OVERVIEW

Research Question

Through attending and investigating political and social protests by civilians in the city of Houston and interviewing them, how can we determine how people perceive and resist the law?

Objectives

To explore how:
- individuals perceive the law
- individuals interact with the law
- individuals resist the law
- external factors affect protesters and their outcomes

METHODS

Attended three Houston protests

March 5, 2018
March for a Dream Act

March 24, 2018
March for Our Lives

Protester Interviews

- Conducted four to five interviews per protest
- Voice recorded most interviews
- Hand transcribed in cases where protesters felt uncomfortable being recorded
- Interview questions did not include words law or resistance in order to explore everyday understandings of these concepts
- Interview questions:
  - Why did you attend the event?
  - What do you hope to accomplish through marching?
  - Is there anything you’re concerned about when you march, like safety? If so, what tactics are you prepared to use?
  - How do you feel about the presence of police at this march?
  - Does the fact that you need permits and approval for this protest change the value or importance of the protest in any way?

FINDINGS

Legal Consciousness

Protesters and the law are engaged in a mutual relationship in which they perceive, interact with, and shape one another, both knowingly or unknowingly.

- By marching, it helps me more internally rather than visually. The way I see marches, it just helps media write a story so I don’t really care about that party - what I care about is how it helps me internally, it just grounds me back to my roots and...it shows me how there’s still people who are fighting with me. - March for a Dream Act Protester

Police: Enforcing Social Order

"Rather than maintaining public order, what the presence of police patrols insures is the ‘reproduction of social order.’"

- Didier Fassin in Enforcing Order

"They think of us as criminals and as a threat to the people of the city. We aren’t the people they are trying to keep safe."

"They overreact and they just sit there and laugh at us...one of their cars could backfire and they would use it as an excuse for taking us out. - March for a Dream Act Protesters

Landscape

Three forms of landscape impacted the protest and participants

1. Location
   - March for a Dream Act: NRG Stadium
   - Rice Unites for DACA: Rice Memorial Center Grand Hall
   - March for our Lives: Tranquility Park in Downtown Houston

1. Police Presence
   - “Peace Officer” presence is required by the city of Houston

1. Protest Permits
   - Protests classified as “parades”
   - Application fee of $285

The Power of Language

"And eventually their talk of rights became route to collective action- prompting the girls to rap in unison and protest together..."

- Lynn Haney in Offending Women

At all three protests, in addition to the visual expression of language written on signs and posters, we found that creative, auditory language was a prominent form utilized by protesters to vocalize their messages of resistance

Scales of Law

By examining the scales and size of a protest, the numbers and members of a protest, its location, etc. we come to understand to what degree mindsets and perceptions toward resistance and the legitimacy of the law are shaped by these factors.

"It can be frustrating to try and get people involved at a small school...it was beautiful to see 200+ students take time out of their day...the event was a great reminder that we care about these issues."

- Student at Rice DACA

"I wanted to let each and everyone of you know that you are making a difference, that things can change in our city, our state, and our country.”

- Mayor Turner (March for Our Lives)

Subjectivity

"I saw this event as a way to show that I don’t believe the U.S. should be a place where immigrants feel unsafe or unwelcome, and to learn from others how I should continue to advocate for immigration reform in the future.”

- Protester at Rice Unites for DACA

Using the protest to recognize their position of subjectivity, protesters hence publicly demonstrate their beliefs and take advantage of their agency.

DISCUSSION

Limitations

- Limited number of protests
- Sampling method not randomized
- Limited sample size with interviews conducted
- ⅔ protests conducted in line with city ordinances

Future Research

- Conservative protests
- Sample: those who abstain from protests
- Historical variations in protests in Houston
- Media portrayal of protests
- Intersectionality of protests: how do race, class, gender, etc. play a role in determining legal consciousness regarding protests?

References


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