How Events Enter the Public Sphere: Conflict, Location, and Sponsorship in Local Newspaper Coverage of Public Events[1]

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Protest events occur against the backdrop of public life. Of 382 public events in police records for one year in a small U.S. city, 45% convey a message, 14% involve social conflict, and 13% are standard protest event forms. Local newspapers covered 32% of all events, favoring events that were large, involved conflict, were sponsored by business groups, and occurred in central locations. The more liberal paper also favored rallies and events sponsored by national social movement organizations (SMOs) or recreational groups. Discussion centers on the ways these factors shape the content of the public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Public life happens in public places. In public, people who are not intimates may meet face to face and perhaps influence one another or a wider public. Street theater, street-corner speeches, marches, celebrations, vigils, leafleting, and other kinds of public acts seek to express collective sentiments or influence public opinion. Scholars around the world recognize the importance of public events for the public sphere, the abstract space in which citizens discuss and debate public issues (e.g., Alario 1994; Chaffee 1993; Koenen 1996; Sebastiani 1997). The link between public events and the public sphere is the mass media. Acts staged in public places may seek to influence only the other people in that space: passersby who will hear the speech, song, or chant, or read the signs. But, more often, these public events are oriented not only to those physically present

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but also to a larger public. Usually, a major goal of a public event is to attract the attention of the mass media, for only through the mass media can people communicate beyond their immediate social setting.

Scholars of protest have long recognized that the functioning of the mass media has critical consequences for social movements and cycles of protest, generally agreeing with Lipsky: "If protest tactics are not considered significant by the media, or if newspapers and television reporters or editors decide to overlook protest tactics, protest organizations will not succeed" (1968, p. 1151). The mass media play a critical role in the progression of a protest cycle, communicating information about events and issues in "media attention cycles" (Downs 1972) that first attract attention to developing events and issues and then withdraw attention from them when the issue becomes old or the disruption too severe (Tarrow 1994, 1998). Many scholars have stressed the importance of the media for shaping the public perception and framing of movements and movement issues (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gans 1980; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; Molotch 1979; Molotch and Lester 1974; Olien, Tichenor, and Donahue 1992; Oliver 1989; Zald 1996). Understanding the filter applied by newspapers and television to the realities of demonstrations is essential to understanding the effects of protests and demonstrations in the polity.

Apart from their crucial role in shaping protest cycles, the media are at least as pivotal in research on protest and unrest because scholars so often turn to media sources (particularly newspapers) for data about protest events. (A few influential examples are Gurr [1968], Jenkins and Eckert [1986], Jenkins and Perrow [1977], Kriesi et al. [1995], Lieberson and Silverman [1965], McAdam [1982], Olzak [1992], Shorter and Tilly [1974], Spilerman [1970, 1976].) The validity of these studies depends heavily on the accuracy and completeness of newspaper records or at least on the assumption that the sample of events covered by newspapers reliably tracks the underlying flow of events according to a consistent principle such as random selection, possibly with probability proportionate to the "size" of the event.

Unfortunately, this methodological assumption treats the media as passive "channels" of communication or neutral and objective observers and recorders of events, a view that for some time now been rejected by scholars of the media (e.g., Gans 1980; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Shoemaker and Resse 1991), as well as refuted by studies of the media coverage of collective events (Danzger 1975; Franzosi 1987; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Mueller 1997*a;* Snyder and Kelly 1977). Pinning down the nature of the bias is difficult, however, because independent tabulations of protest events against which to compare the media record are extraordinarily rare. In recent years, however, a new tactic has reinvigorated the

study of bias in media records of protest. Police department records compiled routinely provide an alternate source that can be compared to media records. Police records contain many more events than are recorded in the press, which allows patterns of selection bias in the media record to be better identified (Fillieule 1998; Hocke 1998; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; McCarthy et al. 1998).

However, these studies of police and media records of protests have, themselves, been distorted by a failure to examine media representations of protest in the context of comparisons with other kinds of public actions. Without such comparisons, scholars have been unable to provide a complete account of the role of protest or movement events within the public life of a community. This article addresses this lapse by presenting a comprehensive picture of the public events in one small city and showing how protest events fit within this larger context. We show that, although not all protest events are covered by local newspapers, conflictual events are generally *more* likely to receive media coverage than other events of similar size and form, and that space itself (i.e., a central location) plays a much greater role in media coverage than has previously been recognized. These results suggest a need to reconsider the interplay between public events and the mass media in the creation of public discussions about social issues.

Public Acts and Public Messages in Public Spaces

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to engage theoretical debates about the nature of the public sphere, we take it as given that the public discussion of public issues is important, that public events play a significant role in promoting or shaping the public sphere, and that mass media are important conduits of information between groups of people. Understanding the way public events become represented in the mass media is critical for understanding the workings of the public sphere.

It is well recognized that public life is ritualized and organized, so that public actions generally take on well-defined forms that are meaningful to participants and observers (Bennett 1980; Brown and Kimball 1995; Drucker and Gumpert 1996; Lees 1994). Insiders may accept these forms as natural categories of action, while detached observers can observe the ways in which the categories themselves are constructed and evolve over time. The "protest" is one such ritualized form that conveys roughly the same meaning to activists, police, news reporters, the general public, and social scientists alike. This shared meaning has blinded researchers to the constructed nature of "protest" and led them to assume an unproblematic isomorphism between form and content in their definitions of protest events. But, as Tilly (1978) first told us 20 years ago, the forms or reper-

toires of protest shift across time and space, and new forms of protest are often created by adapting nonprotest forms to new purposes. Identical forms may carry very different content. "Parade" and "march" are two names for exactly the same form (McPhail and Wohlstein 1986), and the words can be used interchangeably even though in the United States in the 1990s the popular connotations of *parade* involve entertainment, while the word *march* is popularly applied only to message events. Likewise, there are many kinds of rallies, from pep rallies to protest rallies: they share the form of a stationary gathering with speeches containing informational and emotional content, but vary greatly in the "issue" they may address. As protest repertoires evolve, message content is often added to event types created for other purposes. In the United States in the 1990s, ceremonies, musical performances, literature distribution, and amateur street theater are all event types that are typically "apolitical," but all have carried protest content in past times and places and can and do sometimes carry protest content in the 1990s.

At any given time, there are certainly regularities and patterns about the kinds of content conveyed in various forms, but these meanings are always contextual and always evolving. Block parties are generally understood in the United States in this era to be consensual events that convey a sense of sociability and community to residents of a particular area, although they do disrupt normal traffic patterns because they require closing a street. However, using a barricade to close a street without permission has been internationally recognized as a protest tactic since the French Revolution. In the context of ongoing student-police battles in the late 1960s, when countercultural residents blocked Madison's Mifflin Street for a block party, the police treated the event as an insurrection, and the ensuing battle between police and residents became a full-scale riot. Even in the apolitical 1990s, the Mifflin Street block party evolved into a riot in 1995, although the drunken revelers setting fires and attacking police had no apparent political agenda.

Similarly, we can assess biases in the coverage of protest or claims-making content only by measuring it against the coverage of other kinds of content or the lack of message content. Social movements and protest events researchers have generally focused their attention on particular kinds of claims or particular kinds of events, on claims or actions that are contentious, disruptive, political, or directed at the government (e.g., Fillieule 1998; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Olzak, Shanahan, and West 1994; Rucht and Neidhardt 1998; Tilly 1986). Such restrictions, however, ignore the possibility that the same issue can be constructed as contentious or not and that the boundary between contentious and consensual issues is always evolving. Both AIDS and breast cancer, for example, have been constructed both as health concerns that should be dealt

with consensually and as contentious issues about public funding for medical research. The Freedom from Religion Foundation has challenged the consensual nature of Christmas trees and nativity scenes on public property. Disruption always leads to public debate about whether it is meaningful protest or meaningless hooliganism. To study only issues framed as political or conflictual is to be unable to examine the effect of the frame itself on the reception of the message.

To obtain a wide range of events for comparison, we used police records to compile a broad set of public collective events, both contentious and consensual. As we indicate below, even this procedure could not catch "all" events, because police agencies themselves are selective in which events they record, but we have obtained a broad set of events compiled from sources other than the media that may be used for identifying the selection factors in media coverage. We then compare the media coverage for different types of events. We classify an event as having a "message" if part of its apparent purpose was to influence public opinion or action, broadly construed. A message in this sense encompasses protest messages or claims but also includes consensual persuasive content (e.g., breast cancer awareness), ethnic pride, religious messages, fund-raising, and business promotion. Events that do not have messages are those that are ends in themselves, such as social events, performances, and athletic competitions. There are obviously ambiguous cases in informational or educational events, particularly when incomplete records are being coded. The criterion for identifying a message, however, was whether the event appeared to be an end in itself that did not need any recognition from nonparticipants to accomplish its purpose (no message) or whether the event was a means to exert influence over persons not participating (message). We defined an event as involving *conflict* if we were aware of social or political conflict about the event itself, the sponsoring organization, or the issue addressed by the event. One event, the Mifflin Street block party, was judged to involve conflict despite having no apparent message because of the history of the event and substantial public debate about it. Otherwise, conflict events were a subset of message events.

Local News

Although most research attention over the years has been focused on national newspapers of record, scholars have begun to recognize the importance of local and regional news media, both substantively, for their role in shaping local political discourses, and methodologically, for their relative comprehensiveness in covering local events. More people read local newspapers than read the *New York Times*. Many events that come to be perceived as national news, or as part of a national movement, begin as local

events that make the local news. A full understanding of the role of the media in shaping protest cycles requires an examination of the construction of local news and the ways local politics and local protest are intertwined with national movements and national politics. Studies of local protest campaigns, particularly those that have compared similar campaigns in different locales, have found differences that are tied to the particular social, political, and economic conditions of an area; studies of local protest reveal the influence of national or global movements as they play out in a particular way in each particular place (e.g., Eisinger 1973; Hellman 1987; Ray 1993; Rothman 1993). Although the most local newspapers are small suburban advertising weeklies, newspapers classed as "regional" sources provide serious news coverage of their metropolitan areas. Regional news media cover a much higher proportion of the events within their catchments than do national media, and as electronic archives of newspapers make searches of a compilation of regional newspapers feasible, scholars are recognizing that a collection of regional newspapers may provide a much more comprehensive documentation of events than any national newspaper ever could. However, more studies are needed of the construction of local news before this potential can be realized.

THE ROUTINES OF PROTEST AND PUBLIC EXPRESSION

As Mueller argues in a very useful review (1997*b*), it is important to work toward a theory of media production that can lead to an understanding of which events do and do not become news. Central to such a theory is a realistic understanding of the production of public events. Most research and theory about the media coverage of events are implicitly based on a neat image of the relation between protesters, the police, and the media: activists plan and carry out an event, police are caught by surprise and respond to the event, and the media hurry to the event so they can observe it and report what happened in the confrontation. But recent scholarship has shown that this neat image is more wrong than right, at least most of the time for the 1990s in the United States and much of Europe. Experienced event organizers, police, and reporters are more like members of an improvisational troupe: the script is not fixed, but the players have worked together before, they follow general guidelines, and they can predict each other's actions. Most public events—often even the majority of protests—have permits, and the organizers and police jointly agree upon the time, place, and manner of the event. Even in unpermitted disruptive protests, experienced protesters and police often negotiate the terms of the event, agreeing on what conduct will or will not result in an arrest. The media are similarly tied up in the creation of the event. Experienced organizers plan events that meet journalistic standards of newsworthiness,

write press releases, call reporters, and craft their "sound bites" for the media; in some cases, the police complain that reporters are notified about unpermitted protests before the police are. Reporters cultivate activists as "sources," and activists cultivate reporters in the hopes of gaining more favorable coverage for their issue. In short, understanding the routine interplay of activists with police and reporters is an essential precondition for understanding "media bias."

Policing Public Events

Free speech decisions in U.S. courts during the 1970s determined that authorities could not regulate the content of public expression but that they could regulate its time, place, and manner. As a result, police agencies began instituting standardized permitting procedures (McCarthy and McPhail 1997; McCarthy, McPhail, and Crist 1998; McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy 1998). Although operating in different national legal climates, the trend in Europe has been in the same general direction, away from confrontation and toward regulation and negotiation (Della Porta 1996*a;* Della Porta 1996*b;* Della Porta and Reiter 1998). From some points of view, the result has been a win-win situation. The police gain knowledge about what will happen and are better able to minimize disruption related to the event. Activists can count on police help to divert traffic, manage crowds, and ensure no one gets hurt or arrested. Although there are periods of intense mobilization during which these arrangements break down and times in which being arrested becomes a badge of honor for an activist cadre, most people most of the time do not want to spend time in jail or to pay large fines. Similarly, police agencies do not wish to police riotous events or to appear to have lost control of a protest situation. The result is that the majority of political protest events stay within the bounds of time, place, and manner restrictions.

As a consequence, police and protest practices have evolved together. These mutual adjustments between the authorities and the protesters have shaped the recent cycles of protest in the United States and Western Europe (e.g., Costain 1992; Koopmans 1993; McAdam 1983; McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson 1991; McCarthy and McPhail 1997; McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy 1998; Meyer 1993; Tarrow 1994). One aspect of this developing interaction is the evolution of successful protest campaigns toward increasingly formalized protest organizations that in turn shift their actions toward more institutionalized actions directed by professional staff (McCarthy and McPhail 1997; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oliver and Marwell 1992; Staggenborg 1988; Tarrow 1994). Another consequence is that protest forms diffuse from hard core activists to the broader population, so that a rally or march is a relatively legitimate form of action

in the eyes of the general public and, thus, can carry many different kinds of content. Although the traditional conception of social movements emphasizes protest as an extrainstitutional form of political behavior, it is clear that protests and demonstrations have themselves become ritualized and institutionalized (e.g., Lofland and Fink 1982; Oliver and Marwell 1992).

Media Filters and Event Coverage

Although there is a casual tendency to treat the lack of coverage of any event as "media bias," no one seriously argues that it is possible for newspapers to report every event that happens, and even those who defend the concept of "objective" news reporting say that there are standards of "newsworthiness" that determine which events are "news" and which are not. The task therefore is to identify the systematic factors that determine the likelihood that an event will receive news coverage. Three kinds of factors have been identified as influencing the news coverage of events: the predispositions of news organizations or of particular reporters toward certain kinds of events or issues, journalistic norms and standards for assessing the news value of events and issues, and the mundane routines of producing news reports to deadlines.

Predispositions.—Movement-oriented commentators often stress the predispositions of news organizations or reporters in selecting events for coverage. These emphasize the increasingly concentrated control of the mass media (Bagdikian 1983; Downing 1980; Lee and Solomon 1990), cite instances in which coverage of events has been downplayed or omitted entirely because of concerns about social disorder (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Molotch 1979; Parenti 1986), and argue that news media generally downplay union or labor struggles (e.g. Beharrell and Philo 1977; Hartmann 1979; Morley 1976). It is also well established that more powerful people and institutions have more ready access to the media (e.g., Goren 1980; Shoemaker and Resse 1991). Nevertheless, comparisons among specific news organizations often find that the overt editorial policies of a newspaper find expression in the selection of events that receive attention in the news sections and particularly that more left-wing newspapers cover more movement-related events (e.g., Franzosi 1987; Kriesi et al. 1995, p. 256).

News value.—Journalistic norms and standards for assessing the news value of events are widely agreed to be important in determining which events get covered (Altheide and Rasmussen 1976; Bowers 1967; Gamson and Meyer 1993; Gamson 1995; Gamson et al. 1992; Gans 1980; Hocke 1998; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; Schulz 1982; Shoemaker and Resse 1991; Sigelman 1973; Snyder and Kelly 1977). A standard prescriptive list

of news value criteria taught to journalism students generally includes the prominence or importance of the issue including the number of people affected and the magnitude of the effect; human interest and human drama; conflict or controversy; the unusual; timeliness; and proximity, with a preference for local events over distant ones (Shoemaker and Resse 1991). Working journalists and media researchers studying them agree that these news value criteria are complex and competing and that a story's news value is constructed in the process of making assignment decisions and writing stories (Lester 1980; Molotch and Lester 1974). Reporters see or create an angle for their "story" and in the process construct subjective news value features such as "narrativity" (Jacobs 1996) and "drama" (Gamson and Meyer 1996). These news values are understood by many activists who seek to create events that will embody them (Cohn and Gallagher 1984; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Ryan 1991; Salzman 1998).

As Hocke (1998) emphasizes, however, empirical attempts to tie news value to events identify different characteristics, and assessments of the criteria of news value typically are made on the basis of the features of published reports, not on the inherent character of the original events prior to their construction as "news." The only consistent claim validated through comparing media coverage to extramedia sources is that events that are "bigger" in terms of involving more people, lasting longer, or creating more disruption are more likely to be covered than "smaller" events (Kriesi et al. 1995; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Snyder and Kelly 1977).

News routines.—Although news value is often folded into the concept of "news routines," it is helpful to distinguish the more mundane news routine constraints on the reporter's job, specifically the problems of getting information and writing to meet a deadline. The constraints of a deadline create a premium for stories that fit into an obvious template. Reporters cultivate "sources" who will give them information for their stories, and groups and individuals differ markedly in their level of routine access to reporters (Shoemaker and Resse 1991). Other mundane factors are well recognized by media analysts and activists, and include writing a good press release with vivid quotations that can be incorporated into a news story, timing the event appropriately for news media deadlines, cultivating relationships with reporters, notifying the press in advance of upcoming events, and (for television coverage) planning events for their visual appeal (Cohn and Gallagher 1984; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Ryan 1991; Salzman 1998).

Considerations of routine suggest the importance of other factors that have been less well recognized in the literature on protest events. Although spontaneous protests are in some sense more newsworthy because they

are more likely to be disruptive, they are much harder for reporters to cover. Events that are announced in advance permit reporters to plan their schedules. Annual events are even more amenable to planning and permit the preparation of feature or human-interest stories that can be pegged to the event. The location of an event matters, too. Past research has emphasized "national" media and has demonstrated that geographic proximity of the event to the media outlet is an important factor in coverage (Danzger 1975; Hocke 1998; Mueller 1997*a;* Snyder and Kelly 1977), which is quite consistent with the news value of proximity. However, the importance of proximity as a news routine factor has been less well recognized for coverage within a city, with little attention having been paid to the spatial dimension of news "beats": the "state government" beat occurs at the state capitol, the "local government" beat at city hall, the "crime" beat at the police station. Events occurring in places frequented by reporters in their daily routines are much easier for them to cover than those occurring elsewhere.

METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Setting

Madison, Wisconsin, is a city of about 200,000 in a county of about 300,000. A cluster of government buildings—including the state capitol, federal and state courthouses, city and county government offices, and the Madison Police Department (MPD)—are clustered together in the heart of downtown. The capitol is surrounded by Capitol Square, with park-like grounds and wide sidewalks. Connecting the capitol area with the University of Wisconsin campus is State Street, a half-mile pedestrian mall lined with stores and restaurants. The campus end of State Street creates an ell with Library Mall, a plaza flanked by campus libraries. The university's Bascom Hill rises just beyond Library Mall. There are small concrete elevated podiums and stage areas at each end of State Street that may be used by anyone who wishes to give a performance or speech; a permit to plug into the city's electricity at either site costs $5.25. Although a shortage of parking and the visible presence of deinstitutionalized mentally ill and homeless persons divert much of Madison's retail trade away from downtown, government employees and university students still dominate downtown spaces, and the downtown area remains the center of public life in the city. Downtown public life is seasonal. When it is warm enough, licensed food carts sell a variety of ethnic foods at the two ends of the mall, and performers and speakers use the two public stages throughout the day. Public ceremonies are most commonly conducted within the capitol rotunda or on the steps of the capitol, which makes an attractive backdrop. The capitol area is the usual site of protests and demonstrations,

although student rallies may remain in the Library Mall area or on Bascom Hill. Marches most often run between the Library Mall area and the capitol, or around Capitol Square. This traditional protest area intersects the jurisdiction of three separate police agencies. The Capitol Police have jurisdiction over the capitol and its grounds, the University of Wisconsin campus police cover all university areas (including Library Mall), and the Madison Police Department has jurisdiction over other downtown areas, including Capitol Square across the street from the capitol grounds, all of State Street, and the rest of the city.

This study focuses on 1994 and examines any public event for which we could find a record in a wide variety of official sources. This particular year was chosen because it was the most recent complete year when data collection began and was the year for which we had the most complete police records, since some agency records had been discarded for prior years. Other analyses from this project examine a more limited set of events and official sources over a longer time period (Oliver and Maney 1998).

Public Agency Sources

Each police agency in Madison has its own geographic jurisdiction and internal record-keeping logic. Most of the records were kept unsystematically, and the amount of information available varied markedly between sources. Records of permit applications were generally more systematic and contained more information than log book records. Log books provided information about unpermitted events, which frequently lacked details about the numbers, actions, identities, or issues of protesters. Although some researchers have treated a particular systematic police record as if it were a meaningful universe of events (e.g., Hocke 1998; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996), this apparent comprehensiveness is illusory. Police agencies have different physical and legal jurisdictions that lead them to record some events and not others and to be more comprehensive about some locations than others. A separate methodological study (Maney and Oliver 1998) explores these patterns for Madison and finds that events recorded by newspapers but not police largely occur indoors on private property (and thus outside police jurisdiction) or are small and nondisruptive and concludes that all record sources must be treated as incomplete. Different record sources must be assessed against each other to determine their logic of inclusion and exclusion of events. Thus, for each agency, we sketch the logic whereby it creates records.

MPD parade permits.—Parade permits are required for any event that will disrupt traffic on a public street, including road races, charity walks, and children's bike parades. These are considered temporary records and

archives for prior years are not available. We coded all MPD parade permits.

MPD log.—All 130,000 entries in the paper copy of the MPD 911 log book were scanned visually by the second author for items of potential interest. Although MPD log records are computerized, there is no Uniform Crime Report (UCR) category for public events and no search logic for retrieving them from computer files. A dozen unpermitted protests were located from the visual scan of the log; these records were created because of citizen complaints. Additionally, we identified several dozen incidents of collective violence (fights involving 10 or more people), which are excluded from the present analysis.[2] We found virtually no overlap between the log book and the permit records. MPD officers stated that it was their policy to create no record for a law-abiding event (permitted or unpermitted), even if officers spent significant amounts of time policing or observing it. It is legal to march or gather on city sidewalks without a permit as long as one does not impede the flow of traffic.

Street-use committee.—Street-use permits are required if a street is to be closed for more than a few minutes. These events are coordinated through an interagency street-use committee. These are considered temporary records and are unavailable for prior years. We coded all paper permit applications and committee agendas for 1994. The director of the street-use committee has also maintained a list of downtown events as handwritten notes in planning diaries, which we read for information about additional events. These records overlapped somewhat with other permit records, but also included events not recorded elsewhere.

Capitol police permits.—The Capitol Police are responsible for all state-owned property in Wisconsin. Permits are required for any gathering, display, or literature distribution on state property, and the data are recorded in a standardized format that makes this a comprehensive record of permitted events on state property. We were able to obtain a computer download of these permit records. Weddings, private meetings (e.g., for employees regarding their benefit options), and photography sessions were excluded from analysis.

Capitol police log.—Information from the computerized Capitol Police log was obtained with the assistance of the police, who conducted searches and generated lists of candidate events. Preliminary work revealed that

[2] It is questionable whether these "big fights" should be included as public events. Of the 76 large fights located in police records, we could find media traces of only two. We have not yet conducted exhaustive systematic searches for all traces of these fights, and it is possible that a couple more might have received some media mention. However, most of these fights resulted in no arrests, and many dispersed as soon as (or even before) the police showed up. None had any indication of having a "message." We plan a separate study of the phenomenon of collective violence.

the relevant event codes such as "crowd management" and "riot/rally" did not capture all relevant stories, so these were supplemented with keyword searches. For each candidate event, we examined and coded all relevant information in both the full log file and, when available, the computerized officer's report file. Similar to the MPD log, the Capitol Police log contains no systematic information about permitted events, but it provided often cryptic clues about unpermitted protest events. Small and uneventful protests generate log entries that only indicate a protest occurred with little or no information about the message, behavior, or number of protesters. Even more complete records of disruptive protests, indicated by phrases like "protesters climbing walls" or "people in wheelchairs heading for the governor's office," often lacked information on the identity of the protesters or the issues involved.

Campus police log.—With the aid of police staff, we obtained a computer download of potentially relevant campus police log book records that included up to five lines of "disposition" text. Paper and computerized report files were located and read for further information about events deemed relevant from the disposition. The campus police make no systematic attempt to record information on peaceful permitted events. Groups that wish to use university property (outdoors as well as indoors) are required to obtain the equivalent of a permit. However, these requests are handled through the university's room scheduling office, which logs literally thousands of space reservation records a month and has no search logic that would permit the location of the events of interest.

Media Sources: Local Newspapers

Madison has two daily newspapers, both listed as "midwest regional sources" by NEXIS. The *Capital Times* is a locally owned afternoon paper that does not publish on Sunday and that circulates principally in the Madison area. The morning *Wisconsin State Journal* is owned by Lee Enterprises, has about three times the circulation of its competitor, and is distributed more broadly across southern Wisconsin. The papers share production facilities (which are owned by a jointly owned holding company), but were founded separately and have distinct editorial policies and reporting staff. Editorially, the *Wisconsin State Journal* defines itself as moderate and politically independent, endorsing both moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats. The *Capital Times* defines itself as progressive and liberal Democratic. Rigorous computerized searches for events were conducted with the NEXIS database using all descriptors appearing in the police record as keywords, including actions, locations, participating individuals or groups, and synonyms for these. Every article

that explicitly mentioned the event was saved and coded, regardless of its length, location in the newspaper, or detail in describing the event.[3]

Specifying the dependent variable (timely coverage).—In the present analysis, we focus on "timely coverage," which we define as at least one unambiguous reference to the event in either newspaper during the 31-day interval starting 15 days before the event to 15 days after. Substantively, receiving timely coverage is necessary if an event is to have an impact through media coverage. The choice of this particular interval is based on preliminary analysis in this project using a broader 18-month interval (six months before to 12 months after events) to find all possible stories for message events and a subset of events not explicitly related to a message. Contrary to common assumptions in event research,[4] news stories about collective events are often printed many days or even weeks and months after the event and, in addition, prior coverage of events is quite common and may contribute to mobilization. If one wants to examine the total *volume* of coverage of an event, it is necessary to examine a broader interval around the event, or many stories will be missed.

However, although references to events can be found months before and after events, especially as the anniversary of an event approaches, the distribution of coverage is highly spiked in the several days before and after the event. Our preliminary analysis indicates that although only about half of the events receive "next day" mention, depending on the year and the types of events, 68%–78% receive mention within one day before or after the event, from 80% to 85% are mentioned within the week of the event (i.e., less than four days before or after), and 87%–90% are mentioned within the 15 days before or after the event. Outside the spike, the distribution of event coverage is relatively flat throughout the rest of the 18-month interval with the exception of a slight revival as the anniversary of the event approaches. A few events are mentioned *only* on their anniversaries, without having received coverage at the time of the event. However, references to events that receive only nontimely coverage are usually very short and incomplete. In sum, if one is interested only in whether an event receives some media coverage or not, media searches must not be too narrowly confined to the day of the event, but expanding the search more than a couple of weeks around the event provides very little payoff for the effort expended.

[3] Subsequent analyses will consider the content and framing of news coverage. The first step is simply to determine the factors that lead an event to receive any mention at all.

[4] European studies of protest events have tended to focus on the Monday issue of newspapers and to restrict their attention only to events occurring in the previous weekend (e.g., Kriesi et al. 1995; Rucht and Neidhardt 1998).

Of the 121 events that received any newspaper coverage, 82% (99) were covered by both newspapers, 4% (5) were covered only by the *Wisconsin State Journal,* and 14% (17) only by the *Capital Times.* Although the selection logics of the two newspapers were very similar, there were a few crucial differences between them, so separate results are presented for each.

RESULTS

The Shape and Rhythm of Public Life

When activists stage protests or demonstrations to call public attention to their claims and concerns, they do so against the backdrop of public life in public spaces. What else is going on in public space? Table 1 shows the distribution of event types in the official records and the percentage of each type that received timely media coverage. The "proportion of records" column includes all relevant records, while the rest of the table excludes the 127 literature distribution permit records.

Fully 25% of the police records are Capitol Police permits for literature distribution. Even this percentage is understated as a percentage of events, because most literature distribution permits are for multiple dates, usually many or all of the Saturdays between April and October, at the Farmer's Market on Capitol Square. As the first set of columns in table 2 indicates, 34% of these permits were to social movement organizations, and another 34% were to issue-oriented organizations, thus indicating that a wide variety of organizations were seeking to influence public opinion in this way. No literature table received newspaper mention, which is not particularly surprising, so we dropped literature distribution from the analysis of the correlates of media coverage.[5]

Standard protest forms that have been the objects of "protest events" research (rallies, marches, vigils, and unpermitted protests) are only a

[5] McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith (1996) keep literature tables and leafleting in their models despite the low frequency of press coverage of such events. We did not because, following our exhaustive event-specific protocol, doing so would require creating a separate event for each distinct date and then concluding what we already know, which is that these activities did not receive press coverage. Although it is possible that a more systematic and exhaustive media search might uncover an occasional mention of a literature table, the cost/payoff ratio from such an enterprise would be prohibitive. Similarly, we excluded from the analysis the Farmer's Market itself, which occurs every Saturday in season and receives a great deal of media attention, both in periodic articles about the Farmer's Market and in passing mention to incidents which occur "at the Farmer's Market." Trying to determine whether every distinct Saturday's market did or did not receive its own particular mention was deemed a pointless enterprise.

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENT TYPES

Event Type	*N*	Proportion of Records	Proportion of Events*	Any Media Coverage (%)	*Capital Times* (%)	*Wisconsin State Journal* (%)
Standard protest events	49	.09	.13	44	42	33
Rally†	9	.02	.02	78	78	56
March or moving rally	11	.02	.03	54	54	45
Vigil	5	.01	.01	20	20	0
Protest, unpermitted‡	24	.05	.06	33	29	25
Other message events	105	.21	.27	51	50	46
Ceremony§	34	.07	.09	59	56	47
Speech, hearing	11	.02	.03	45	45	36
Mixed‖	45	.09	.12	40	40	38
Fair, sale, commercial#	15	.03	.04	73	73	73
Message nonevents	169	.33	.11	26	24	19
Literature table	127	.25	. . .			
Display**	29	.06	.08	24	21	14
Collection, distribution††	13	.03	.03	31	31	31
Other events	186	.37	.49	19	18	17
Public social event‡‡	60	.12	.16	12	12	12
Athletic event§§	26	.05	.07	50	50	42
Concert or performance‖‖	91	.18	.24	11	9	11
Parade	9	.02	.02	44	44	44
All records	509	. . .		32	30	27

* *N* for proportion of events = 382; literature tables are excluded.

† Includes one combination of a lobbying day and a rally.

‡ Includes unpermitted literature distributions that resulted in police complaints.

§ Includes ceremonies, memorial services, and ceremony/display events; includes three press conferences.

‖ Includes social, entertainment, or athletic events with clear informational or fund-raising purposes indicated in the official record; includes Take Your Daughter to Work day.

Includes five commercial promotions which all received media coverage.

** Includes both informational and art displays; includes Christmas light tours.

†† Includes collections of items other than money (food, clothing, blood) and distributions of items other than literature (poppies and forget-me-nots for Memorial Day and Veterans Day).

‡‡ Includes student, church, neighborhood parties, and neighborhood children's parades as well as larger public recreational events that are not athletic and do not include performances.

§§ Includes competitive and fun walks, runs, bike rides with no mention of fund-raising or message; includes a vintage car race.

‖‖ Includes a big fireworks show.

small proportion of all events occurring in public spaces; they are only 9% of all records, and only 13% of event records excluding literature distribution. However, some of these events that took on protest *forms* involved nonprotest *issues,* including marches against drugs, against suicide, in favor of church attendance, and promoting a multiethnic festival, along with a vigil commemorating the Holocaust.

TABLE 2

Types of Sponsoring Organizations for Events and Literature Tables

Type of Organization	Literature Tables		Events	
	N	Proportion	*N*	Proportion
None*			96	.25
Nothing in record	0		69	.18
City events office personnel	0		27	.07
Event specific*			29	.08
Event-specific organization	3	.02	24	.06
Individual name only	1	.01	5	.01
Government*			32	.08
Government agency	4	.03	26	.07
Elected official, candidate, or party	8	.06	6	.02
Occupational*			9	.02
Union or labor group	0		3	.01
Professional association	0		6	.02
Public service*			10	.03
Military, veterans group	0		6	.02
Service club	0		4	.01
Social movement organization:				
Local*	21	.17	6	.02
National*	9	.07	10	.03
Issue oriented:†				
Local*	22	.17	17	.04
National*	9	.07	25	.07
Other:				
Religious group*	8	.06	16	.04
Business association*	5	.04	10	.03
Business (particular)*	1	.01	17	.04
University*	0		8	.02
Nonprofit institution*	17	.13	11	.03
University student group*	1	.01	18	.05
Youth group or school*	3	.02	23	.06
Recreational group*	10	.08	30	.08
Neighborhood association*	1	.01	15	.04
Total	127	1.00	382	1.00

* These organization types are used as independent variables in multivariate models; infrequent types with conceptual similarities and similar rates of media coverage are grouped to avoid estimation problems.

† Educational, charitable, or advocacy groups.

With literature tables excluded, the purpose of over half the events is solely entertainment or recreation. The largest categories are performances and parties. There were 60 permits granted to close streets for public parties (most of these were for neighborhood parties or children's parades) and another 90 permits were granted for individuals or groups to perform on public property, generally inside the capitol building or in the Capitol Square area. Even this figure for performances is underestimated, for the street-use coordinator's planner contained another 125 records that appeared to be performances by individuals and groups in the downtown area. We did not systematically code or search media sources for these additional performance events.

In addition to these entertainment events, our analysis of the official records revealed a large number of events that were clearly vehicles to persuade or inform the public even though they were not protest events. Most important among these for scholars of social movements are the ceremonies and the events that mix messages with recreation. A ceremony is a nondisruptive permitted event in a public place at which people give an award, memorialize someone, dedicate something, or give a short speech in honor of or expressing concern about something. These events often appeared to be staged "media events." The three press conferences were grouped with them because of their very similar form.[6] We coded eight ceremonies as not having a "message" designed to influence the public.[7] Most of the mixed events were fund-raisers, that is, social, recreational, or entertainment events that raise money for a particular organization or cause. We also included in this group a few additional social and recreational events that did not mention fund-raising, but were clearly intended to convey a message related to public issues (e.g., the NAACP's Freedom Fest or the "fun walk in the watershed," whose stated purpose was to inform the public about watershed issues).

The last three columns of table 1 show the proportion of each event type that received media coverage for both papers combined and for each paper separately. Notably, the highest rate of any media coverage is for rallies, followed by commercial events and then ceremonies. In the next tier are athletic events, marches, speeches and hearings, and parades. It

[6] It might be argued that press conferences should not be included, as all three obtained media coverage. However, the media do not always show up when someone invites them to a press conference, and, in their form, press conferences are very similar to many of the "ceremonies." If press conferences are excluded, 71% of the ceremonies received media coverage instead of the present figure of 74%.

[7] These were military and student award presentations, a building dedication, a meeting with the press that appeared to be about security procedures, ceremonies for art displays, and an athletic event. All were ambiguous cases in which a message might have been intended; 60% of these events received media coverage.

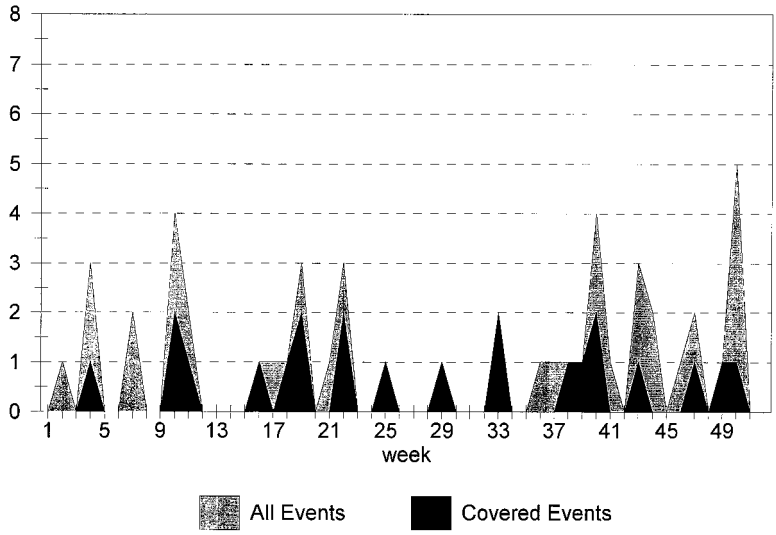

FIG. 1.—Weekly frequency of events: protests and demonstrations

is also worth noting that the "message nonevents"—displays, distributions, and collections—receive more media coverage on average than the amateur performances or public social events, which are much larger and involve some actual activity. The two newspapers are broadly similar in their patterns of event coverage. However, consistent with the difference in editorial policies, the *Capital Times* is considerably more likely to cover rallies and somewhat more likely to cover other protest forms and speeches and ceremonies than the *Wisconsin State Journal*.[8]

Cyclical and noncyclical variations play an important role in public events. Nearly a third of all events occur on Saturday. Figures 1–4 show the weekly frequencies of different groups of events throughout the year, demonstrating both clear seasonal cycles and wide weekly fluctuations within those cycles. There are few events early in the year in the depths of winter. All activity drops off during the vacation period of spring break (week 13). Social and recreational events mostly occur in the warmer weather between weeks 16 (mid-April) and 44 (end of October), with a peak on July Fourth (week 27). Protests and demonstrations and other message events are less common during the summer vacation months (weeks 23–35); the "other" message events tend to occur mostly in the

[8] This difference is larger in 1994 than in the other three years (1993, 1995, 1996) for which we have data.

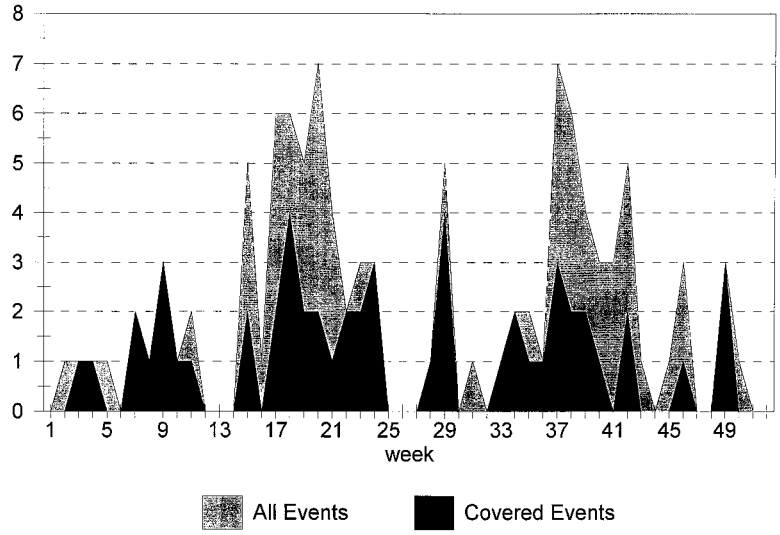

FIG. 2.—Weekly frequency of events: other message events

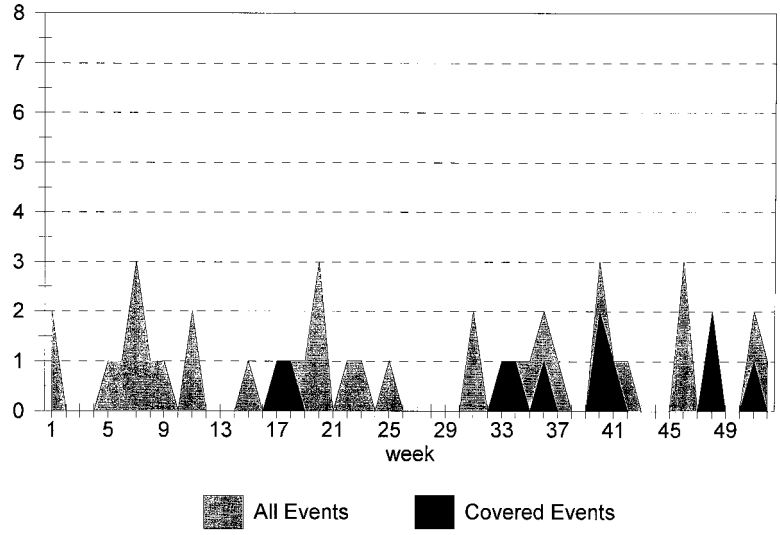

FIG. 3.—Weekly frequency of events: displays and collections

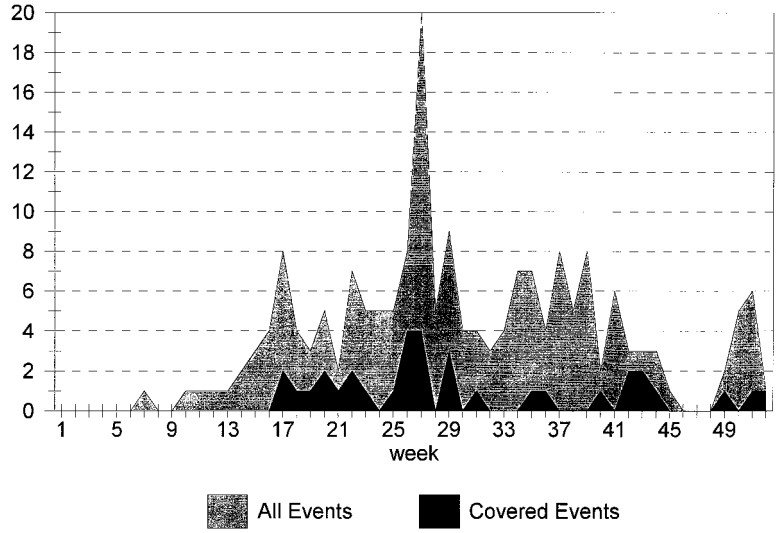

FIG. 4.—Weekly frequency of events: entertainment events

spring and fall, while protests and demonstrations are more scattered through the school year. Collections and distributions are more evenly distributed through the year. The seasonal pattern is, not surprisingly, most pronounced when indoor and outdoor events are distinguished. As figure 5 indicates, the seasonal patterns are somewhat complementary, with indoor events peaking in spring and fall and dying out in the summer, while outdoor events peak in the summer. However, both kinds of events are rare in January and February, and both kinds of events rise in the spring and fall.

Examination of the superimposed plots of coverage rates for the event types in figures 1–4 suggests that events have a higher probability of coverage if they occur when fewer other events are occurring in the same week. This possibility is examined below.

Correlates of Media Coverage

In this section, we describe the independent variables we coded. We also present their bivariate relations with media coverage.

Size

It is well established that the size of an event is a major predictor of its media coverage (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; McCarthy et al.

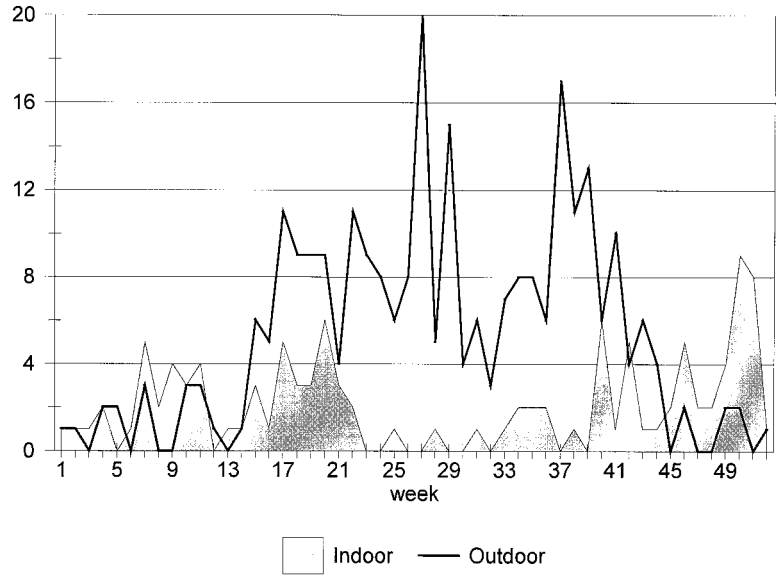

FIG. 5.—Seasonal pattern of indoor and outdoor events

1996; Snyder and Kelly 1977). Unfortunately, numerical estimates of the number of participants are missing from the large majority of Madison police records, and certain event types are more likely to have size estimates than others. We looked for size-relevant information in all records, including equipment requests for chairs. Even with these kinds of clues, 59% of the police records lack any size information. So in addition to using the objectively available information on event sizes, we coded a subjective size variable on the basis of whatever information and impressions we could glean from police comments, the sizes of other similar events, or our own knowledge of local events. This subjective size variable is obviously imperfect, but adequately captures the differences among small, medium, large, and very large events. After preliminary analysis using a variety of coding schemes (detailed in table 3), the size variable used in the analysis is the four-category scheme shown in table 3 because it has high predictive value, produces less distortion in the effects of other factors, and is closer to the gross distinctions of the original coding scheme. As table 3 indicates, the size of an event has a strong positive effect on the coverage of events. However, the smallest events, the nonevent displays, distributions, and collections, which were often coded as involving no people at all (i.e., having zero size) were almost as likely to be covered as medium-size events, while the small events (involving fewer than 16 people) were much less

TABLE 3

CODING OF SIZE OF EVENTS AND NEWS COVERAGE BY EVENT SIZE

	ESTIMATED SIZE				SIZE IN RECORD*			COMBINED SIZE GROUPS				
CODING	Coded Categories (*N* Persons)	*N*	Midpoint	Log Midpoint	Mean*	*N**	Any News (%)	GROUP LABEL	*N*	Any News (%)	*CT* (%)	*WSJ* (%)
0	None†	39	0	0.0‡		0	26	. . .	39	26	23	18
1	Tiny (1–5)	19	3	1.1	3	7	5	Small	54	7	7	7
2	Very small (6–15)	35	10.5	2.4	12	8	9					
3	Small (16–30)	62	23	3.1	29	12	29	Medium	234	28	27	23
4	Modest (31–99)	86	65	4.2	56	38	28					
5	Medium (100–499)	86	300	5.7	203	56	28					
6	Larger (500–1500)	25	1,000	6.9	695	16	72	Large	55	75	73	71
7	Large (2,000–10,000)	25	6,000	8.7	4,375	8	72					
8	Very large (10,000+)	3	45,000	10.7		0	100					
9	Huge (100,000+)	2	200,000	12.2	100,000	1	100					

NOTE.—*CT = Capital Times; WSJ = Wisconsin State Journal.*

* Observed size information uses any clues available in the record and is not based on consistent information.

† Displays, collections.

‡ The log of zero is undefined, so the "log midpoint" variable is set to zero (i.e., the log of 1.0) for events of size zero, as this makes the scale behave most reasonably.

TABLE 4

AVERAGE SIZE OF EVENT TYPES

TYPE	MEANS		MEDIAN		*N*	
	Observed	Estimated	Observed	Estimated	Observed	Estimated
Rally	265	181	265	65	2	9
March	940	766	250	300	5	11
Vigil		23		23	0	5
Ceremony	76	86	100	23	11	34
Speech	75	661	75	65	2	11
Protest	20	72	11	11	16	24
Display	0	10	0	0	1	29
Distribution, collection	100	46	100	0	2	13
Mixed	3,942	5,369	300	300	31	45
Commercial	300	11,566	300	6,000	1	15
Social	160	381	62	65	50	60
Athletic	958	1,904	500	300	11	26
Performance	66	2,341	11	23	22	91
Parade	1,808	2,200	150	300	6	9

NOTE.—Observed size statistics are based on those events for which some size information was available in the police record. Estimated size statistics use the midpoint of the subjective size category, as shown in table 3.

likely to be covered, and the largest events (involving 500 or more people) were much more likely to be covered.

However, as table 4 shows, differences in rates of media coverage between types are not just due to the sizes of events. "Mixed" events are considerably larger than ceremonies and larger than rallies and marches but are less likely to receive media coverage. This suggests the importance of more detailed information about the factors affecting news coverage.

Organizations and Media Access

To assess the effects of organizational sponsorship on media access, we developed the detailed classification shown in table 2 of the types of organizations listed in official records as sponsoring or connected with the events. Organizations classified as "national" are the local chapters of national organizations, and are contrasted with purely local groups. Social movement organizations (SMOs) are voluntary associations whose purpose is the pursuit of social change goals in a contentious fashion. By contrast, the issue-oriented groups are voluntary associations that pursue social issues and concerns in a more consensual fashion, such as the American Heart Association or the Children's Trust Fund. The issue-oriented

groups would generally see themselves and be seen by the movement groups as being very different from them, although they typically mix advocacy with fund-raising and service. The "nonprofit" category includes museums, orchestras, hospitals, social service agencies, and development groups that are professionalized and that receive significant government funding. "Business associations," which promote an industry or business sector, are distinguished from particular business firms. Businesses are not necessarily promoting their own ends when they sponsor events: some are for-profit firms whose business is to put on public celebrations, while in other cases businesses sponsor events as a kind of public service.

Comparing the organizations represented in literature distribution permits to those sponsoring other event forms in table 2, it is clear that many organizations seeking to communicate messages to the public do so directly, with literature distribution. Movement organizations, issue organizations, religious groups, and nonprofits dominate literature distribution. The pool of organizations distributing literature might be viewed as a kind of inventory of organizations or messages seeking public attention.

Table 5 shows the rate of newspaper coverage for events according to organizational sponsorship. The two newspapers are generally quite similar in their responsiveness to the various organization types. The major exception concerns the national SMOs: consistent with editorial policies, the *Capital Times* covered 70% of their events (nearly tying its coverage of business association events) while the *Wisconsin State Journal* covered only 40%. Business associations have by far the highest rate of coverage in both newspapers, with 90% of their events covered. About half the events of other "insider" groups are covered by both newspapers, including military and veterans groups and service clubs, particular businesses, the university, and nonprofits. It is notable that event-specific organizations also have a relatively high success rate of 59%. These are often established organizations that put on the same large event year after year. Lower rates of coverage, around one-third, are obtained by occupational groups, local SMOs, and the consensual issue-oriented health, education, and charitable organizations, both national and local. Events sponsored by recreational groups and neighborhood associations have even lower rates of coverage. Finally, events sponsored by religious groups or youth groups or schools are less likely to receive coverage than events with no organization mentioned at all.

Location

Although it is well recognized that news routines, "beats," and the physical constraints of preparing news stories for a deadline are important factors in determining whether an event is covered, prior researchers have not

TABLE 5

MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS SPONSORED BY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Type of Organization	*N*	Any News (%)	*CT* (%)	*WSJ* (%)
None*	96	14	12	11
Nothing in record	69	19	16	14
City events office personnel	27	4	4	4
Event specific*	29	59	59	59
Event or campaign specific	24	58	58	58
Individual name only	5	60	60	60
Government*	32	31	31	25
Government agency	26	31	31	23
Elected official, candidate, or party	6	33	33	33
Occupational*	9	33	33	11
Union or labor group	3	33	33	0
Professional association	6	33	33	17
Public service*	10	50	40	50
Military, veterans group	6	50	33	50
Service club	4	50	50	50
Social movement organization:				
Local*	6	33	33	33
National*	10	80	70	40
Issue oriented:				
Local*	17	35	35	35
National*	25	36	32	32
Other:				
Religious group or congregation*	16	12	12	12
Business association*	10	90	90	80
Business (particular)*	17	47	47	41
University*	8	50	50	50
Nonprofit institution*	11	45	45	45
University student group*	18	39	39	39
Youth group or school*	23	4	4	4
Recreational group*	30	27	27	17
Neighborhood association*	15	20	20	20
All organization types	382	32	30	27

* These organization types are used as independent variables in multivariate models; infrequent types with conceptual similarities and similar rates of media coverage are grouped to avoid estimation problems.

drawn the logical inference that the spatial location of an event would be related to reporters' routines. The "state government" beat is physically located at the capitol, for example, while the "university" beat is located at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Location information in the police records was carefully coded into a detailed set of categories capturing the exact location of all events. Based on both the logical characteristics of

TABLE 6

CODING OF LOCATIONS AND NEWS COVERAGE BY LOCATION

			MEDIA COVERAGE (%)		
	N	PROPORTION	Any	*CT*	*WSJ*
Downtown/university inside:					
Inside capitol	66	.17	36	33	32
Inside other downtown building	12	.03	42	33	33
Inside university building	13	.04	54	46	54
Downtown/university outside:					
Capitol steps, grounds	79	.21	29	28	25
Other downtown outside	49	.13	57	57	43
University outside except Library Mall	12	.03	58	58	50
Library Mall area	29	.08	7	7	7
Not downtown:					
Inside	19	.05	21	21	16
Outside	103	.27	20	20	19

spaces and the frequencies of media coverage of events in those spaces, these were distilled into the categories shown in table 6. Except for the Library Mall area, events in the downtown or campus areas receive more media coverage than those away from downtown. There appears to be no particular difference in the coverage of indoor versus outdoor events. The relatively low gross rate of media coverage for events inside the capitol or other downtown buildings and on the capitol grounds compared to other downtown areas is due to the mix of events in these spaces: most displays are in the capitol or other downtown buildings and most performances are on the capitol grounds or in the capitol rotunda. It is not immediately obvious why events on the Library Mall have such low rates of media coverage, although it may be due to the mix of events in the space or a lack of news interest in student-oriented events.

Newsworthiness

Messages and conflict.—The first part of table 7 shows the bivariate relation between newspaper coverage and newsworthiness factors. If we understand newsworthiness as being about the public sphere, as about communicating information relevant to public concerns, then it is reasonable to suppose that events attempting to convey a message to a larger public ought to be more newsworthy than nonmessage events. We coded an

TABLE 7

MEDIA COVERAGE BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS (EVENTS ONLY)

			Media Coverage (%)		
	N	Proportion	Any	*CT*	*WSJ*
Newsworthiness:					
No message	209	.55	24	23	22
Message	173	.45	41	39	34
No conflict	330	.86	28	28	25
Conflict	52	.14	52	48	40
No message, no conflict	208	.55	24	23	21
Consensual message	122	.32	37	36	32
Conflictual message	51	.13	51	47	39
No disorder	358	.94	31	30	27
Disorder	24	.06	46	42	38
No vehicles	352	.92	29	28	25
Vehicles	30	.08	63	63	53
No amplifier	316	.83	30	29	26
Amplifier	66	.17	39	38	33
Organizer not local	26	.07	15	12	8
Local organizer	356	.93	33	32	29
N of police (quantitative factor):					
0	335	.88	29	28	25
1	15	.04	47	47	40
2	14	.04	29	29	29
3	6	.02	67	67	17
4	3	.01	67	67	67
5	5	.01	40	40	40
6	1	.00	100	100	100
7	1	.00	100	0	100
8	1	.00	100	100	100
9	1	.00	100	100	100
Timing and routines:					
Not annual	333	.87	27	26	22
Annual	49	.13	63	61	61
Not holiday	350	.92	31	29	26
July Fourth	16	.04	19	19	19
Other holiday	16	.04	69	69	63
Legislature in session	53	.14	30	31	28
Legislature not in session	329	.86	32	28	25
Indoors	110	.29	36	33	32
Outdoors	272	.71	30	29	25
Day of week:					
Sunday	52	.14	34	35	27
Monday	52	.14	40	40	35
Tuesday	41	.11	27	24	24
Wednesday	30	.08	23	20	17
Thursday	28	.07	32	29	25

TABLE 7 (*Continued*)

	N	Proportion	Media Coverage (%) Any	*CT*	*WSJ*
Friday	56	.15	34	34	30
Saturday	123	.32	29	28	27
Time of day:					
All day	78	.20	33	32	29
Morning	70	.18	33	31	29
Midday	88	.23	28	27	24
Afternoon	52	.14	37	35	31
Evening	94	.25	30	29	26

event as having a "message" if part of its apparent purpose was to influence public opinion or action, rather than the event being an end in itself. Standard protest events (rallies, marches, vigils, unpermitted protests) as well as literature distribution, collections, and commercial promotional events were all assumed to have messages. Social or athletic events whose stated purpose included raising money or informing the public were classified as "mixed" events and deemed to have message content. Similarly, public social events with clear "ethnic" labels were considered to be conveying a message of ethnic pride. For other events, we made judgments based on the nature of the sponsoring group and the police description of the activity to determine whether a message was involved. Most speeches, ceremonies, and displays were judged to have message content, although a minority appeared to be ends in themselves (e.g., student awards ceremonies, art displays, historical lectures). Most performances and social events were judged to lack message content. As table 7 indicates, message events receive substantially more coverage than nonmessage events, although this effect is stronger for the *Capital Times*.

The element of drama or contention is recognized as making an event newsworthy. We defined an event as involving "conflict" if we were aware of social or political conflict about the sponsoring organization or the issue addressed by the event. One event, the Mifflin Street block party, was judged to involve conflict despite having no message, because of the history of the event and the substantial public debate about it. Otherwise, conflict events are a subset of message events. As table 7 indicates, conflictual events receive much more coverage than nonconflictual events.

Eliminating the Mifflin Street block party, we can trichotomize events as involving no message, a nonconflictual message, or a conflictual mes-

sage. Table 7 shows that the coverage of consensual-message events is midway between nonmessage and conflictual-message events.

Other newsworthiness factors.—Since the literature refers to an extremely wide range of factors as affecting newsworthiness and since our police records were generally sketchy and incomplete, we proceeded somewhat inductively and coded all information available in the records that might affect coverage. From log book records, we could code the number of different police officers mentioned in the record, which is generally an indicator of an unexpected disruption. Large permitted events generally yield no mention in log books, even when many officers are working overtime to police the event. However, the sudden emergence of several dozen unruly protesters often leads to entries in log books about officers being called in early or to reports from several different officers as events unfold. We also coded a more subjective assessment of whether the event involved disorder, which was based on comments in the police log about problems, including extensive trash, people upset about locked restrooms, and traffic problems, as well as more politicized disruptions. Permit records indicate whether there are vehicles involved and whether there will be electrical amplification of sound, features which might make an event seem more interesting or newsworthy. As table 7 indicates, all of these newsworthiness factors increase the likelihood of coverage. Events involving disorder, more than three policemen, vehicles, or an amplifier were more likely to be covered by both newspapers.

Finally, we examined the address of the contact person for permitted events and coded whether this person was from the Madison metropolitan area or elsewhere. Additionally, the descriptions of a few events in the log book make it clear when the participants are from out of town (e.g., when the protesters get off buses from Milwaukee). Even "national" newspapers emphasize local events and personalities, and the lifeblood of a local newspaper is the local angle. Additionally, local organizers are more likely to be in communication with local news reporters. As expected, events with nonlocal organizers were less likely to be covered.

Timing and Competition for News Hole

Newspapers publish daily and have rigid deadlines that create constraints on reporters to research and write their stories quickly. The "news hole" is the amount of space available for news stories in a particular issue of a particular publication: newspapers do not publish blank spaces and cannot readily add extra pages. When there is a lot of news, some gets left out. When news is "slow," editors will fill the pages with whatever they can find. Thus, the coverage of any particular news item is inevitably

affected by the presence or absence of competing news. News reportage of local events requires local news personnel and thus could be particularly susceptible to factors of timing and the competition between events.

The time of the event in relation to news deadlines is commonly cited as a news routine issue. Since the *Wisconsin State Journal* is a morning paper, while the *Capital Times* is published in the afternoon, the literature would suggest that timing would influence which paper covers an event. Permitted demonstrations at the capitol can occur only between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M., or between 4 and 6 P.M. Based on this rule and by inspecting the distribution of starting and ending times available in the records, event times were categorized as all day (beginning before 10 A.M. and ending after 2:30 but before 8 P.M.), morning (beginning before 10 A.M. and ending before 2:30 P.M.), midday (beginning after 10 A.M. and ending before 2:30 P.M.), afternoon (beginning after 10 A.M. and ending after 2:30 but before 8 P.M.), and evening (part of the event is after 8 P.M.). Table 7 indicates that the time of day makes little difference in an event's coverage by either newspaper.

Less has been said about day-of-the-week rhythms in coverage. Events occurring on different days of the week have different probabilities of coverage, with events occurring on Mondays being somewhat more likely to receive news coverage than events on other days of the week, and events on Wednesday least likely. It is not clear whether these daily differences arise from reporters' routines or from daily variations in the size of the news hole, but they appear similar for the two newspapers.

Since news coverage is daily and tends to be tightly compressed around an event, the number of competing events within a short time frame may influence the prospects of coverage, and it appears from figures 1–4 above that the probability of coverage is lower when there are competing events. To assess these effects, we calculated a variety of moving averages of the number of events around each date, and found that moving averages in the range of two weeks (between 11 and 19 days) have the strongest negative relation to media coverage in these data, with the 17-day average having the strongest bivariate negative correlation with media coverage. Substantively, this suggests that events compete for space in the newspaper with other events occurring in the preceding and following week.[9] As

[9] The effect of this variable is influenced by the "outlier" July Fourth, when there were 16 events; the next highest total is seven. The effect of the variable is weaker if July Fourth is removed from the data. A more detailed analysis of interactions also revealed that there is a strong negative correlation in 1994 between the number of message events in a day or three-day period and the probability of media coverage of a particular message event, while there is no such correlation for nonmessage events. However, a check of the 1993, 1995, and 1996 data for message events found no such relationship, so this is not reported or interpreted in this article.

table 7 shows, events are less likely to be covered when they are competing with more events in the 17-day period (eight days before to eight days after) around them.

Events that can be predicted in advance are often covered in different ways from breaking news. A dummy variable indicates whether the event is linked to a holiday or an anniversary (including Christmas-related events, New Year's Eve, Martin Luther King Day, Independence Day, St. Patrick's Day, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Women's Equality Day, and the Fiftieth Anniversary of D-Day). Of the 32 events that were linked to holidays, 16 occurred on July Fourth. As table 7 shows, events on July Fourth (generally children's parades) were less likely to be covered than other events, while events on other holidays were much more likely to be covered. We also created a dummy variable for annual events, that is, routinized or ritualized events with the same name, description, or organization held several years in a row at about the same time of year. These included such events as an Irish Dance on March 17, a Take Back the Night march, ceremonies around Martin Luther King Day, the gay pride march, the antiabortion movement's commemoration of *Roe v. Wade,* and a variety of annual fund-raising events. Consistent with the news-routine value of predictable events, the 49 annual events are much more likely to receive media coverage than other events.

Finally, the Wisconsin Blue Book was consulted to determine the exact dates on which the Wisconsin state legislature was in session in 1994, and a dummy variable indicates whether the legislature was in session on the particular date of the event. Table 7 indicates that whether the legislature is in session on a particular day appears to make little difference in the probability that a 1994 event is covered. However, the main legislative budget sessions are in odd-numbered years.

Multivariate Analysis

Obviously, many of the factors predicting media coverage are correlated, and we need to use multivariate analysis to determine the net effects of each factor while controlling for the others. Two full models are shown in the appendix for each newspaper, giving the effects of all variables excluding and including the event typology. To make the models estimable for both newspapers, organizations were grouped as indicated in table 2, and vigils were combined with unpermitted protests. The reduced models shown in table 8 were constructed by selecting any variable that had a nontrivial coefficient (i.e., $P < .2$) in any of the four models after variables were eliminated by backward stepwise regression. The omitted categories for organizational sponsor, location, and event type were chosen to have moderate rates of news coverage, and various sensitivity analyses

TABLE 8

LOGIT REGRESSION OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

	INCLUDING EVENT TYPES				EXCLUDING EVENT TYPES			
	CT		*WSJ*		*CT*		*WSJ*	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Constant	−1.57***	.58	−1.80***	.58	−1.79***	.51	−1.75***	.51
Size zero	−.24	.58	−.51	.61	−.81	.52	−1.00^{+}	.55
Size small	−.89	.67	−.85	.65	−1.61**	.62	−1.17^{+}	.61
Size large	2.03***	.50	1.97***	.48	2.19***	.48	2.20***	.47
Location:								
Downtown, outside[a]	−.61	.48	−1.15*	.47	−.53	.44	−1.05*	.45
Downtown, inside[b]								
Inside at university	1.06	.81	1.40	.78	.84	.80	1.23**	.77
Library Mall area	−2.64**	.95	−2.99**	.97	−2.72**	.91	−2.83**	.92
Not downtown	−1.79***	.53	−1.80**	.53	−1.49**	.48	−1.58***	.49
Organization type:								
Event specific	1.18^{+}	.69	1.26^{+}	.68	1.15^{+}	.65	1.27^{+}	.65
Local SMO	−1.59	1.18	−.59	1.08	−.76	1.16	−.08	1.07
National SMO	2.76*	1.21	.53	.89	3.09**	1.18	.72	.91
Local issue	.24	.75	.79	.72	.74	.71	1.09	.71
National issue	.74	.63	1.01	.62	.77	.61	1.05^{+}	.61
Recreational	1.87**	.66	.94	.68	1.40*	.59	.87	.64
Business	2.12*	.83	1.67*	.79	2.17**	.78	1.85*	.75
Nonprofit	1.41	.87	1.43^{+}	.86	1.46^{+}	.85	1.62^{+}	.84
University students	1.48^{+}	.85	2.03*	.82	1.72*	.82	2.08*	.81
Business association	3.62*	1.40	2.34*	1.10	3.21**	1.22	2.53*	.99
Public service	1.11	.97	1.79^{+}	.92	.86	.88	1.63^{+}	.88

Other:								
Monday	1.26*	.50	1.30**	.50	1.25**	.48	1.22*	.48
Wednesday	−1.84*	.77	−1.54*	.72	−1.43*	.71	−1.35^{+}	.70
Saturday	−.57	.39	−.30	.39	−.73^{+}	.38	−.35	.37
Message	−.10	.51	.06	.50	.85*	.40	.64	.40
Conflict	2.06***	.56	1.85**	.55	1.59**	.51	1.38**	.51
Vehicles	1.10*	.56	.82	.54	1.11*	.54	.63	.53
Nonlocal organizer	−1.46	.98	−1.64^{+}	.94	−1.43	.88	−1.52^{+}	.88
Amplifier	1.12*	.56	.89	.53	1.10*	.48	.95*	.48
Annual	.50	.53	.76	.50	.54	.50	.76	.48
Event type:								
Rally	2.92*	1.18	1.84^{+}	1.00				
Ceremony	.97	.67	.73	.65				
Mixed	1.26^{+}	.64	1.22^{+}	.63				
Commercial	.61	.85	1.26	.83				
Performance	−1.34^{+}	.68	−.18	.62				
Log likelihood	−135.23037		−139.68721		−143.8587		−143.84157	
χ^2 (df)[c]	198.59 (32)		167.94 (32)		181.33 (27)		159.63	
Probability[d]	.9998		.9766		.99995		.9797	

[a] Downtown outside = capitol steps, other downtown outside, or outside the university.
[b] Downtown inside = inside the capitol or inside other downtown buildings.
[c] Significance of χ^2 test comparing models including and excluding event types is .1400 for *WSJ* and .0040 for *CT*.
[d] These entries show the probability of χ^2 comparing the restricted model (this table) with the full model (app. table A1).
$^{+}$ $P < .1$, two-tailed.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

were performed to be sure that the coefficients in the presented models represent major trends in the data and not outliers or small numbers of cases in a category. The selection of variables into the reduced models and the relative sizes of coefficients are consistent with the full models, and chi-square tests indicate that each reduced model fits as well as its full model.

Newsworthiness.—As expected, the size of an event is a major factor in the likelihood that it will receive coverage. Large events involving at least 500 people are much more likely to be covered by either newspaper than smaller events. However, size effects are less consistent below this threshold. The coefficient for very small events (1–15 people) is negative but is not generally significant, and the coverage events of size zero (i.e., displays and impersonal collections and distributions) is not significantly different than medium-size events.

But size is not all there is to newsworthiness. After size, the strongest effect on media coverage is the presence of conflict. This is not the same thing as disruption or disorder: neither the number of police, nor the subjective disorder code, nor being an unpermitted protest has any effect on news coverage, and the conflict effect is net of size. Net of conflict, there is some evidence that consensual message events receive somewhat more coverage than nonmessage events: the message coefficient is positive although not strong when event types are excluded.

More mundane newsworthiness factors also have effects. Events with amplifiers and events involving vehicles (i.e., street parades) receive more coverage, although these effects are stronger for the *Capital Times.* Since data on amplifiers come from permit records, the presence of amplified sound is probably an indication both of prior planning and of structuring the event in a way to speak to an audience. The effect of having a nonlocal organizer is consistently negative, which is consistent with local newspapers' assumed greater interest in events with local ties, although the effect is not strong enough to be significant.

Sponsoring organization.—Organizations clearly differed in their ability to attract newspaper attention to their events. Both newspapers give high rates of coverage to events sponsored by business associations and businesses and, to a weaker extent, the nonprofit institutions and organizations whose purpose is to put on an event. Although their gross rates of coverage are lower, University of Wisconsin student groups and recreational groups have positive effect coefficients because the events they sponsor are generally social or performance events with low coverage rates, and such events receive more coverage when they are sponsored by these groups than otherwise. Consistent with their respective editorial policies, the *Wisconsin State Journal* also is more likely to cover events

sponsored by consensual issue-oriented groups and the "public service" groups, while the *Capital Times* is especially likely to cover events sponsored by national SMOs.

Location.—It is a real estate truism that location is the key to property value. Location is important for receiving media coverage for an event as well. After multivariate controls, the original nine location codes could be grouped into the five shown in the table without loss of predictive value. The reference category in the table is the combination of inside the capitol and inside other downtown buildings, where both newspapers cover about one-third of the events. Net of controls for event characteristics, both newspapers covered events on the Library Mall or away from downtown much less often than those occurring in the capitol or other downtown buildings. The *Capital Times* had about the same rate of coverage for all downtown events, while the *Wisconsin State Journal* covered inside events at the university more and outside events downtown less than it covered events in the capitol or other downtown buildings. Location effects seem linked to news routines. Events in a small well-defined downtown area are easier to get to in a busy day than events in other parts of town. Furthermore, reporters are more likely already to be downtown for other reasons. While collecting data for this project, we observed an unpermitted blockade of the legislative chambers over an antiabortion bill. The first reporters on the scene were those who were already in the building for another purpose, presumably because their beat is the capitol. Other reporters and television crews (who were called by the protesters) arrived later.

The importance of location can be most strongly seen in the contrast between ceremonies and "mixed" events. Neither type of event is typically thought of as protest, and both generally carry consensual rather than conflictual content. The "mixed" events should generally be more newsworthy than ceremonies, as they are much larger than ceremonies and involve some sort of interesting activity. But 59% of the ceremonies received coverage versus only 40% of the mixed events. It turns out that this difference is entirely accounted for by the location of the event. Ceremonies are more likely to occur in the capitol, while mixed events are more likely to occur away from downtown or on the Library Mall. In fact, at any given location, a mixed event is *more* likely to receive coverage than a ceremony.

Timing and routine.—The bivariate effect for annual events is largely explained when other variables are controlled, although it remains positive, especially for the *Wisconsin State Journal.* Although the proportions of events that are annual differ across event types, coverage for annual events is consistently higher across the types (except for ceremonies, where

there is little difference). When reporters can plan ahead for the event and rely on templates and understandings from prior years, any kind of event is more likely to be covered, but this is a relatively weak effect.

It is less clear why events on Monday are much more likely to be covered, and events on Wednesday and Saturday are somewhat less likely to be covered, but this different effect is consistent between the two newspapers and remains after multivariate controls. This is most likely an effect of the news hole (the amount of space available on a given day for news), as the newspapers' news holes do differ by day of the week because of regular fluctuations in advertising. However, there is no simple correspondence between the day an event occurs and the day it is reported.

Event forms.—Comparisons of fit statistics for model 1 and model 2 indicate that event forms affect media coverage over and above the other characteristics of events, and that this effect is strong and significant for the *Capital Times* in both the full and reduced models. The main factor is that the *Capital Times* was especially likely to cover rallies, although the *Wisconsin State Journal* also has a marginally significant tendency to cover rallies as well. Additionally, mixed events and, to a lesser extent, ceremonies were covered more than their other characteristics (principally location) would predict. Conversely, performances were less likely to be covered, especially by the *Capital Times.* The relative coverage rates of particular protest forms needs to be viewed as conditional. Prior research (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996) found that, in Washington, D.C., marches were more likely to be covered than rallies; our sample of marches and rallies in Madison is relatively small. However, everyone seems to find that vigils receive very little news coverage.

DISCUSSION

Research in this tradition began by asking which protest events receive news coverage. This question is important in two ways, both because most research on protest events relies on news reportage of events as data and because protest events are an alternate path to influence for people who feel aggrieved by social policies. But an adequate answer to the question of *which* protest events receive coverage requires answering a prior question: How do protest events fare in competition with other events for space in the news hole? Is protest an effective way of bringing issues to the public sphere by way of news coverage? We can answer this question only by comparing protest events to other kinds of events. When we make the comparison, it is clear that protest is quite effective in competition with other similar events for news space. Local newspapers may seem to be full of small stories about social events, performances, and athletic competitions, but police records make it clear that there are many more of these

events than other kinds of events and that events purely for entertainment, with no message, are much less likely to be covered in newspapers than events with messages.

The results of our research allow us to place public events on a coverage scale. On the one end are promotional events for local businesses and business sectors, which have extremely high rates of news coverage, often in the "business" section which is explicitly oriented to business interests. On the other end of the scale are the purely social and entertainment events which are ends in themselves, have no particular relevance to people who are not present at the event, and have little or no "news value" by any journalistic standard. These events are quite unlikely to be covered, unless they are large. Athletic events and most message events fall between these extremes. Regardless of editorial position, this scale and the location of most event types on it is similar for the two newspapers.

With this scale established, the coverage of events carrying protest content can be calibrated: rallies are near the high end, while marches, speeches, and mixed events are in the middle (receiving coverage comparable to athletic events and parades). Unpermitted protests have relatively low rates of coverage (comparable to the rates for displays and collections), although they receive more news attention than social and entertainment events. The more liberal newspaper gave considerably greater coverage to rallies than the more conservative newspaper, but even the more conservative newspaper gave rallies and other protest events relatively high coverage as compared with other event types. In fact, the data suggest that there is little bias against protest. Instead, it is social events and small performances that are especially likely to be omitted from the news record.

But the omission of events that are not, after all, trying to communicate a message to a larger public seems less noteworthy than the omission of nonconflictual message events. Instead, if there is a bias, it appears to be against messages that lack conflict. If conflict exists about an event or an issue connected to it, the event is much more likely to receive news coverage. The data suggest that it is drama, not novelty, that makes an event "news." In this respect, it is worth noting that athletic events, which involve the drama of competition, can be "news" in a way that performances or social events cannot. If conflict or drama is news, ceteris paribus, social movements have an advantage over other kinds of groups in obtaining news coverage. The contrast between conflictual and consensual issues is enormous. Fourteen (88%) of the 16 rallies, marches, vigils, ceremonies, and speeches around a conflictual issue received media coverage, while only 46% of the 54 rallies, marches, vigils, ceremonies, and speeches involving consensual issues received media coverage. Displays are much less likely to be covered than events, but 42% of the seven displays involving conflict received some coverage versus only 18% of the 22 involving

a consensual issue. This is not affected by editorial policy. The *Wisconsin State Journal* shows the same pattern of considerably higher coverage for conflictual than consensual messages, even though its coverage of both kinds of message events is lower than the *Capital Times.*

The type of organizational sponsor also has a major effect on news coverage. Business associations and businesses were very successful in receiving coverage regardless of the editorial stance of the newspaper and net of other event characteristics. Net of other event characteristics, nonprofit institutions, event-specific groups, service organizations, university students, and recreational groups also were treated favorably by both newspapers. It is especially worth calling attention to the comparison between the social movement organizations and the national and local issue-oriented groups. The issue-oriented groups are a lot like movement organizations, in that they are voluntary associations that seek to educate or persuade the public to new ideas and to make claims that, if realized, would affect people other than themselves. In fact, issue-oriented groups often advocate for increased public funding or other legislation relevant to their issue. Where they differ from movement organizations is in their nonconflictual and relatively nonpolitical appeal to public issues or concerns. They frame their issues as charitable or educational or consensual public concerns. They frame themselves and are framed by others (including movement activists and social movement scholars) as very different from social movements, as insiders seeking to do good rather than outsiders seeking controversial change. Both newspapers covered around a third of the events sponsored by issue-oriented groups, which is about the same coverage they gave to local movement organizations. When multivariate controls are introduced, the effect coefficient becomes negative for local SMOs and positive for the local and national issue groups. This means that, net of the strong positive effect of conflict, local SMOs receive less coverage than other organizations, and issue groups receive more. However, these effects are generally weak and nonsignificant. Net of controls, the more moderate *Wisconsin State Journal* favored the issue groups—especially national issue groups-more than the *Capital Times* did, but these effects are not large enough to be significant. The big difference editorial position made was in the liberal *Capital Times*'s higher coverage of national social movement organizations. These coverage rates suggest that social movement organizations can be "insiders," at least for some media organizations.

Location and the spatial dimension of action have also been insufficiently appreciated in earlier discussions. Just as early research has demonstrated the regional bias of any news outlet, this research has demonstrated the existence of smaller-scale geographic biases in news coverage within one small city. Events occurring away from the downtown area

had much less chance of receiving news coverage than comparable events occurring near the state capitol. "Public" events are intended to be observed by strangers and, ideally, publicized through the mass media. Most public events in Madison tend to occur in well-defined and narrowly limited public spaces, and news coverage focused on those limited areas. Events occurring outside these well-defined areas received much less coverage. Additionally, the data suggest that there is some avoidance of the Library Mall area by news reporters, which is viewed as a "student" domain. Several news people mentioned the lack of news value of "another protest by the same group of people on Library Mall." Urban geographers and anthropologists have been calling attention to the spatial organization of urban life, to the ways in which different groups of people frequent different areas of town and use public space differently. When people differ in their access to the places frequented or considered significant by news reporters, they will differ in their ability to reach a larger audience through public events. Additionally, mundane factors that affect newsworthiness or news routines appear to make some difference in coverage, including the day of the week, the presence of vehicles, the use of an amplifier, and the absence of a local organizer.

The lessons of these results for activists seeking media coverage seem fairly clear. Events involving conflictual messages fare rather well in local news coverage, particularly if they occur in the right places and have an organizational sponsor with positive ties to the news media. Activists seeking to influence the public or to mobilize action on a consensual basis, on the other hand, appear to be fighting an uphill battle. However, contrary to common assumptions, there appears to be no premium for disruption or surprise in obtaining news coverage: unpermitted protests were not especially likely to be covered, and neither the number of police nor the subjective measure of disorder predicted news coverage. Timing the event to meet news deadlines seems less important for newspaper coverage than recognizing daily differences in news hole sizes.

The lessons for protest event researchers are also fairly clear. Protest does appear to be "newsworthy" and to have a reasonably high probability of coverage. However, there is a distinct bias in the news record not only toward larger events (which has been well documented) but toward more established groups who present their concerns in predictable ways in predictable places located downtown, where the reporters are. The genuinely marginal people, who put on their events in their own spaces, are much more likely to be missing from the news record.

Finally, these results have important implications for our understanding of the role of media coverage of public events in creating the public sphere of democratic discourse. In this discussion, it is important to remember the scope of the research, that we have no way to assess the

coverage of public events against the routine access of political or economic elites to news reporters. Additionally, the police data do not record most events in private spaces. With these caveats in mind, there are three main conclusions to be drawn about the impact of public events on the public sphere. First, although there has been considerable discussion of the timing of events relative to news deadlines, these data suggest that much more attention should be given to *where* events occur and to the spatial as well as social accessibility of events to news reporters. In particular, the locations that received media coverage (the capitol area and inside university buildings) are not the locations where a majority of the population goes (i.e., shopping malls and sports arenas). This implies that public events can be oriented either to those physically present at the event, or to the mass media, but that it is relatively difficult to do both.

Second, the data suggest that news organizations are not necessarily homogeneous, particularly if they are in a competitive market. Both newspapers, regardless of editorial position, covered events of importance to the business community. But this does not mean that their editorial positions are irrelevant to their decisions about which kinds of other events are important and worthy of coverage. The more liberal newspaper gave substantially more coverage to rallies and to events sponsored by national SMOs than did the more moderate newspaper. Although some journalistic norms of "objective" news reporting imply that editorial position should be uncorrelated with news coverage, traditional conceptions of the role of a free press in democratic discourse in the public sphere suggest the value of diverse and competing definitions of which issues are important to the public. If staging public events is a mechanism for bringing issues into the public sphere that are not already being discussed, it follows that there cannot be a priori objective standards for which of these issues are important enough to receive media attention.

Finally, the results suggest that the drama of controversy and polarization is central to what is understood by reporters and the general public as "interesting" or "newsworthy," and that the way an issue is framed is more salient than the novelty or disruptiveness of an event, especially if the disruption remains relatively small. Although they have not had comparable data on the coverage of large numbers of events, this news preference for conflict over cooperation is well recognized among media scholars (Shah and Thornton 1994; Shoemaker and Resse 1991; Thornton and Shah 1996). At least by way of a public event, it appears relatively difficult to obtain media coverage to promote good health, education, charity, volunteering, or positive community relationships. Although public events are not the only means by which issues enter the public sphere, the results in this article strongly support arguments that the information the public receives from the media about social issues is slanted toward

conflict and controversy. It may be useful in closing to consider this contentious "public sphere" one encounters in the newspaper with the full range of events actually occurring in the "public square," where people are in physical proximity to one another. In the public square, people not only contend, they also socialize, entertain each other, raise money for charity, and seek to influence each other in nonconflictual ways. This image of positive sociability is at variance with many images of public life, and it is possible that Madison is unusually civil. But the data suggest that it is also possible that the images of public interactions have been too heavily distorted by reliance on media coverage as a source of information about those interactions.

APPENDIX

Full Models

TABLE A1

Logit Regression of Newspaper Coverage

	Excluding Event Types				Including Event Types			
	CT		*WSJ*		*CT*		*WSJ*	
Independent Variable	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Constant	−2.78*	1.27	−3.29*	1.31	−4.15*	1.98	−2.99	1.99
Size zero	−.99	.65	−1.00	.70	−.21	1.65	.08	1.86
Size small	−1.38*	.68	−1.18+	.68	−.62	.75	−.71	.75
Size large	2.22***	.51	2.31***	.50	2.08***	.57	1.82**	.53
Organization type:								
None	−.78	.81	−.90	.82	−.87	.96	−.91	.94
Event specific	.99	.84	1.17	.88	.70	.98	1.00	1.00
Local SMO	−1.05	1.31	−.59	1.24	−2.08	1.60	−1.62	1.47
National SMO	2.12*	1.01	.99	1.00	1.54	1.05	.88	1.03
Local issue	.49	.82	.99	.82	−.26	.91	.63	.89
National issue	.73	.79	1.09	.81	.45	.88	.85	.90
Religious	−.53	1.06	.10	1.04	−.92	1.19	−.45	1.17
Occupational	.72	1.23	−1.71	1.64	.33	1.34	−2.25	1.86
Recreational	1.20	.83	.87	.87	1.52	.97	.54	.99
Business (particular)	1.87+	.96	1.76+	.96	1.71+	1.04	1.47	1.03
Youth group, school	−.53	1.32	−.52	1.33	−.23	1.53	−.74	1.44
University	−.08	1.19	−.21	1.26	.19	1.43	.63	1.53
Nonprofit	1.40	.99	1.50	1.00	1.25	1.05	1.30	1.05
University student group	.73	1.16	1.11	1.14	.80	1.38	1.18	1.31

Business association	2.88*	1.36	2.43*	1.19	3.52*	1.55	2.17	1.38
Neighborhood	.57	1.32	.23	1.38	1.60	1.73	1.22	1.73
Public service	.74	1.05	1.72	1.04	.99	1.17	1.79	1.13
Location:								
Inside capitol	.58	.59	.80	.59	1.03	.65	1.19+	.64
Inside other downtown	.73	.96	1.02	.99	.73	1.06	.78	1.11
Inside at university	1.61	1.10	2.64*	1.11	1.95	1.20	3.06*	1.18
Inside, not downtown	−.18	.99	−.38	1.04	−.16	1.06	−.59	1.15
Outside other downtown	.26	.67	−.53	.69	.74	.76	−.44	.79
Library Mall	−2.07*	1.03	−1.72+	1.03	−1.50	1.17	−1.50	1.18
Outside at university	.89	1.02	.43	1.05	1.72	1.29	.71	1.23
Outside, not downtown	−1.18+	.66	−.90	.66	−.95	.77	−.91	.76
Time of day:								
All day	−.22	.56	.18	.57	−.35	.60	.10	.62
Morning	−.27	.57	−.09	.60	−.19	.61	−.09	.65
Midday	−.04	.59	.39	.59	−.10	.66	.37	.65
Afternoon	.17	.60	.43	.61	.05	.67	.48	.67
Day of week:								
Sunday	−.02	.79	−.32	.82	−.11	.84	−.40	.87
Monday	.99	.80	1.10	.82	.79	.84	1.10	.87
Tuesday	.05	.82	.34	.86	−.04	.89	.42	.93
Wednesday	−1.33	.90	−1.44	.89	−2.01*	1.01	−1.58	.98
Friday	−.02	.77	−.14	.81	−.54	.82	−.35	.86
Saturday	−.71	.72	−.51	.75	−.66	.76	−.43	.82
Other:								
July Fourth	−.79	1.30	−.73	1.38	−1.01	1.50	−.61	1.54
Other holiday	.95	.79	.33	.78	.95	.86	.86	.85
Message	.98*	.48	.61	.48	−.46	.66	−.10	.67
Conflict	1.62*	.64	1.52*	.64	2.41**	.78	2.34**	.80
Disorder	−.11	.89	.45	.88	.23	1.05	1.31	1.20
Vehicles	1.22*	.61	.65	.60	1.66*	.73	.74	.69

TABLE A1 (*Continued*)

Independent Variable	Excluding Event Types				Including Event Types			
	CT		*WSJ*		*CT*		*WSJ*	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Other:								
Nonlocal organizer	−1.18	.97	−1.39	1.02	−1.29	1.09	−1.47	1.11
Amplifier	1.05+	.56	.87	.55	.98	.63	.72	.60
Annual	.30	.56	.84	.54	.58	.63	.93	.59
Legislature in session	−.24	.50	−.16	.51	−.30	.55	−.10	.56
N of police	.12	.18	.22	.18	.12	.19	.28	.19
N events in 17 days	.21	.18	.23	.18	.52	.35	.25	.34
Event type:								
Rally					4.69**	1.67	1.52	1.44
March					1.76	1.56	−.03	1.49
Ceremony					2.11+	1.17	−.03	1.19
Speech					1.30	1.40	−1.25	1.64
Protest or vigil					.79	1.59	−1.78	1.71
Display					.72	2.00	−1.48	2.29
Collection, distribution					1.82	1.88	−.12	2.01
Mixed					1.93+	.99	.98	.97
Commercial					.81	1.05	1.12	1.10
Social					−1.58	1.67	−1.40	1.60
Performance					−.39	.95	−.50	.97
Parade					−1.13	1.40	−1.06	1.31
Log likelihood	−141.21604		−138.17967		−130.23979		−131.36407	
χ^2 (*df*)	186.62 (50)		170.95 (50)		208.57 (62)		184.58 (62)	
Probability[a]					.0381		.3250	

Note.—Omitted dummy variables are medium size, government organization type, capitol steps location, evening, Thursday, and athletic event. *CT* = *Capital Times*; *WSJ* = *Wisconsin State Journal*.

[a] This test compares models including event types with models excluding event types.

+ $P < .1$, two-tailed; * $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$; *** $P < .001$.

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Corrected Figures for Oliver & Myers AJS 1999.
(Figures are illegible as scanned or copied from published version)

Figure 1: Weekly frequencies of protests and demonstrations.

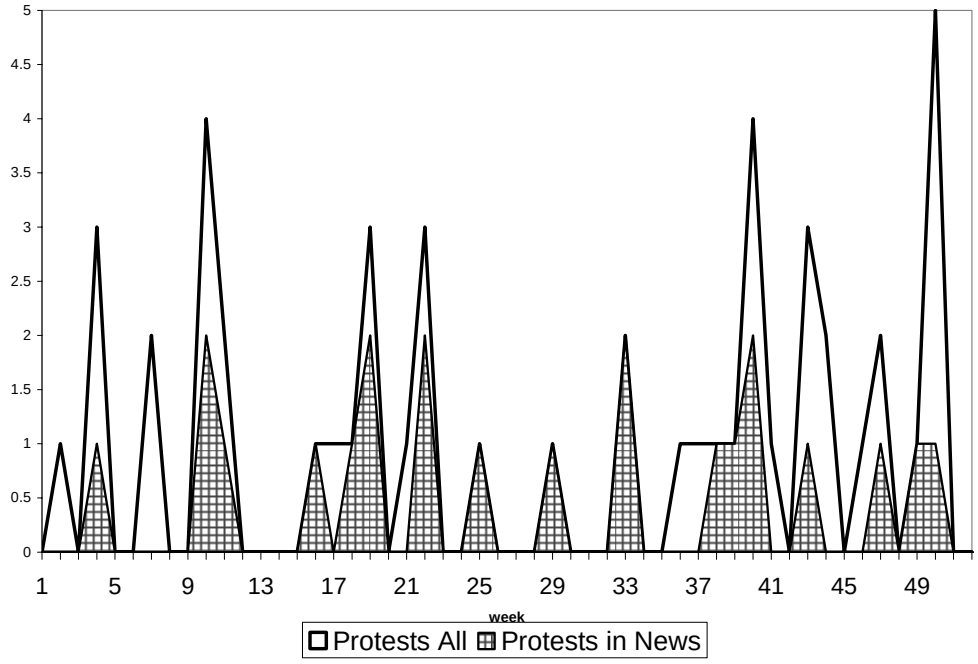

Figure 2: Weekly frequencies of other message events.

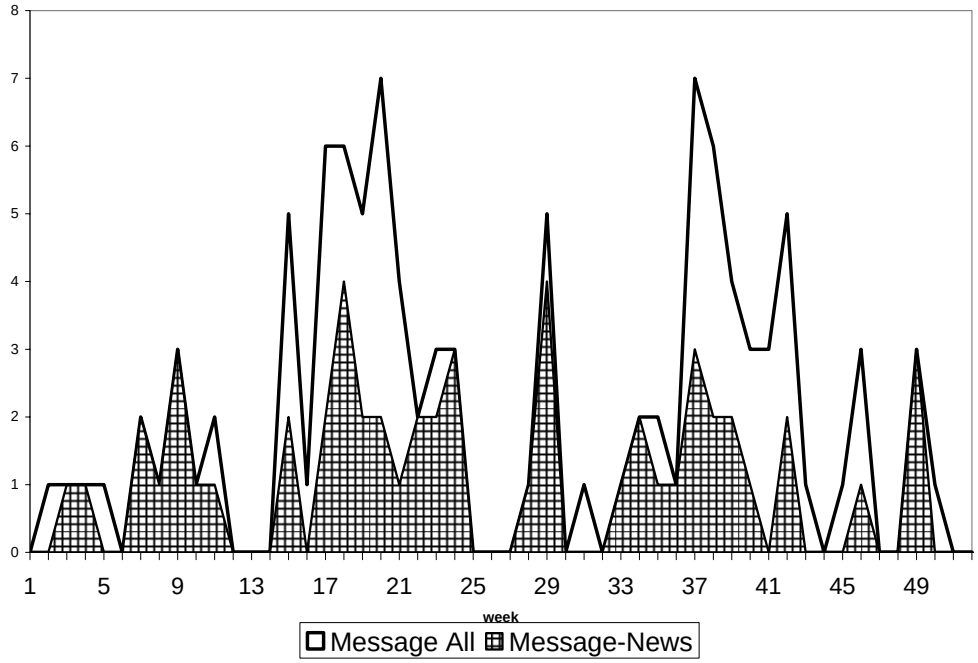

Figure 3: Weekly frequencies of displays.

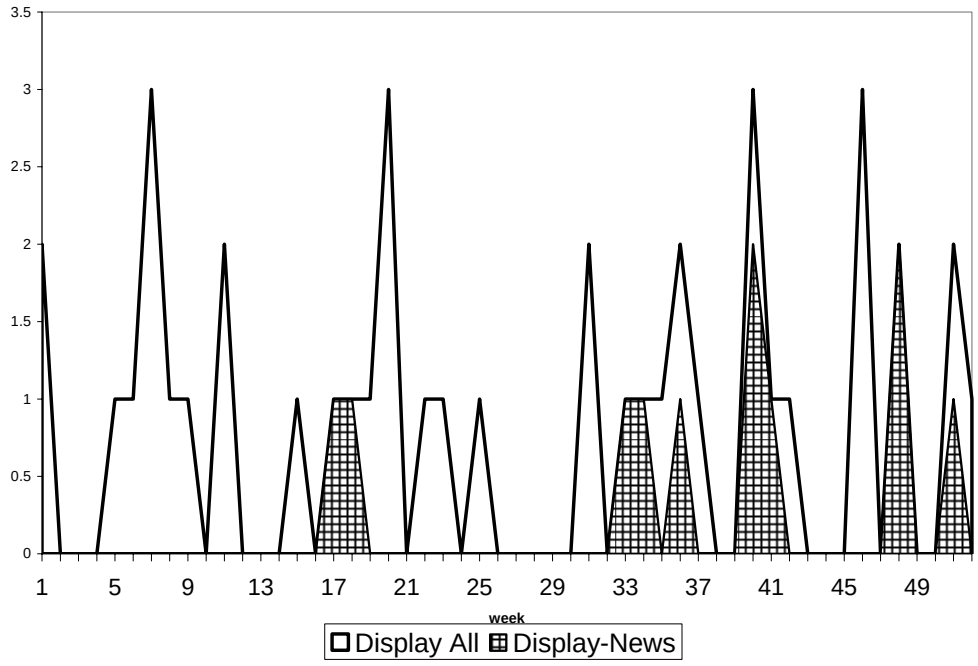

Figure 4: Weekly frequencies of social & entertainment events.

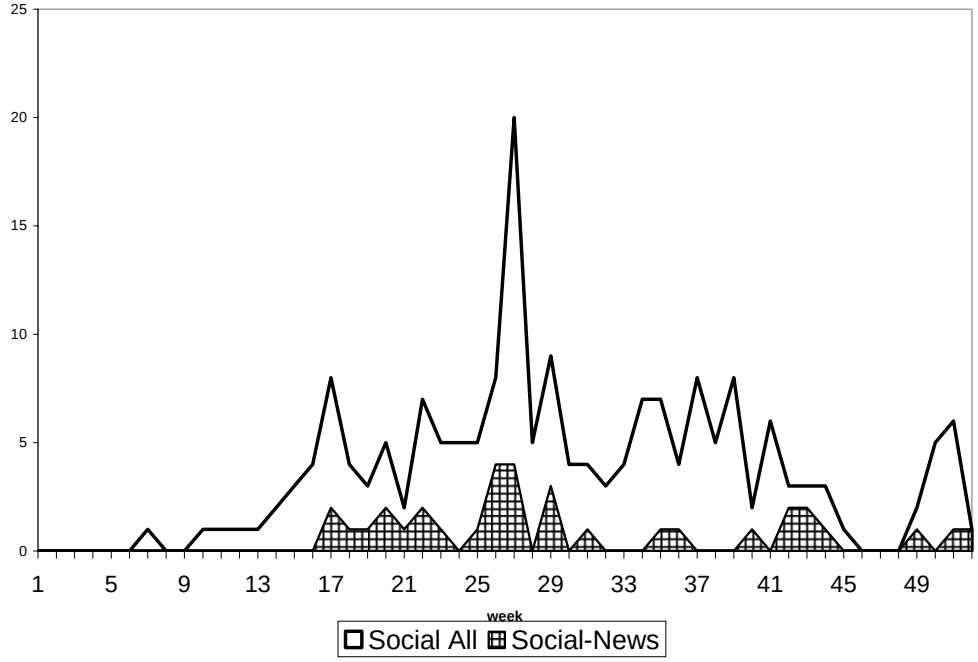

FIG 5. Seasonal Pattern of Indoor and Outdoor Events