We interpret these findings to suggest that BLM protests do affect prosecutorial elections by moving DA elections generally towards contested races. For instance, the police killing of Laquon McDonald around the BLM protests has led to more contested elections, even among Republicans. Because prosecutorial elections are historically uncompetitive and uncontested at rates above, protest activity can have a more substantial effect here relative to other electoral bodies.

H1: BLM Protest activity will lead to an increase in contested prosecutorial elections

We find that BLM protests are associated with better Democrat DA performance in general elections, and worse Republican DA performance in primary elections. We then run two models with lagged measures of unemployment, poverty, median income and racial demographics, and prison admissions to predict how changes in county economics affect prison construction.

H2: Higher rurality (more surplus land) will lead to a higher likelihood of prison construction within a county

H2: Higher poverty and higher unemployment will lead to a higher likelihood of prison construction within a county.

We used the following data for our analysis.

1. BLM Protest Activity Data between 2016 and 2020, courtesy of William Nelson and Vanessa Hessick
2. Prosecutorial Elections Data for One Full Cycle (2013 through 2017) courtesy of the UNC Prosecutors and Politics Dataset (Hessick and Mario 2020)
3. We then harmonize the protest data with the elections data. To make sure these are all the geographic unit of prosecutorial district.

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H1: BLM Protest activity will lead to an increase in contested prosecutorial elections

We find that BLM protests decrease the competitiveness and contestation of Republican prosecutorial primary elections.

On January 1st, 2014, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) expanded eligibility for Medicaid to adults with income 138% of the federal poverty level. A disproportionate number of justice involved individuals suffer from mental or physical impairments (Frank and McGuire 2010). For this reason, prior studies have found that access to health insurance decreases recidivism rates (Pry et al. 2020) and criminal offending (Deos et al. 2022). As a result, we hypothesize that:

H1: States that expand Medicaid access will see a reduction in prison admissions, and those that do not expand healthcare access will see an increase.

We find that rural counties are more likely to open prisons between 1990 and 2010 than non-rural counties.

We find that rural counties are more likely to open prisons between 1990 and 2010 than non-rural counties. We then run a two-way fixed effects (county, year) analysis of the data. Based on these ideas, we hypothesize that:

H2: Higher poverty and higher unemployment will lead to a higher likelihood of prison construction within a county.

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