

POLITICAL AFFILIATION AND THE PREJUDICE IT CREATES IN THE NFL PROTEST

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Abstract

One of the most heated sports debates in recent history has been the politically tangled NFL Kneeling protest. Since the 2016 NFL preseason, many football players took up kneeling during the national anthem as a form of silent protest to voice their opinions on systemic inequality that individuals faced in the United States. We are interested to see if our survey respondents' support of the actions of the players and whether or not they would like the NFL commissioner to take action against the players that participated in the protest. Furthermore, we want to see if respondents' answers vary depending on their party affiliation. Our study's results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between party affiliation and support of the players' actions. In addition, we also found a statistically significant difference between party affiliation and the commissioner taking action.

1. Introduction

The United States has a history of protests, dating back to the colonial era. One of the most controversial protest and debates in recent history in the United States is the NFL kneeling protest. In order to protest the systemic injustice towards minorities, Colin Kaepernick was a key figure in the protest because of his kneeling during the American Anthem in the preseason games of the 2016 NFL season (Kane and Tiell, 2017). Kaepernick's actions came as a reaction to instances of police brutality on people of different races, such as the incident with Michael Brown, which resulted in the utilization of Body-Worn Cameras for officers (Fallik, Deuchar, and Crichlow, 2018). Although in the incident of Brown, the jury had declared the Officer innocent, but the situation still added to a narrative of systemic racism and social injustice. Kaepernick's actions started a ripple effect in the United States in many different social aspects. Following Kaepernick's actions, many other players also joined him in the protest, which further fueled ongoing debates regarding the issue of injustice for minorities. Aside from the scope of sports, this created a divide across the United States among citizens and thus created different views and opinions on the matter.

During and after the timescale of the NFL protest there were many opinions, ideas, and events leading to deeper divide. As a result, Kaepernick's actions became more than just an issue in modern sports; it

instead became a centerpiece of an even bigger debate that had been established centuries before the beginning of American football: Is there prevalent social and racial injustice in the United States of America? However, the players' actions also created an additional question: Are their actions justifiable and constitutional? As in many debates, this situation drew different opinions. However, the second question cannot be answered as simply, as the presence of polarized media resulted in further discussion over the right or wrong of the protest (Kane and Tiell, 2017). As such, we continued to have a nation that was fractionalized over the morals of the situation.

Over the course of the situation, there were many speculations on whether or not personal biases of racial and political faction created a prejudice in peoples' opinion on the actions of Kaepernick and the other players that were involved and how much of an impact this made (Nagai, 2018). There were several studies and bodies of research conducted in regard to the influence of race in controversial topics and protests and some of them will be discussed in the next section. Nevertheless, not many are conducted with greater focus on how political views instill and create a prejudice in people's opinions. In this study, we are interested in seeing how political bias impact the opinion of the population in this particular protest.

This study has two questions: Is there a statistically significant difference between political affiliation and the support for the players' actions? Is there a statistically significant difference between political affiliation and their opinion on whether or not the NFL Commissioner should take action against the players.

2. Literature Review

Through the course of the protest, there was rising speculation of whether or not Americans tend to come in favor of the NFL player participating the protest. Using the next few research articles, we attempt to demonstrate a better understanding of the perceived trends in these biases. Although we will review studies of race and political affiliation, our emphasis will be on the latter as our study intends to get a better understanding of the political bias of individuals in the NFL kneeling protest.

2.1 Racial Bias in Traffic Stops

Fallik (2019) conducts an analysis on traffic stops to see if there is racial profiling within traffic stops. He makes an initial connection to demonstrate that racial minorities are more likely to be searched, but the presence of spuriousness invalidates any possible conclusions that can be drawn. Fallik shows that even using the most up- to- date technology and analytical systems, it is often hard to bring clarity to the question of racial profiling and systemic injustice. Thus, there is room for individual opinion and bias in racial issues to be present--as in the case of the NFL protest; moreover, as Fallik states, unless the data collected is done through direct fieldwork with the stakeholders, it's often difficult if not impossible to draw a conclusion to that question.

2.2 Aftereffects of Perceived Systemic Injustice

Fallik, Deuchar, and Crichlow (2018) study body worn cameras and their impact on law enforcement agencies. The application of body worn cameras came in light of the passing of Mr. Brown, which led then President Barack Obama to constitute a taskforce to find a better way of policing . After the shooting of Mr. Brown, the city of Ferguson went into a mass spur of protest against police brutality and a violent uproar against systemic injustice. In light of the events of the Ferguson Era, one of the recommendations by the constituted task force was the addition of body worn cameras for the police officers. The authors demonstrate that although there was improvement of citizen-police interactions and personal accountability on both sides, there was not a perfect solution. In addition, the authors note that there is a mixed opinion for police officers in terms of their liking of the camera and how difficult it would be to get recorded information. But even with that enhancement, they believe that this would not have made a keen difference in creating a "Ferguson Era" as the racial profiling and other acts that lead to discontent still continues today.

2.3 Pension Stocks and Political Influence

Bradley, Pantzalis and Yuan (2016) show how political influence plays a strong role in shaping the investment of state pension funds. They present the first glimpse of the spectrum of political bias that is instilled in the American system today. In the course of the paper, the authors make key points to show how a state pension fund is being strongly affected by the firms they are deposited in. They found that in states that have a greater number of politically affiliated trustees, members tend to invest more in firms that are politically connected to their representative parties. Conversely, states that have trustees with a smaller number of politically affiliated members tend to invest in local firms that are not politically tied, but yield better returns. They point out that when there is political influence in the decision of state pension funds, the results are not always desirable. This paper demonstrates that political views often have a strong correlation with personal opinions, decisions,

and outcomes. Hence, showing that a political mainframe may not always be the best method to use while analyzing something as complex like state pension funds or the NFL protest.

2.4 The Psychological Link in Political and Group Biases

Pronin (2006) discusses the different kinds of biases that can influence a particular individual. Although there may be perception within the general public that most decisions made by individuals come to serve the best interest of the population, people are more likely to make decisions and statements based off judgments that best serve their self-interest. This validates the thought that it may be possible to see an association between an individual's opinion on a particular scenario, such as the NFL protest, and the general consensus of their political party.

One of the most compelling parts of Pronin's article points to the presence of prejudice and group-based biases. She mentions how affiliations of an individual within his or her own in groups can cause a looming prejudice about a decision that would be made. This goes on to display that perhaps by removing special interest boundaries, the looming prejudice may also disappear in certain cases. Pronin also states, "people can also be blind to forms of group based biases other than prejudice," (2006, p. 38). The example she draws upon demonstrates how political affiliation tends to draw individuals to line with their party's ideology--even though the particular decision defies their own values. This article demonstrates the influence that affiliations and prejudices can have on an individual and shows how this can cloud an individual's perception of a particular topic.

In summary, in all the articles discussed above the authors establish how the perception of the public can be clouded by circumstances more than evidence. The first two articles Fallik (2019) and Fallik et. al. (2018), show how there can be the presence of racial and systemic injustice in the United States, but also mentions how it is not easily documentable. Although there have been attempts to better understand the data without spuriousness and prevent such circumstances, the success rate is very slim. This leads to the vocalization of individuals, such as Colin Kaepernick and others in the NFL Protest. Although race is the root factor that has led to the protest, many opinions about the protest are not the effect of being clouded by the wall of race, but rather political affiliations. In the last two articles, the authors indicate how political ideologies can be a trap of sorts; clouding and walling in an individual's perception, which creates more prejudice.

3. Data Collection

In this study, we wanted to test the following hypotheses:

H_0 = There is no statistically significant difference between an individual's political affiliation and the support of the players' conduct.

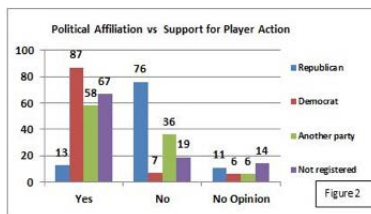
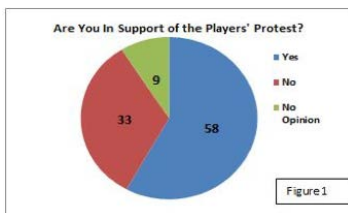
H_0 = There is no statistically significant difference between an individual's political affiliation and their opinion on whether or not the NFL Commissioner should take action against the players.

In order to test the above hypotheses, we developed a survey consisting of 12 questions (see Appendix A). The questions implemented in the survey were designed to determine the demographics of the participants such as gender, age, education level, party affiliation, and income level. In addition, other questions were formulated to evaluate the survey respondents' perception of the NFL Kneeling protest.

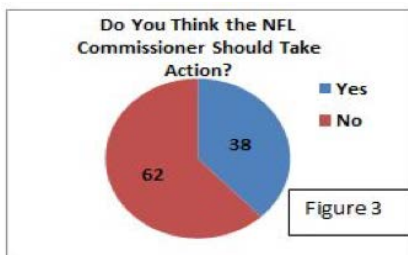
We administered the survey using Amazon Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing website where individuals are contacted to participate in the survey. We collected 200 responses from individuals in the United States 18 years old and older. All variables for the analysis are nominal (categorical) variables; thus, we will use Pearson's Chi-square test of independence to test our hypotheses. Chi square test is commonly used to determine if there is a significant relationship between two nominal (categorical) variables. We used IBM's SPSS to conduct the statistical analysis.

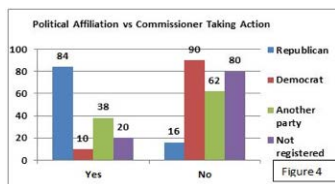
4. Results

Overall, 58% of the sample came in support of the players' actions, 33% did not come in support of the players' actions, and 9% of them did not have an opinion (figure 1). In figure 2, we show individuals' support of the players' actions based on their political party affiliation. Specifically, 87% of the Democrats who took part in the survey came in support of the players' actions, while 76% of the Republicans were not in support of the players' action. When looking at other political parties and individuals who not registered to vote, we saw 58% and 67% of the individuals who participated came in support of the players' actions, respectively. We performed a Chi-square test to test our hypothesis that there is an association between respondents' party affiliation and the support of the players' actions. Our results show a statistically significant difference in how political affiliation affects individual support for the players' protest ($\chi^2(6) = 92.16, p < 0.01$). Thus, we reject our first null hypothesis at the 1% level.



Overall, 62% of the sample support of the NFL Commissioner taking action, and 38% did not support the Commissioner taking action (figure 3). In figure 4, we show individuals' support of the NFL Commissioner taking action against the players based on their political party affiliation. Specifically, 84% of the Republicans support that the NFL Commissioner takes action against the players while only 10 % of the Democrats support that the NFL Commissioner takes action against the players. In addition, 38% of those that belong to another party support that the NFL Commissioner takes action against the players and 20% of those that are not registered support that the NFL Commissioner takes action against the players. We conducted a Chi-square test to test our hypothesis that there is an association between respondents' party affiliation and their support of the NFL Commissioner taking action against the players. Our results show a statistically significant difference in how political affiliation affects individuals' opinion for NFL Commissioner taking action against the players ($\chi^2(3) = 89.66, p < 0.01$). Thus, we reject our second null hypothesis at the 1% level.





5. Discussion

Our results show that there is a statistical significant difference between political affiliation and the individual's support for the players' action. This would go hand in hand with what most social media and news network say. We found that those who held republican's values are more likely to not be in support of the players' action, and individuals who held democratic views were more likely to be in support of the players' action. However, we found the most interesting part of our data to be elsewhere. Apart from the two major parties, we also polled individuals who were registered members of parties other than the two major political parties, and individuals who are not registered to vote. We predicted that these individuals would be more evenly distributed among the offered choices. However, we saw that both sides heavily came in support of the players' action (almost 60% each side).

These results bring into question on whether or not the protest can be entirely politicized. This also called into attention if the involvement of politics is distracting the true purpose of the protest. If individuals were to look beyond politics, would they be able to find justification for the actions of the players? Or will it still be unjustifiable? Would the absence of political guidelines increase support for the players or will it decrease the support for the players? This landslide of responses resulted in the formation of more questions that can be considered in future research.

In addition, we found there is a statistical significant difference between an individual's political affiliation and their opinion on whether or not the NFL Commissioner should take action against the players who took part in the protest. We saw a very similar pattern in the answers when compared to the first set of responses. Not only were they opposites in terms of opinion between Republicans and Democrats, but there was also a visible pattern of which side supported the players' actions more.

The divide because of political guidelines is very clear and obvious, yet the overall population displayed greater support for the players in both questions. This takes us back to the weight and impact of the individuals who are not Democrats and Republicans. We see that an overwhelming number of individuals who are not registered to vote and the individuals who are representing other parties came against the commissioner taking action on the players. This added an extreme amount of weight in favor of the players' actions, which we would not have seen if we were to only

take into consideration the views of the Republicans and Democrats. In fact, we would have seen a far more even pie if the responses of the unregistered and other parties were not taken into the data. This again draws the question of how much has the guidelines of politics influenced the view of the individual. Would we have seen a different result if politics and political guidelines were not so deeply engrave in our society and culture?

6. Conclusion

It is clear that individuals who were able to distinguish themselves as either republican or democrat were more likely to have an opinion that corresponds with their political ideology. In addition, those that were not from either of these two groups bring to question on how different the opinion of the general society would have been if this protest did not garner a political tag to its name. It also shows that maybe in a humanitarian prospective, the actions of these players can be justified, which opens the door to future research possibilities. One option is to see how isolating the political variable would influence this data, so the nation can have a better understanding of the players' actions. We should also see how politically biased media has affected an individuals' opinion when it comes to these two questions. Would we see the same divisions or will the data be less skewed? The options we have now are limitless, but for now we have to understand that maybe viewing this protest and the actions of the players' through a political medium or standpoint may not give us the best picture. It gives us a minimized view of the whole truth, one that is being blocked by the wall of politics. Maybe, if we were to take a step back and view the actions of the players in a humanitarian prospective, or just as an individual with no guidelines and political restrictions, we may be able to justify the NFL protest.

7. Implications for Future Research

Future research should focus on finding other topics that are being guarded by political mainframes and find a way to collect the opinions of individuals on the basis of their values, not just their political ideologies or other sorts of affiliations. By studying various issues in the society that are plagued by political baggage, there could be a platform to attempt to provide a level ground for understanding public support more so based on individual values rather than group biases.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

What is your gender?

Male

Female

What is your age range?

18-34 years

35-54

55 and Above

What is your highest level of education you have attained?

High school or less

Some College

College Graduate

Postgrad or Higher

Are you currently registered as a republican, democrat, independent, another party or are you not registered?

Republican

Democrat

Independent/another party

Not Registered

Do you watch the National Football League?

Yes

No

Are you aware of the kneeling protests that are taking place in the NFL?

Yes

No

Do you believe that players' actions are patriotic or unpatriotic?

Yes

No

No opinion

Do you believe that the players' actions have influenced any changes to systemic racism in place, if any?

Yes

No

There is no Systemic Racism

No opinion

Are you in support of the players' protest?

Yes

No

No opinion

Has the president's views on the matter changed your view of the NFL Protest?

Yes

No

No opinion

Should the NFL commissions take action on those that kneel during the national anthem?

Yes

No

What is your income level?

Under \$25,000

\$25,001-\$75,000

Over \$75,000