

Black Lives Matter protests have not led to spike in coronavirus cases: report

By Alexandra Kelley

Following weeks of speculation as to whether or not Black Lives Matter protests across states would lead to an uptick in coronavirus infections, a study using data from the country's largest cities found "no evidence" that the demonstrations caused a spike in the number of new COVID-19 cases.

In a [paper](#) published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), several authors analyze the effects major Black Lives Matter protests had on city populations and found that the amount of new cases was offset by individuals who elected not to march and opted to continue social distancing.

The study was conducted by observing 315 major U.S cities; protests took place in 281 of them, and did not occur in the other 34. Protests were also differentiated by how long demonstrations lasted, as well as if any violent activities occurred at the time.

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"We find no evidence that urban protests reignited COVID-19 case growth during the more than two and a half weeks following protest onset," the researchers write. "We conclude that predictions of broad negative public health consequences of Black Lives Matter protests were far too narrowly conceived."

Using anonymously reported smartphone data collected by Safe Graph, the researchers were able to analyze the movement of 45 million individuals during protests. Confirmed case data was sourced from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This data is intended to observe how protesters may have practiced social distancing or how close they came into contact with other people. The social distancing analysis lasted for 30 days before and after the protests to gauge the case growth.

Analyses reveal a few key findings, namely that researchers found no evidence that stay-at-

home behaviors were different in counties which had protests and counties which did not have protests.

Researchers also saw an increase in stay-at-home trends in the counties closest to the city, or where protests were headquartered. Following the protests, social distancing behavior increased. In conjunction with relatively linear coronavirus case growth, the findings suggest that “any direct decrease in social distancing among the subset of the population participating in the protests is more than offset by increasing social distancing behavior among others.”

Put differently: more people stayed home during protests, which balanced out any new cases contracted by demonstrators. Community transmission was not a major factor associated with Black Lives Matter protests.

Despite protests compromising the CDC-recommended social distancing protocols, the study proposes that the effect of the protest on social distancing practices was overall positive.

“While it is possible that the protests caused an increase in the spread of COVID-19 among those who attended the protests, we demonstrate that the protests had little effect on the spread of COVID-19 for the entire population of the counties with protests during the more than three weeks following protest onset. In most cases, the estimated longer-run effect (post-21 days) was negative, though not statistically distinguishable from zero,” the authors write.

One outlier noted during the study was found in Maricopa County, Ariz., the home of its capital city Phoenix. This follows the state having trouble containing cases prior to organized demonstrations.

Other states showcasing large increases include California, Florida and Texas.

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