

Abstract:

Social Interactions and the Dynamics of Political Movements: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong's Antiauthoritarian Protests (David Yang)

What drives individuals to persistently engage in political movements? We test whether participation in one protest within a political movement increases subsequent protest attendance. We also examine the mechanisms underlying persistent political engagement, considering changes in individuals': (i) political beliefs; (ii) political preferences; and, (iii) social interactions. To identify an effect of past protest participation, we randomly incentivize Hong Kong university students into participation in an antiauthoritarian protest. To identify the effects of social interactions, we cross-randomize the intensity of this treatment across major-cohort cells. We find that experimentally-induced protest attendance does not significantly change political beliefs or preferences one year later. However, experimentally-induced past participation is significantly associated with protest attendance one year later, with persistent political engagement greatest among individuals in the cells with highest treatment intensity. Evidence on the formation of new friendships indicates that social interactions supported sustained political engagement.