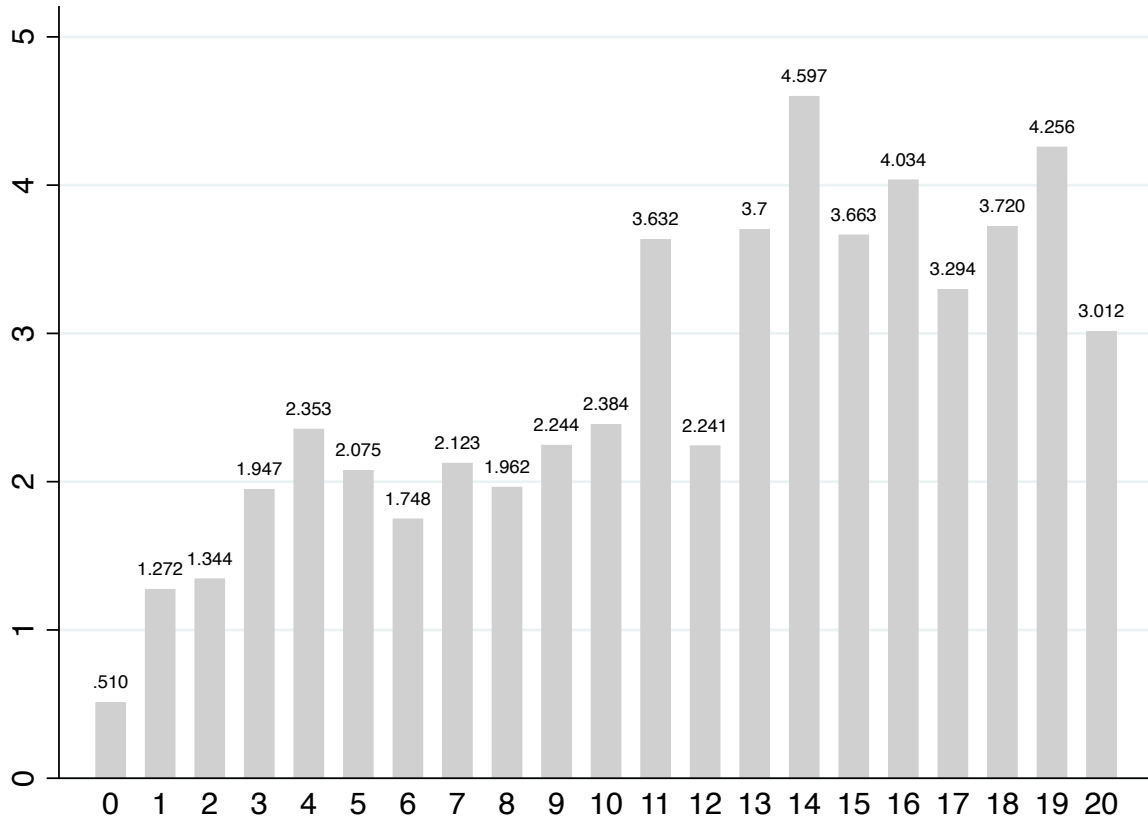| Level of Democracy	Local Decentralization		Regional Decentralization	
	0	**1**	**0**	**1**
0	34	26	62	16
1	41	19	68	19
2	32	5	40	3
3	59	143	145	91
4	47	36	58	49
5	34	18	13	26
6	4	37	58	23
7	13	60	15	60
8	44	47	53	43
9	21	25	38	28
10	11	48	14	40
11	2	20	9	10
12	1	9	11	17
13	10	11	12	25
14	15	30	21	39
15	21	75	36	62
16	39	103	82	70
17	10	115	72	56
18	24	167	77	158
19	9	165	68	132
20	0	310	79	279

Figure 4: Average number of protests in a year by democracy level

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables in the Estimation Sample

	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Number of Protests	2611	2.699	4.632	0	41
Number of Political Protests	2611	1.960	3.713	0	34
Local Decentralization (t-1)	2238	.775	.418	0	1
Regional Decentralization (t-1)	2644	.556	.497	0	1
Polity (t-1)	2514	12.74	6.92	0	20
Polity^2 (t-1)	2514	210.286	156.619	0	400
Human Rights	2656	4.82	2.29	0	8
Unemployment	2661	8.57	5.97	0.2	39.3
Freedom of Association	2661	1.16	.820	0	2
Freedom of Press/Speech	2665	1.00	.720	0	2
GDPpc (ln)	2763	7.993	1.650	4.861	11.364
Excluded Population	2447	1.797	1.513	0	4.524
Youth Bulge	2901	27.880	7.902	11.580	42.774
Total Population (ln)	2881	9.015	1.719	5.094	14.104
Protest (t-1)	2477	2.74	4.81	0	63
Country Size Km (ln)	2819	11.947	2.023	5.704	16.612

B   An alternative measure for political decentralization

Having such a comprehensive sample of countries requires using a broad concept of political decentralization. Yet, there are authors that have shown skepticism towards using a simple measure of the existence of elected subnational legislatures as a proxy (Rodden 2004, Treisman 2007). For instance, Brancati (2006) defines as politically decentralized a country in which subnational governments have independent decision-making power over, at least, one issue area (Riker 1964, 11). This restriction, however, makes her adopt an additional assumption regarding the effectiveness of decentralization: that it is only genuine in democracies.[7]

While we are not specifically interested in measuring the effect of a restricted concept of decentralization that implies working with a self-selected sample of countries, we welcome the necessity of using such a measure as a necessary robustness check. Therefore, we depart from the latest version of the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al. 2016) to create a binary variable that takes the value of 1 for those countries in our sample that have subnational governments holding authoritative competencies in at least one policy.[8] The new version of the RAI presents annual scores for 71 countries from 1950 to 2010; that is, for less than half of the countries in our sample. More relevantly, the average Polity score of these countries is 5 points higher than in our full sample, going up to 17.48.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for Polity

	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Polity (Full Sample)	2652	12.80	6.90	0	20
Polity (Local Decentralization Sample)	2178	12.97	6.82	0	20
Polity (Regional Decentralization Sample)	2553	12.77	6.92	0	20
Polity (RAI Sample)	1465	17.73	3.63	3	20

For the 924 country-year cases in which both measures coincide, there is a .603 correlation between our regional political decentralization variable, and the restricted variable we employ in this Appendix. Results for the re-specified models are in Table 8. To maintain consistency with the models presented in the manuscript's main text, we use a one-year lag of the binary RAI measure.

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[7]Specifically, (Brancati 2006,652) states that, in practice, nondemocracies infringe on the jurisdiction of subnational legislatures, flout the legislation they produce, and install regional politicians that do not challenge the national government's authority.

[8]The *n_policy* variable measures the range of policies for which a regional government is responsible: 0: very weak authoritative competence in a), b), c), d) whereby a) economic policy; b) cultural-educational policy; c) welfare policy; d) one of the following: residual powers, police, own institutional set–up, local government; 1: authoritative competencies in one of a), b), c) or d); 2: authoritative competencies in at least two of a), b), c), or d); 3: authoritative competencies in d) and at least two of a), b), or c); 4: criteria for 3 plus authority over immigration or citizenship.

Table 8: Using the RAI *n_policy* variable

DVs: Number of Protest Events[a] & Number of Political Protests Events[b]		
	Model 13[a]	Model 13[b]
RAI *n_policy*	-.378** (.140)	-.380** (.155)
Polity	.115 (.087)	.168* (.079)
Polity^2 (t-1)	-.004 (.003)	-.006* (.003)
Human Rights	-.041 (.029)	-.041 (.032)
Unemployment	-.007 (.007)	-.0001 (.007)
Excluded Population	.006 (.043)	.002 (.052)
GDPpc (ln)	.151 (.114)	.172 (.123)
Youth Bulge	.007 (.016)	.003 (.016)
Country Size (Km, ln)	.115** (.046)	.113** (.048)
Protests (t-1)	.098*** (.012)	.093*** (.012)
constant	-2.18 (1.66)	-2.91* (1.54)
Inflation Stage		
Freedom of Association	.041 (.465)	.440 (.524)
Freedom of Press/Speech	-.176 (.441)	-.134 (.507)
Unemployment	-.243*** (.073)	-.239** (.091)
Youth Bulge	-.510*** (.089)	-.492*** (.109)
Total Population (ln)	-1.06*** (.206)	-.961*** (.274)
constant	17.38*** (3.37)	15.93*** (4.16)
Observations	1111	1111
Zeros	307	194
Non-zeros	804	717
Alpha	.549 (.095)	.599 (.090)
Vuong T. (Pr>z)	4.06 (0.000)	4.00 (0.000)
Wald X^2(Pr>X^2)	339.06 (0.000)	284.88 (0.000)

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

As observable, the effect of our operationalization of the RAI variable shows a statistically significant negative effect on the frequency of protests. Additionally, only when restricting the definition of a protest to demands involving political processes and behaviors, does democracy (as measured by Polity) have an effect on the frequency of protests suggesting a lack of variation in this subsample. This alternative test confirms the hypotheses in the manuscript's main text, and, is in line with previous findings in the literature (Brown 2009). Democratic countries in which the subnational governments have decision-making power over at least one policy have less frequent protest events than the rest.

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