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Journal of European Public Policy

ISSN: 1350-1763 (Print) 1466-4429 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjpp20

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To cite this article: Amir Abdul Reda & Xiao Lu (05 Dec 2025): Crisis governance and protest during the covid-19 pandemic in Europe: a conditional grievance theory, Journal of European Public Policy, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2025.2596125

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2596125

JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY
https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2596125

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Crisis governance and protest during the covid-19 pandemic in Europe: a conditional grievance theory

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ABSTRACT

Why do some crisis-response policies trigger more protests than others? What does this reveal about how governments should introduce restrictive–but necessary–measures during times of crisis? This paper revisits prevailing explanations for protests against Covid-19 policies by proposing a conditional grievance theory of protest. We argue that the protest-inducing effect of containment measures depends not only on their restrictiveness, but also on the timing, scale and persistence of accompanying economic support. When economic support is both substantial and synchronised with the imposition of restrictions, material grievances are dampened and mobilisation is less likely. We test this argument using the first full time-series cross-sectional dataset of the Covid-19 pandemic for 22 European countries measured at daily intervals. Our findings show that while more restrictive policies tend to increase protest activity, this effect is significantly mitigated in contexts where economic support is high and well-timed. These results highlight the importance of designing crisis governance strategies that align policy restrictiveness with timely and persistent economic relief.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 19 May 2025; Accepted 21 November 2025

KEYWORDS Protest; covid-19; policies; Europe; containment

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic was marked by a flurry of contentious action despite what first started with an unprecedented decline of protest events (Metternich, 2020). Across the world, demonstrators took to the streets to protest the often-severe restrictions and governmental injunctions implemented to fight the spread of the virus. Issues being protested

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Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2596125.

ranged the whole gamut of governmental policies against the virus–mobility restrictions, vaccine mandates, international travel restrictions, and so on Hellmeier (2023). Others simply exploited expansions in the political opportunity structure to protest pre-existing issues–such as assisted dying (J. G. Martín & Perugorría, 2024). Despite repeated containment measures, civil liberty curbs, and deeply intrusive anti-pandemic measures around the world, most countries remained within a cycle of infections and containment for the better part of three years–2020 to early 2023.

Containment measures are deeply unpopular–and understandably so. They intrude on civil liberties, restrict freedom of movement and personal choice, and impose social isolation that compounds both economic hardship and psychological strain. Yet from a purely rational perspective, short-term compliance with such measures would serve the collective good by hastening the end of a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this logic, restrictive policies–such as curfews–often provoke strong public backlash, with effects that extend beyond the immediate health context. Recent evidence shows, for example, that similar measures can significantly erode support for incumbent governments (Canavan & Turkoglu, 2024), and are linked with shifts in public priorities around the world (Abdul Reda & Alkhonin, 2025; Abdul Reda *et al.*, 2024). We argue that this reflects a classic collective action problem with important implications for how governments design and communicate crisis-response policies.

This paper explains protests against pandemic-related policies through the lens of economic grievances. We argue that protests against Covid-19 policies is not driven solely by the restrictiveness, i.e., the 'stringency', of the policies in question, but by whether those measures are accompanied by timely economic support. As policies become more restrictive, they impose growing material costs on affected populations. In the absence of financial relief, these costs generate grievances that increase the likelihood of protest. Conversely, when governments provide timely and proportional economic support, they help absorb the shock of restrictions and reduce incentives for mobilisation. This conditional relationship between policy severity and economic relief shapes compliance and contention during crises. We show that this dynamic holds even when accounting for political factors such as regime type, trust in government, or opportunity structures. The broader implication is that economic cushioning is a critical policy lever for governments seeking to maintain public order during emergencies. Doing so is critical not only to managing public health, but also to minimising protests in times of crisis. We show that this dynamic holds even when accounting for political and economic factors discussed by others in explaining protests against Covid-19 policies (Farzanegan & Gholipour, 2023; Iacoella *et al.*, 2025; Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Wood *et al.*, 2022).

This paper makes several key contributions. First, we assemble the first dataset that integrates both political and economic factors identified in the literature as drivers of protest against Covid-19 policies. Second, our study is the first to offer a comprehensive time-series analysis of such protests spanning the entire pandemic period–from 2020 to 2023. In contrast, prior research has typically relied on much shorter timeframes, often covering less than half of the pandemic (Cordell *et al.*, 2023; Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Pfaff *et al.*, 2023; Plümper *et al.*, 2021; Wood *et al.*, 2022). By leveraging the full timeline, we assess how key protest-inducing factors evolved over time and identify the most influential ones. Our dataset includes daily data on policy, economic, mobility, and health variables for more than 20 countries and over 800 regions across Europe. This enables us to show that protest activity is closely linked to both the restrictiveness of containment measures and the material conditions they produce. More restrictive policies consistently correspond to increased protests, particularly in contexts where economic support is lacking. Our findings underscore the critical role of timely financial assistance in reducing civil rejection of important government policies. In doing so, we highlight the importance of policy design that aligns restrictive measures with economic relief, not only to ensure compliance but also to reinforce societal cohesion during crises.

2. Restrictive policy introduction, economic support, and civil protest

Protests that arise in response to containment policies during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, have significant implications for societal stability that extend beyond their immediate effects on policymaking (Branton *et al.*, 2015; Collingwood *et al.*, 2018; Hellmeier, 2023; Hunger *et al.*, 2023; Ketchley & El-Rayyes, 2021; Mazumder, 2018; Reny & Newman, 2021; Wasow, 2020). However, despite a large literature that explores the impact of social movements and protests on policy changes (Amenta *et al.*, 2010; Barrie *et al.*, 2023; Burstein & Sausner, 2005; Cornwall *et al.*, 2007; Giugni, 2004, 2007; Johnson, 2008; King *et al.*, 2007, 2005; Kriesi, 1995; McAdam & Su, 2002; Olzak & Soule, 2009; Snow *et al.*, 2007; Soule & King, 2006), there are comparatively fewer studies questioning the reverse relationship – the impact of restrictive policy introduction on protests against said policies.

The conventional wisdom suggests that protests against Covid-19 policies stem from a combination of political, economic and psychological elements. Previous studies have attributed the varying intensity of protests against diverse policy strictness to factors such as civil liberties and governmental trust (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023), partisan influences within legislatures (Pfaff *et al.*, 2023), or the prevalence of conspiracy beliefs and individual tendencies (Nachtwey *et al.*, 2020; Ramirez & Wood, 2024). Differences in protests

related to Covid-19 policies have been further elucidated by political opportunity theories, indicating that protesters were mobilised due to the pandemic's progression (Plümper *et al.*, 2021), or by the nature of the policy being enforced, which modified the political opportunity structure for activists (Cordell *et al.*, 2023). Thus, it is reasonable to interpret protests against Covid-19 policies with political variables in mind, given the vast spread of misinformation and partisanship surrounding Covid-19 and health regulations in the public domain (Charquero-Ballester *et al.*, 2021; Curley *et al.*, 2022). Similar phenomena were well-documented during the 2015 U.S. election and the 2021 Capitol riots, where factors such as misinformation, conflicting political narratives, and partisanship had a significant impact (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Lee, 2021; Swire *et al.*, 2017). Recent analyses also associate a variety of subjective attributes with support for anti-Covid-19 containment policy protestors and a predisposition to engage in contentious behaviour *despite* the containment policies (Bethke *et al.*, 2023; Hunger *et al.*, 2023). Other recent studies highlight the timing of protests against Covid-19 containment strategies as a key factor, often correlating with low virus-related mortality rates and stringent policies (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Plümper *et al.*, 2021).

One of the main findings is that restrictive policy introductions do, in fact, lead to an increase in protest activity (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Pfaff *et al.*, 2023; Plümper *et al.*, 2021). The logic is that restrictive government measures such as pandemic lockdowns and restrictions on social freedoms amplify public dissent by exacerbating existing grievances, leading to significant public unrest (R. M. Duch *et al.*, 2025; Hellmeier, 2023; Kurer *et al.*, 2019). Empirical evidence from cross-national studies, although using incomplete time series of the pandemic, suggests that heightened policy restrictiveness may correlate with increased protest frequency in countries as different as the United States, Brazil and Germany (Hellmeier, 2023). Based on these findings, we expect that:

> **Hypothesis 1.** With increasing policy stringency, the frequency of protests will also increase.

Yet, these findings also raise a central question in crisis governance: how can states maintain public acquiescence to restrictive measures when they face little room to maneuver? We argue that public compliance depends not only on the restrictiveness of policies but also on the state's capacity to offset the material costs they impose. Drawing on grievance-based theories of mobilisation, we posit that economic support can blunt the disruptive effects of restrictive measures and reduce the likelihood of protests.

Grievance reduction theory posits that such economic support decreases protests by mitigating financial stress and increasing government legitimacy. In fact, a substantial body of literature highlights the connection between

grievance caused by governmental policies, the emergence of large-scale protests concerning economic crises, and the austerity measures governments implement to address them. The prevailing understanding in this literature suggests that people are more inclined to protest policies that result in personal hardship (Arce & Bellinger, 2007; Aslund, 2001; Bellinger & Arce, 2011; Johnston & Almeida, 2006; Kurtz & Lauretig, 2022; Przeworski, 1991; Rüdig & Karyotis, 2014; Simmons, 2016; Walton & Seddon, 2008; Williamson, 2014, 1990).

We build on the literature on grievances and the synchronicity argument by Neumayer *et al.* (2023) to propose a conditional grievance theory of protests. At the heart of this theory is the idea that the impact of restrictive policies on protest activity depends not only on their restrictiveness but also on whether they are accompanied by timely economic support. When governments introduce strict containment measures without timely financial assistance, they risk deepening material hardship, thereby heightening public grievances and increasing the likelihood of mobilisation. Conversely, when economic support is provided in tandem with restrictive policies, it can dampen dissatisfaction and reduce incentives to protest.

This argument highlights the interdependence between containment restrictiveness, economic relief, and the decision to mobilise. Protesting is costly, and individuals typically weigh the expected benefits of protesting–or the cost of inaction–against the personal risks of taking to the streets. The cost-benefit analysis of protest participation is well-documented in the literature, from studies of routine demonstrations to large-scale revolutions (Gupta *et al.*, 1993; Muller, 1985; Shadmehr & Bernhardt, 2011; Steinert-Threlkeld & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2021). In liberal and democratic societies, while the risk of repression may be relatively low (Cunningham *et al.*, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 1993), health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic introduce a new form of cost: the risk of infection and potentially death (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023). Prior research confirms that protesters respond to this threat, as protest activity in Europe during the pandemic varied with Covid-19 death rates (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, the emergence of protests during a health crisis is shaped by how containment measures interact with economic support. We argue that when restrictive policies are introduced without economic relief, individuals may perceive government actions as unresponsive or unjust–prompting protests even amid serious health risks. In these cases, material hardship may outweigh the dangers of mobilisation. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect that the influence of restrictive policies on protest activity is conditional on the level and timing of economic support provided by the government.

Enhanced economic support measures, such as direct financial assistance, subsidies, tax relief, and unemployment benefits, can mitigate the material

pain experienced by individuals and businesses during periods of restrictive pandemic policies (R. Duch *et al.*, 2023). By alleviating financial stress, governments can address one of the primary drivers of public dissent and unrest, thereby reducing the frequency and intensity of protests (Kern *et al.*, 2015; Kurer *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we argue that when governments combine restrictive measures with timely economic relief, citizens may perceive such policies as more legitimate, reducing motivations for protest. Additionally, the material cushion offered by economic support policies simply reduces the benefits of protesting the Covid-19 policies. This relationship suggests that economic support can act as a buffer, cushioning the adverse effects of severe restrictions and helping people cope with short-term sacrifices (Kurer *et al.*, 2019). When people feel economically supported, their tolerance for temporary restrictions should increase. In fact, the literature finds traces of this relationship elsewhere. In some cases, increased economic support helps dampen the opportunity structure opened by a specific level of Covid-19 related deaths (Farzanegan & Gholipour, 2023), while in others, increased economic support helps dampen grievances caused by workplace closures (Wood *et al.*, 2022). Here, we extend these arguments by explaining that economic support helps alleviate the general material pain caused by increasingly restrictive pandemic fighting policies. When people feel supported and financially secure, they are more likely to comply with public health measures and less likely to engage in protests, leading to a more peaceful and cooperative society during challenging times.

Beyond mitigating material grievances, economic support may also reduce protest by affecting individuals whose opposition to containment measures is driven by ideological or psychological motivations. While such motivations–e.g., concerns over civil liberties, distrust in government, or resentment against vaccination mandates–may not be alleviated by financial aid in a direct sense, economic support can nonetheless exert indirect demobilising effects through two mechanisms. First, cross-cutting motivations are common among protest participants. Even individuals primarily driven by political, ideological reasons often face simultaneous economic pressures which can help dampen or increase their likelihood to participate in protests (Azedi, 2023; Dalton *et al.*, 2010; Siltala, 2020, april). Financial support can reduce the salience of these economic concerns, thereby weakening the incentive for ideologically and economically motivated individuals to form broad-based protest coalitions. As a result, in the absence of shared material grievances, protests may lose critical mass and organisational momentum.

Second, economic support increases the opportunity costs of protest and dampens the emotional energy that sustains mobilisation. As protest research has shown (Jasper, 2011; van Troost *et al.*, 2013), participation is not solely a function of grievance intensity but also of perceived risk, effort, and the affective resonance of a cause. In times of financial precarity,

restrictive policies may evoke acute feelings of fear, anger, and injustice, creating fertile ground for mobilisation. Conversely, when individuals receive substantial support, they may experience reduced urgency or emotional volatility, even if they still hold normative objections to the policies in place. In this sense, economic support does not necessarily need to 'buy off' ideological opposition per se. Rather, it modifies the protest environment by making mobilisation less likely, less intense, and less coordinated. This logic aligns with broader political opportunity theories (Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Kolb, 2007; Meyer, 2004), which emphasise that grievances translate into collective action only under favourable contextual conditions–including economic insecurity and social unrest.

Accordingly, we can formalise the above argument into the following testable hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 2.** Containment policies are more likely to trigger protests when economic support is low, but less likely to do so when support is high.

Note that in this study, we do not claim to directly measure individual grievances. Rather, we treat the combination of stringent containment policies and limited economic support as structural conditions conducive to widespread grievance formation. This macro-level design allows us to test the general proposition that economic support moderates the protest-inducing effects of containment policies–consistent with prior cross-national research on protest under austerity or crisis conditions (Ancelovici, 2015; Davies, 2025; Hunger *et al.*, 2023; Oana *et al.*, 2025).

3. Data, measurement and estimation strategy

To test our theory, we compile a unique dataset based on several data sources which we transform into a time series cross section format for 22 European societies. Our dataset innovates from previous research in two main ways. First, our analysis spans March 2020 to December 2022, aligning with the complete period for which policy data are available. Given that the pandemic concluded only a few months later, in February 2023, our dataset provides very nearly full coverage of the pandemic. Previous works on coronavirus containment policies and protests were published during the pandemic and therefore did not benefit from the entire time series of observations (Iacoella *et al.*, 2025; Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Plümper *et al.*, 2021). While we acknowledge the need for scientific and policy insights during the pandemic itself, the fact of the matter remains that using a time series without well grounded endpoints is akin to a selection bias in the data (Geddes, 1990). Second, we innovate from previous research by accounting for the main political and economic variables identified by previous literature on protests against Covid-19 policies.

To test our hypotheses, we adopt the following main model specification:

$$Protests_t = Stringency_{t-n} + Economic\ Support_{t-n} + Stringency_{t-n} \times Economic\ Support_{t-n} + \chi + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Where $Protests_t$ against policies implemented to control the pandemic at time t, is a function of the average restrictiveness of said policies over time $t - n$, represented by $Stringency_{t-n}$, and taken in relation with $EconomicSupport_{t-n}$ provided by governments to populations. We account for other variables that may confound the relation between the main explanatory variables and the dependent variable, which are indicated by χ in the equation. Additionally, we include country and day/month/year fixed-effects, with standard errors clustered at the country level. The error term is given by ε. We use lag effect $t-28$ because monthly values are used in the rest of the literature (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023), and it makes logical sense to us that the effect of restrictive policies–and other independent variables that fluctuate at daily intervals–should impact the population more substantially over a longer time period rather than on the day of their implementation. That being said, we run our main models at time t, $t-3$ days, and $t-7$ days, and results are very similar, with results for time t being even generally stronger–see Table B2 in Appendix B. By using time lags we also avoid the potential issue of reverse causality–the potential reversed effect of protests on policymaking.

Due to the count nature of our dependent variable, we estimate Equation (1) using a negative binomial model. We also experimented with a linear model and a Poisson regression model, but favoured the negative binomial estimation first because our dependent variable is a count variable, which is not ideally estimated using the ordinary least square model. Second, we favoured a negative binomial model over a Poisson regression model because over-dispersion tests over all our main tests and robustness checks showed that our dependent variable was over-dispersed.

3.1. Dependent variable: protests

Our dependent variable is based on a subset of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Direct Covid-19 Disorder Events dataset, which is made up of daily incidents of protests directly linked to the coronavirus pandemic. ACLED is a data project centred on events, created for in-depth analysis of conflicts and crisis mapping, and continuously gathers real-time information on the locations, dates, participants, casualties, and categories of all documented instances of political violence and protest events worldwide. Its data is derived from a wide range of local, national, and international sources including local and international media reports, NGO updates, and

official government announcements in over 75 languages and the information is collected by trained researchers worldwide. It encompasses various events, including protests aimed at healthcare workers responding to the pandemic, demonstrations against government decisions related to the pandemic, and more (Raleigh *et al.*, 2010).[1]

The distribution of our main dependent variable is visualised in Figure 1 below–it is constituted of 24,781 events that occur in various subnational regions across 22 European countries from February 2020 to March 2023, at different levels of economic support based on the Economic Support Index–classified as low (below the first quartile), moderate (between the first and third quartiles), and high (above the third quartile). In general, periods with higher levels of support are associated with relatively lower levels of protest, suggesting that generous economic measures may have mitigated–but not eliminated–public discontent during moments of heightened uncertainty and policy transition.

In the appendix, we added several additional descriptive analyses to contextualise the scope and nature of protest activity. Figure A4 in Appendix A displays the total number of protest events recorded per country, while

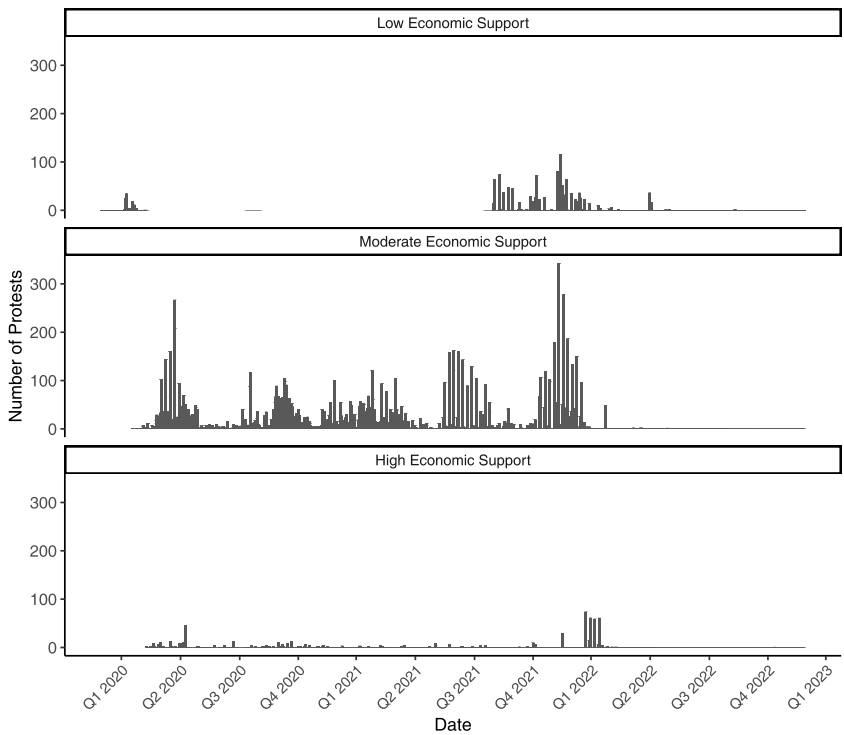

Figure 1. Daily Civil Protests in 22 European Countries (2020 to 2023).

Figure A5 presents the distribution of estimated participant numbers. Figure A6 summarises the thematic focus of protest events based on coded issue types. We refer the readers Appendix A for a more detailed description.

3.2. Main explanatory variables: policy stringency and economic support

One of our main explanatory variables is a measure of the implementation of various anti Covid-19, containment policies at specific times during the timeline of the pandemic–it is constructed out of the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) dataset. The OxCGRT dataset covers the period of January 1st, 2020, to December 2022 and systematically documents government policies across various domains, including closures and containment, health measures, economic policies, as well as daily COVID-19 cases and deaths. This comprehensive dataset encompasses the policies of over 180 countries with a total 43,128 of data points for 43 European countries–here, we use 13,244 data points for our 22 European countries of interest (Phillips, 2020).

We use two types of variables from the OxCGRT, in our main models and in our robustness checks–the first are policies coded by a discrete number from 0 to 3, with a higher number implying a more restrictive policy, such as School closures, Stay at home requirements, facial covering (mask) mandates, vaccination mandates, etc. The second are synthetic indices that provide a comprehensive assessment of government actions. Specifically, there are four categories of indices: the Government Response Index, Containment and Health Index, Stringency Index, and Economic Support Index. Variations of these indices exist, based on factors such as vaccination status. Each of these indices is a composite measurement, calculated as the mean score of various response metrics and spans a range from 0 to 100. A higher score signifies a more restrictive response, with 100 indicating the strictest level of response (Phillips, 2020).

The Stringency Index, one of these indexes that assesses the restrictiveness of government policies during the pandemic is a composite measure of nine of the response metrics namely: school closures; workplace closures; cancellation of public events; restrictions on public gatherings; closures of public transport; stay-at-home requirements; public information campaigns; restrictions on internal movements; and international travel controls. It helps measure the overall restrictiveness of containment policies implemented by governments to curb the Covid-19 pandemic (Phillips, 2020). We plot the evolution of the Stringency Index in Figure A2 in the Appendix, for the 22 European countries we focus on.

To capture economic interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, we incorporate data on the Economic Support Index across various European

countries. The Economic Support Index measures the extent of government economic support provided to mitigate the pandemic's impact and is also compiled by the OxCGRT dataset for the same time period as the one available for the Stringency Index (Phillips, 2020). Overall, it helps us understand how different countries responded to the crisis, offering insights into the effectiveness of such interventions in maintaining economic stability and supporting vulnerable populations. We plot its distribution in Figure A3 in the Appendix, from 2020 to December 2022. In brief, the index ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating more substantial economic support. At the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, most countries rapidly implemented high levels of economic support, as indicated by the high initial values of the index. This may have been crucial for addressing the immediate economic fallout from lockdowns and other restrictive measures. Throughout 2021, there were fluctuations in the level of economic support, reflecting adjustments in policies as governments responded to changing conditions and the evolving nature of the pandemic. A notable trend is the varying levels of economic support across different countries over time. For instance, some countries like Germany and the United Kingdom maintained relatively high levels of support throughout the pandemic, while others showed more variability. This divergence highlights the different approaches and capacities of countries to sustain economic interventions over the long term.

3.3. Control variables

To illustrate the economic pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, we control for food price inflation across various European countries. Food price inflation measures the percentage change in food prices over time, providing insights into cost fluctuations of essential goods. This monthly data is useful for understanding economic stability and household financial pressure during the pandemic, as rising food prices can worsen financial hardship and contribute to social protest.[2]

We also control for mobility data as measured in Google's Community Mobility Reports to capture real changes in daily activities during the pandemic. We rely on Google's Community Mobility Reports (GCMR) which computes daily differences in time spent at workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to a pre-pandemic baseline. We use time spent at workplaces instead of time spent at home because it is the most complete time series for the European countries of our dataset–time spent in residential areas is much more incomplete and therefore not as useful for the tests to come.[3]

We also control for several alternative mechanisms outlined in the literature to explain civil protest to policies aimed at curbing the Covid-19

pandemic, with the large majority of them being focussed on institutional variables. First, how democratic and/or liberal a country is has been outlined as an alternative mechanism (Hellmeier, 2023; Neumayer *et al.*, 2023), and we control for it here. Second, previous literature has mentioned the importance of partisan control of legislatures–what party ideology is in power–as an alternative explanation to civil protest to Covid-19 policies (Pfaff *et al.*, 2023), and we control for it here. To the extent that there exists a societal and partisan alignment between citizens and politicians, the partisan composition and ideological orientation of governments could logically influence public participation in protests. While the predominance of the leftist participation has been found in protest events in transition democracies and regarding topics such as wars, environment, and LGBT rights (Hutter & Borbáth, 2019; Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Meyer & Tarrow, 1997; Tavits & Letki, 2009; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2001), recent studies on far-right protests have suggested a curvilinear nature of contentious protests where citizens at the two extreme ends of the political spectrum are more likely to be demonstrators (Gattinara *et al.*, 2022; Powell, 1982; Rovny *et al.*, 2022; Ruisch *et al.*, 2021). This has to do with the under-representation of those groups of people in government. Thus, it is plausible to expect that with improved quality of representation and reduced ideological disparity between mainstream parties and the overall population, the number of protests will reduce.

With reduced trust in government agencies and lower confidence in the competence of politicians and parties in handling crises, citizens are more likely to join mass demonstrations than waiting for the next election to come. To hold politicians accountable, citizens use retrospective evaluation of the government's past performance and take hints of the intra-cabinet conflict which is an important indicator of government competence (Ashworth, 2012; Besley, 2007; Ferejohn, 1986; Healy & Malhotra, 2013; König & Lu, 2020). When perceived performance is bad and observed intra-cabinet conflict is high, people are more willing to take extra-institutional actions by joining protests (Altiparmakis & Lorenzini, 2018; Grasso & Giugni, 2016). Protests may also occur when the public finds it difficult to identify politicians and parties who are responsible for a certain policy initiation or implementation. This can happen in multi-party coalition settings where the coalition members take collective decisions (König *et al.*, 2022, 2025; Lu, 2023, 2025; L. W. Martin & Vanberg, 2011). With an increasing intra-coalition conflict and a higher number of coalition parties, we may therefore expect that citizens will face difficulties in identifying the responsible actors and therefore more likely to protest. We herefore control for these two variables in the empirical tests that follow.

Empirically, political institutional factors are captured through variables we extract from the ParlGov project dataset, which measures in a time series format features relevant to the electoral life, political parties, and cabinets

of EU and OECD countries. In fine, we use variables such as *Intra-Coalition Conflict* and the *Participatory Democracy Index* as controls in our analysis. *Intra-Coalition Conflict* measures political instability within governing coalitions, which can influence public dissent and protests. More specifically, we identify the partisan composition of each coalition government using the cabinet information from the ParlGov dataset (Doring *et al.*, 2023), and then calculate the intra-coalition conflict as the variance of the left-right positions of the cabinet parties based on their election manifestos (Lehmann *et al.*, 2024). The *Participatory Democracy Index* from the V-Dem project reflects the level of participatory democracy in a country, with higher levels indicating a more active and engaged citizenry that may lead to more protests (Coppedge *et al.*, 2024). *Ideological Disparity* measures the extent of ideological differences within the population, with higher disparity potentially hindering unified protest movements. We also include variables for *Left-Right Political Orientation*, capturing the political orientation of governing parties, and *State-Market Orientation*, which measures the government's policy orientation towards state intervention versus market freedom (Doring *et al.*, 2023). These variables help us understand the influence of political and economic policy orientation on protests (Dalton *et al.*, 2010; Powell, 1982). Finally, the *Liberty-Authority* variable measures the level of civil liberties and government authority, with higher levels of liberty expected to reduce the number of protests.[4]

Finally, the political opportunity structure framework suggests that protesters take to the street in relation to very specific occasions in the pandemic, and we control for it here (Plümper *et al.*, 2021). This evolution of the health crisis is measured through daily measures of Covid-19 deaths–here are collected by the OxCGRT. We focus on Covid-19 deaths and omit cases because previous literature has identified it as being more impactful on civil protest than pure case counts (Neumayer *et al.*, 2023), and because the two yielded relatively similar results in the tests we present here and in the Appendix, with Covid-19 deaths being indeed more impactful. Figure A1 in the Appendix illustrates the daily count of Covid-19 deaths across European countries from 2020 to 2023.

4. Estimation results

In Table 1 below, we present the main results for our tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2. Model 1 tests the impact of the restrictiveness of policies implemented to control the pandemic on the number of protests against these policies during the whole timeline of the pandemic in the 22 European countries mentioned above and without control variables, while including country clustered fixed effects and day/month/year fixed effects. In Model 2, we test the interaction between the restrictiveness of policies implemented to control the pandemic *and* economic support to populations, on the incidence of

Table 1. Impact of policy stringency on protests.

Dependent Variable:	$Protests_t$		
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)
Variables			
$Stringency_{t-28}$	0.0072	0.0432***	0.1279***
	(0.0121)	(0.0148)	(0.0192)
$Economic\ Support\ Index_{t-28}$		0.0326***	0.0461***
		(0.0106)	(0.0103)
$Stringency_{t-28} \times Economic\ Support\ Index_{t-28}$		−0.0006***	−0.0008***
		(0.0002)	(0.0002)
$Workplaces\ National_{t-28}$			0.0353**
			(0.0158)
$Covid\ Deaths_{t-28}$			1.7×10^{-5}***
			(1.87×10^{-6})
Food Price Inflation			−0.0419
			(0.0584)
Intra Coalition Conflict			0.4649***
			(0.0656)
Participatory Democracy Index			2.721
			(1.891)
Ideological Disparity			−114.1***
			(5.579)
Left Right			113.5***
			(5.623)
State Market			2.509***
			(0.4844)
Liberty Authority			−3.990***
			(0.3670)
Fixed-effects			
Country	Yes	Yes	
Date	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit statistics			
Observations	13,244	13,244	8,585
Squared Correlation	0.00463	0.00377	0.00056
Pseudo R^2	0.21687	0.21813	0.14512
BIC	17,440.3	17,440.7	14,477.2
Over-dispersion	0.12739	0.12836	0.08406

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

protests against Covid-19 policies, as per Equation (1). In other words, it tests how different amounts of *Economic Support* for populations moderates the impact of Covid-19 fighting policies on protests against these same policies. As per Equation (1), we do so using an interaction term between *Stringency* and *Economic Support*, and we include country clustered fixed effects and time fixed effects. Finally, in Model 3, we conduct a robustness check of Model 2 by controlling for several relevant economic and political variables. In Model 3 we only add time clustered but remove country clustered fixed effects because issues of multicollinearity arise and prevent our optimisation algorithm from converging–we do the same for many models in the Appendix that include many control variables for the same reason.

Our results based on the whole timeline of the pandemic for 22 European countries challenge previous findings in the literature on the impact of sheer restrictiveness of government policies on the future incidence of protests.

Unlike previous findings based on substantially shorter timelines of the pandemic, results in Model 1 indicate that the restrictiveness of anti-Covid-19 policies does not predictably increase (or decrease) the number of protests against these policies. Indeed, in Model 1, the coefficient for Stringency_{t-28} is 0.0072 but is not statistically significant, suggesting that the restrictiveness of Covid-19 fighting policies implemented by governments does not lead to more or less opposition to these same policies in the streets. Yet, as per Hypotheses 1 and 2, the results in Model 2 and 3 suggest that economic support plays an important and predictable role on whether more or less restrictive Covid-19 fighting policies will yield more or less unrest against these same policies.

In Model 2 and 3, the coefficients for Stringency_{t-28} are positive and statistically significant at the 99% level, suggesting that 99 times out of 100, when policies implemented to fight the Covid-19 pandemic become more restrictive without any economic support implemented at the same time, they will on average lead to more protests against these same policies in the streets of the 22 European countries under study. Yet, the coefficient for $\text{Stringency}_{t-28} \times \text{Economic Support Index}_{t-28}$ are negative and statistically significant at the 99% confidence interval, suggesting that as Covid-19 policies become more restrictive but economic support also increases for populations, less protests are to be predicted against the Covid-19 fighting policies. In other words, increasing economic support helps reduce protests against Covid-19 policies when these policies are very restrictive on the population. The impact of the relationship between the restrictiveness of Covid-19 policies and economic support to populations, on the incidence of protests against Covid-19 policies are robust to the inclusion of economic, political, and opportunity structure controls as can be seen in the results of Model 3.

Yet, economic support policies have a reverse effect when policies implemented to control the pandemic lose in restrictiveness. In Models 2 and 3, the coefficients for $\text{Economic Support Index}_{t-28}$ are positive are very statistically significant (99%) suggesting that when Covid-19 policies lose in restrictiveness while economic support to populations increases, populations tend to increase their protests against Covid-19 policies. In other words, populations take advantage of the high economic support and lower severity of anti Covid-19 policies to go to the streets and voice their opposition to restrictive policies. This scenario is likely very affected by opportunity structure mechanisms, in which case a high restrictiveness environment with economic support transitions to a low restrictiveness environment with high economic support, and populations therefore take advantage of the change in restrictiveness and material support from the state to take to the streets in such times of transition.

The results of our controls in Table 1 are also interesting. Higher Covid-19 death rates over the past four weeks correlate with increased protests, as

indicated by the positive and significant coefficient of 1.7×10^{-5} in Model (3). This reflects public frustration and fear in response to the pandemic's severity. *Intra-coalition conflict* is also significant in Model (3) with a coefficient of −0.0419, indicating that higher political instability within governing coalitions correlates with decreased protests when additional controls are included. Moreover, participatory democracy levels are not significant in Model 3, suggesting that this factor does not have a clear impact on protests against Covid-19. Greater ideological disparity within the cabinets in power reduces the number of protests, as evidenced by the negative and significant coefficient of −114.1 in Model 3, likely because the cabinet thus become more representative of the ideologies that would otherwise take to the streets to voice their opposition to Covid-19 policies. Other political orientation variables of the cabinets in power such as *Left-Right*, *State-Market*, and *Liberty-Authority* show significant impacts in Model (3). The coefficients are 113.5, 2.5093, and −3.990, respectively, indicating that political orientations of the cabinets in power also have an important influence on protest activities. For instance, the more to the right the cabinet the more protests against Covid-19, while the more the cabinet is made up of parties that espouse a market economic ideology over a state economic ideology the more there will be protests against Covid-19 policies. Instead, the more authority over liberty espoused by the cabinet members the less there will be protests against Covid-19 policies.

We plot predicted probabilities to explore how variations in policy restrictiveness and economic support influence protests across the 22 European countries under study and based on the predictions of Model 2. The objective behind these predictions is to provide empirical evidence on how different configurations of policy restrictiveness and economic support contribute to the conditional grievances experienced by populations and to identify critical thresholds where the propensity for protests escalates. For robustness, we report predicted probabilities with confidence intervals that do not assume normally distributed errors.

Figure 2 displays the predicted number of protests at time *t* in relation to the average stringency and economic support indices over the past four weeks. For clarity, we categorise economic support into low, moderate, and high levels and demonstrate the impact of policy restrictiveness on the predicted daily protest counts in each panel. More specifically, the low, moderate and high levels correspond to values of 0, 50, and 100, respectively, on the Economic Support Index provided by the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT). This index ranges from 0 to 100 and captures the scope of income support and debt or contract relief policies in effect at a given time, including direct cash transfers and deferrals of utility or rent payments. The selected values represent the minimum, mean, and maximum observed in our sample, and are intended to illustrate the range

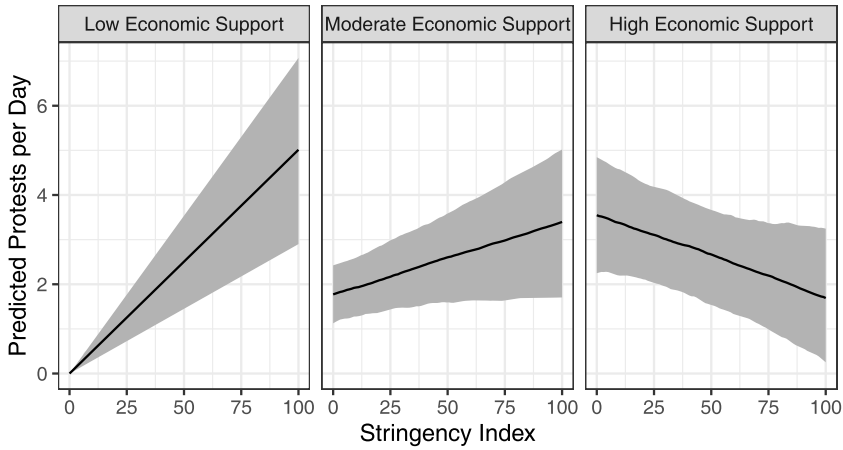

Figure 2. Predicted count of protests per day by stringency and economic support.

of support intensity in empirical terms.[5] In line with the results of Models 1 to 3, the panel on the left reveals that with low economic support, heightened policy stringency results in a significantly increased protest frequency. Specifically, the daily protest count rises by 5 on average when the stringency index escalates from 0 to 100. In contexts where financial assistance is minimal–like in Spain, Poland, or Denmark in the second half of 2022, as per Figure A3–increasingly restrictive Covid-19 policies are strongly associated with rising protest activity. This aligns with our grievance-based theory: as restrictions intensify and impose greater material burdens on the public, the absence of timely economic support fuels discontent, incentivizing mobilisation. Here, restrictive policies not only fail to secure compliance but actively provoke resistance due to unmet survival needs.

Conversely, when economic support is moderate or high, the substantial effect of policy restrictiveness on protest numbers is reduced. When economic support is present but limited, as shown by the middle panel, the grievance-mitigating effect of financial relief begins to surface. Although protest activity still rises with increased restrictiveness, the slope is notably flatter than in low-support contexts. This suggests that even moderate economic assistance can partially offset the material strain caused by containment measures, enhancing the capacity of the state to implement restrictive policies without triggering widespread unrest.

The dynamic shifts dramatically in high-support contexts. While baseline protest levels are somewhat higher–possibly due to increased opportunity to mobilise, as suggested by the political opportunity literature–there is no positive association between policy restrictiveness and protest activity. In fact, the trend reverses slightly. This suggests that robust economic support not only cushions the population from the immediate costs of

restrictive measures, but also undercuts the grievances that typically drive protest. In such settings, governments are better positioned to impose restrictive policies without incurring popular backlash.[6]

Together, these panels support our central claim: the effect of restrictive crisis measures on protest is conditional on the material context in which they are implemented. Economic support acts as a buffer that moderates grievance formation, thereby shaping public compliance in times of crisis.

4.1. Robustness checks

To cross check the validity of our findings, we run a number of additional tests which we include in Appendix B. Robustness Checks. First, we rerun our main model, Model 2 in Table 1, with different time lags–results are extremely similar and can be found in Table B6 in Appendix B. Second, we use different main independent variables in order to ensure that our results are neither an artifact of some specific variable, nor overfit to a specific way to measure policy restrictiveness. In so doing we use the variable for policy restrictiveness computed by the European Center for Disease Control (ECDC) which we pre-process in the same way as Neumayer *et al.* (2023). To do so, we use data from the ECDC source for data on country response measures to COVID-19, published on August 25th 2022, and compare our final stringency variable from the ECDC dataset with our main stringency variable, exhibited throughout the paper and measured by the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT). We compare in three ways our final stringency variable from the ECDC dataset with our main stringency variable, exhibited throughout the paper and measured by the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT). First, we compute a Pearson correlation analysis which does suggest that the two measures are highly correlated for most countries (above 0.7 overall), suggesting a robust linear relationship in their representations of government responses, and despite having different scores. Second, we plot the distribution of both variables by country for the timeline of the dataset–see Figure A15 in Appendix A, which qualitatively demonstrates that both measures do indeed fluctuate in the same pattern despite different absolute measures. Third, we compute statistical tests with the ECDC variables which seek to reproduce the whole of Table 1. Our results with this variable are very similar, and even more significant than the ones we presented in Table 1 above, and can be found in Table B1 in Appendix B.

We also do the same for our dependent variable–instead of using aggregate counts of daily protests we use number of protesters. Results are available in Tables B2 and B3 of Appendix B. As shown in the two tables, the results are consistent for time lags of up to 7 days (t, $t-3$, and $t-7$), indicating that the mobilisation of the highest number of people, in line with the

conditional grievance theory proposed here, is most pronounced within the first week. This suggests that the theory captures short-term dynamics particularly well.

In our robustness checks, we further examine our theory of conditional grievance by focussing on specific COVID-19 policies. In Tables B4 and B5 of Appendix B, we present models replicating Model 2 from Table 1, isolating protests related to particular policies–such as facial covering mandates, workplace closures, and vaccine requirements. The results offer strong support for our theory in the context of facial coverings and workplace closures, where grievance appears to translate more clearly into mobilisation. While the theory does not apply equally across all policy domains, these findings underscore its relevance in specific contexts and suggest that targeted case studies could further illuminate how particular policies drive protest dynamics.

In light of concerns about interaction effects in non-linear models (Ai & Norton, 2003), we estimated additional model specifications. First, we re-estimated our main models using log-transformed protest event counts as the dependent variable. The results closely mirror those from the primary negative binomial specifications, indicating that our main conclusions are not driven by model-specific non-linearities. Additionally, we estimated models using untransformed count data with OLS. These analyses yield substantively similar results, further reinforcing the robustness of our findings. We report and briefly discuss these checks in Tables B29 and B30 in Appendix B.

To account for potential heterogeneity in protest dynamics across different 'worlds of contention' in Europe (Borbáth & Gessler, 2020), we conduct additional robustness checks that incorporate regional variation. First, we control for contention regions by including a categorical variable in the extended models (Table B7 in Appendix B). The results show that our main findings remain substantively unchanged, with the core independent variables retaining their statistical significance and effect sizes. Second, we estimate separate models for each contention region (Table B8 in Appendix B). These subgroup analyses indicate that while the overall patterns are consistent, the effect of economic support is somewhat attenuated in the Eastern European model. However, the interaction effect between containment stringency and economic support remains statistically significant at the 90% confidence level across all regions. This suggests that the proposed conditional grievance mechanism is robust across varied regional contexts, even as the strength of effects may differ.

To assess the possibility of protest-driven policy responsiveness, we conducted an additional analysis examining whether protest activity influenced subsequent changes in containment policy stringency. Drawing on recent studies that explore similar dynamics, we estimated models using protest counts as the key independent variable and policy stringency as the dependent variable, incorporating 3-day, 7-day, and 28-day lags of protest events.

All models include country and date fixed effects to account for unobserved national characteristics and common temporal shocks. As reported in Table B31 of Appendix B, the estimated effects of protest activity on subsequent policy stringency are consistently statistically insignificant across all lag structures. While these null findings do not preclude the possibility of policy responses to protest in other contexts or over longer time horizons, they suggest that within the temporal scope of our data, protest events did not systematically influence short-term policy adjustments.

Vaccination coverage may plausibly shape both public perceptions of government competence and the intensity of pandemic-related restrictions, thereby affecting protest behaviour. We incorporate the share of the population that is fully vaccinated–which we find in the OxCGRT dataset–into our regression models to capture this dimension. Likewise, variation in pandemic phases may affect these relationships, and we account for this by including daily COVID-19 rates (capturing epidemiological intensity), food price inflation (reflecting economic stress), and workplace mobility (indicating the timing and severity of workplace closures) as proxies for pandemic phase dynamics. As shown in Table B11 of Appendix B, the inclusion of this variable does not substantively change the results: the estimated effects of the main explanatory variables remain statistically significant and consistent in direction and magnitude.

To further contextualise our findings and assess the specificity of pandemic-era protest dynamics, we conducted additional analyses comparing COVID-related protests to other contemporaneous protest waves. Drawing on ACLED data, we constructed two alternative samples: one including all non-COVID-related protests and another focussing specifically on climate-related protests, with events classified based on issue categories provided in the dataset. As shown in Table B10 of Appendix B, the core association between policy stringency and protest activity remains robust across both samples. However, we find no significant effects for economic support measures, nor for the interaction between economic support and stringency, in either the general or climate protest models. These findings suggest that the moderating role of economic support observed in the main analysis is specific to the COVID-19 context, underscoring the distinctiveness of pandemic-related grievance mobilisation.

To explore potential non-linear dynamics in the relationship between policy stringency and protest activity, we extend our empirical models by incorporating a curvilinear specification. Specifically, we include a squared term for the stringency index in Model 1 to test whether the effect of restrictions on protest follows a non-monotonic pattern. This analysis responds to concerns that a linear specification may obscure important variation across different levels of stringency. As shown in Table B12 of Appendix B, the results indicate a statistically significant inverted-U shaped relationship:

protest activity is most likely at medium levels of stringency, while both low and very high levels are associated with reduced protest likelihood. This pattern suggests that when restrictions are minimal, citizen grievances may not be sufficiently activated, and when restrictions are severe, barriers to collective mobilisation may deter protest despite heightened discontent. The non-linear specification also helps account for instances where protest remains relatively high under moderate restriction regimes, particularly in settings with high economic support.

To address the role of structural economic inequality in shaping protest responses (Iacoella *et al.*, 2025), we emphasise that pre-existing grievances, such as those arising from economic marginalisation, may condition how populations interpret and react to both restrictive policies and economic support. In contexts marked by structural inequality, state transfers may be perceived as insufficient relative to baseline needs, and thus fail to fully mitigate discontent. To account for this, we include the GINI index both as a standalone control variable and interacted with the economic support in our models (see Table B19 and B20 of Appendix B). The results remain robust, suggesting that the effects of stringency and economic support are not confounded by underlying inequality. Interestingly, we find a significantly positive effect of the interaction term between the GINI index and the economic support, which indicates that economic support is less effective in reducing protest in settings with greater inequality. As further demonstrated by the substantial effects shown in Figure B1 of Appendix B, the impact of economic support becomes insignificant in scenarios of high inequality (GINI index $\geq$ 50). Nonetheless, providing timely economic support can still significantly decrease protests in low inequality contexts.

Sustained restrictions may produce cumulative political and psychological effects, including diminished institutional trust, the normalisation of emergency rule, or latent forms of radicalisation. Likewise, although generous economic support may dampen immediate dissent, extended fiscal outlays or perceived inequities in benefit distribution may themselves evolve into future sources of grievance. To empirically probe the temporal reach of the protest response mechanism, we conduct additional robustness checks estimating the effects of stringency, economic support, and their interaction at extended lags of 60, 90, 120, 150, 180, and 360 days following policy implementation. As shown in Tables B13–B18 of Appendix B, the estimated effects become statistically insignificant beyond 90 days. This pattern suggests that protest reactions are predominantly shaped by recent policy experiences, and that the influence of past interventions diminishes over time. This temporal decay suggests that the effects of support are non-linear and time-sensitive, highlighting the need for sustained or adaptive policy strategies during extended crises. These dynamics are especially salient in the post-pandemic political context and merit longitudinal research beyond the scope of our current design.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Why do some policies provoke more protests than others during times of crisis? This paper has argued that public reactions to crisis-containment policies are best explained through a conditional grievance mechanism–one in which the impact of restrictive policies on protest behaviour depends not just on their stringency, but on whether and how governments cushion their material effects. Using a comprehensive time-series cross-sectional dataset for 22 European countries covering the Covid-19 pandemic, we demonstrate that protest activity increases in response to more restrictive policies–but only when those policies are implemented without timely economic support.

This argument brings a new perspective to the study of protest during the Covid-19 pandemic. Much of the existing literature focuses on political and opportunity structure mechanisms as the main sources of variation in public compliance or unrest (Cordell *et al.*, 2023; Nachtwey *et al.*, 2020; Neumayer *et al.*, 2023; Pfaff *et al.*, 2023; Plümper *et al.*, 2021; Ramirez & Wood, 2024). While our findings do not discount the importance of these political factors, they show that they do not operate in isolation. More importantly, we propose and test a solution to the crisis control puzzle: we highlight a layered interaction by which the effect of restrictive policies depends on whether governments simultaneously provide the material support necessary to offset citizens' grievances that emerge from said policies. Protests emerge not simply in response to coercion, but when that coercion is unmatched by compensatory action.

This insight has clear policy implications. Governments facing health or security emergencies must recognise that crisis fighting policies will generate unrest, but that said unrest can be mitigated by timely economic support. Our findings suggest that economic support may be particularly consequential when containment measures become highly stringent, highlighting the importance of pairing restrictive policies with compensatory relief. By foregrounding the conditional grievance mechanism, our analysis provides a clearer roadmap for managing crisis-driven unrest. Policymakers can reduce the political costs of restrictive measures by aligning them with well-timed, targeted economic relief. This balancing act–between the imposition of restrictions and the mitigation of their costs–is central not just to pandemic governance, but to any crisis in which social order and public welfare are simultaneously at stake.

More broadly, our findings contribute to theories of political opportunity in contentious politics. We show that public policies–especially those related to economic support–can function as institutional signals that shape citizens' perceptions of political openness or closure. Compensatory measures may not only reduce material burdens, but also serve as symbolic

cues of state responsiveness and legitimacy. In this sense, economic policies are not merely background conditions for protest, but an integral dimension of the political opportunity structure itself. Future research on grievance-based mobilisation may benefit from treating material policy instruments as both substantive and communicative acts–capable of altering citizens' expectations about how power is wielded in moments of crisis.

These implications extend beyond the Covid-19 context. As governments prepare for future emergencies–such as climate disruptions, energy shortages, or economic downturns–the lesson is clear: policy restrictiveness and distributive fairness must be co-managed. When governments fail to balance necessary constraints with meaningful economic support, they risk not only inefficacy but also political backlash. Attending to the conditional dynamics between repression and relief can therefore help design more legitimate, resilient, and politically sustainable forms of crisis governance.

Notes

1. We refer readers to the ACLED project documentation for further technical detail.
2. We chose to control for food price inflation because food costs tend to represent a substantial share of household expenditure–particularly for lower-income groups who are often more vulnerable to economic shocks and more likely to participate in protest activity in response to material hardship. Prior research has shown that rising food prices are strongly associated with grievance-based mobilisation, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. To ensure robustness, we also test an alternative specification using general consumer price inflation as a broader measure of cost-of-living pressures. The results, presented in Table B9 in Appendix B, show that the main findings remain substantively consistent and statistically robust when using the general consumer price index.
3. The baseline values are established as the median figures for corresponding days of the week over a five-week period spanning from January 3rd to February 6th, 2020. The data from the GCMR helps construct a granular view of deviance from the pre-pandemic, baseline 'normal' life at a sub-national level as it contains data both at the regional and national levels. The Change in Workplace Mobility ($Workplaces\ Regional_{t-28}$), measured at the regional (and national level), captures the percentage change in visits to workplaces compared to a pre-pandemic baseline, indicating the level of workplace activity and its interaction with policy stringency. This variable is measured in a bounded continuous fashion–as positive or negative percentages that identify the percent difference in mobility on a given day during the pandemic compared to the equivalent baseline day. In other words, if the percentage is negative then it indicates that people are staying at or visiting the target location less than compared to the pre pandemic baseline, with the reverse being also true.
4. Note that all of the above government positions are measured based on the seat-weighted average of the cabinet parties using the variables left/right, state/market, and liberty/authority from the ParlGov data (Doring *et al.*, 2023).

5. As an additional robustness check, we distinguish between different levels of economic support based on the first and third quartiles of the Economic Support Index in our sample: low support corresponds to values below the first quartile, moderate support to values between the first and third quartiles, and high support to values above the third quartile (see Table C1 in Appendix C). The main results still remain.
6. While our theoretical discussion focuses on three scenarios of the policy-support matrix, the fourth–cases with low stringency and high economic support–also aligns with our compliance logic. Here, the opportunity structure is more open: with minimal restrictions in place, citizens are more able to mobilise, especially in response to earlier periods of severe policy. High support may buffer grievances, but in the absence of restrictive measures, those with lingering dissatisfaction can now safely protest past hardship. Thus, even with generous support, protest can occur–not because compliance failed, but because compliance is no longer enforced.

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Centre de Recherche en Santé Publique of the École de Santé Publique de l'Université de Montréal 2025-2026 Conference Cyle, the African Institute for Research in Economics and Social Sciences Research Seminar 2025, and the 2024 American Sociological Association Conference. We would like to thank Manikou Anoun-Somda, Youssef Assarssah, and Iman Bouayyad for their work as RAs at various stages of this project. We are also indebted to Olivier Jacques, Moritz Schmoll, Jesko Hentschel, Bilal Islah, al Mouksit Akim, and Emmanuel Selorm Tsyawo for their feedback and advice on specific modelling aspects of the paper. Amir conceived and led the pre–peer-review manuscript, conducted the literature review, carried out the initial data analysis and robustness checks. Amir and Xiao jointly carried out the pre-submission data analysis and co-authored the pre–peer-review manuscript. During peer review, Xiao led the revisions – including further empirical analysis and robustness checks, figure redesign, and theoretical additions. Both authors contributed to framing the study, developing the theoretical argument, drafting the manuscript, and approving the final version.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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