POLITICAL PROCESSES, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND

LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF COLLECTIVE PUBLIC EVENTS

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Presented at the "Collective Behavior" session of the American Sociological Association meeting Atlanta, Georgia, August 17, 2003. This is a draft of an article in process. We are happy to have you cite this paper, but please check with the authors to see if an updated version is available or there is a published version. The latest version should be available on Pamela Oliver's web site,
http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/PROTESTS/PROTESTS.HTM

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ABSTRACT

Although media scholars recognize that "news" is constructed in interaction between reporters and newsmakers, the significance of this has not been recognized in studies of the news coverage of protest. Social network ties between newsmakers and news reporters can affect the record of events that appear in newspapers. For a sample of 143 events in a small midwestern city, we examine the relation between prior news coverage of the organization sponsoring an event and the amount and prominence of news coverage an event receives, controlling for a wide variety of factors found to be relevant in prior research. Consistent with prior research, large events and those linked to institutional politics were more likely to receive at least some news coverage. However, prior news coverage of the event's organizational sponsor did not have a significant effect on news coverage. The volume and prominence of coverage, for events that received at least some coverage, had somewhat different patterns of effect. Large events and events involving conflict received more words of coverage and more coverage in news sections or section front pages; protests at the capitol received more prominent coverage than other protests. Protests received more news coverage when they were large, while size did not affect the volume or prominence of coverage for other events, except that all events were more likely to make the front page the bigger they were. Competition for news hold space from the state legislature especially affected the volume of news coverage for protests. There was a strong interaction effect across all measures of volume and prominence for events that received at least some coverage, so that events that combine a tie to institutional politics with higher levels of prior news coverage for the sponsoring organization receive more and more visible coverage, while the coefficients on the main effects are negative, implying that it takes both factors to obtain a high volume of highly visible news coverage.

Keywords: politics, media; news coverage, social movements, collective action, protest, social networks

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Understanding factors related to the volume and the prominence of coverage of protest events is crucial to both activists and academics alike. Activists generally view the media as an important vehicle for mobilizing supporters and for influencing policymakers. Organizers alert newspapers, radio stations, and television networks about upcoming events. Colorful banners, riveting street theater, and provocative acts of civil disobedience are carefully planned and designed, in part, to capture the media's interest in covering the event.

Due to concerns regarding the validity of media data for event analyses, methodologically oriented social movements research in recent years has focused primarily upon whether a protest receives any media coverage at all (e.g., McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Rucht et al 1998). "Making the news", however, means little to organizers if their efforts merit only a brief mention buried in the back pages of a newspaper. Social movement organizations must mobilize the media to achieve a certain threshold of media attention before the public becomes aware of the issue campaign (Neuman 1990). Moreover, a handful of disjointed snippets and SoundBits frustrate researchers attempting to glean information on social movements from media accounts.

In past research, we highlighted the complex, triadic interaction between politics, protest, and the news media (Oliver and Maney 2000). We found that newspaper selection of protest events for coverage depended upon the extent to which social movement organizations could either fit into or avoid competing with institutional political processes such as legislative sessions and elections. This study assesses whether the same factors shaping newspaper event selection structures also explain the volume and the prominence of event coverage.

We also seek to redress a surprising lack of research on social networks as a factor in media coverage of protest. Resource mobilization theory stresses the importance of social networks to collective action. Applying this logic to media coverage, we expected high levels of past interaction between a media outlet and a social movement organization to yield both greater volume and more prominently placed newspaper coverage of the organization's events. This is the first study that we are aware to quantify interaction between social movements and the media.

Our findings highlight the significance of protest organizations being simultaneously integrated into journalist networks and channeled towards institutional politics. Organizations that received high levels of past newspaper coverage and addressed issues related to institutional politics were significantly more likely to receive extensive, featured coverage of their events. Organizations that held organized professional interest group-style events such as press conferences, ceremonies, and speeches received better coverage than those that relied upon standard protest forms such as rallies and demonstrations. We see some evidence that routinization of protest has reduced media interest in protests.

Theory

Sociologists and mass communications scholars have put forward several explanations for the mainstream media's coverage of collective public events. The agendas, routines, and conventions of journalists along with the organizational constraints imposed upon them by both limited resources and presentation space have all been seen to play critical roles in what makes the news and how it is packaged. Moreover, these media processes interact with institutional political cycles as well as cycles of protest (Oliver and Maney 2000). Triadic interactions, however, do not necessarily entail equal influence. The primacy accorded to institutional politics by the press can readily be seen in its influence over media processes identified by other researchers as significantly shaping the ways that collective public events are covered.

Resources and Personal Networks

Despite the conceptual importance attached to resources and personal networks in the study of collective action, relatively few researchers have examined the consequences of interaction between social movement organizations and media outlets. In one of a handful of studies focusing on the subject, Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) view making the news as a negotiated process of exchange. The media provide SMOs with a communications vehicle for mobilizing constituents, validating their claims, and expanding the scope of their struggle. SMOs, in turn, provide copy for the media. Reporters and activists struggle over levels of coverage and the content of coverage. Given the abundance of events available for selection, the media have disproportionate power in the relationship (also see Wolfsfeld 1984, 1991). The possession of significant resources by SMOs can help to compensate for this asymmetrical dependency (p.121): "The greater the resources, organization, professionalism, and coordination, and strategic planning of a movement, the greater its media standing and the more prominent its preferred frame will be in media coverage of relative events and issues". Although relationships between activists and reporters are often contentious, this, however, is not necessarily the case.

Activists sometimes deliberately cultivate relationships with reporters in the hopes of obtaining more extensive and sympathetic coverage for their causes. By providing timely information on issues and events, activists can become important and trusted sources on a par with their official and corporate counterparts (Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986:89). In the process, the relative dependency and power between reporters and activists becomes less skewed. Interdependence replaces one-sided dependency. In addition, with high levels of interaction, friendships can develop, particularly when reporters share similar political beliefs (Tuchman 1978). In reference to policymakers, Baumgartner and Jones (1993:109) state: "In seeking to appeal to a new audience, one of the most important allies in this process may be a sympathetic reporter who shares the source's interest in generating some new controversy where previously there had been little attention". Similarly, journalists can serve as important allies of social movement organizations. While not necessarily producing front-page headlines, ties with activists encourage reporters to pay attention to events organized by personally known groups.

As Baumgartner and Jones make clear, SMOs, by no means, hold a monopoly on ties with journalists. Government and mainstream political party officials generally develop the strongest personal ties with journalists. In this regard Kielbowicz and Scherer (1986:78)

write: “Reporters on beats are also more likely to develop sympathies for their regular sources that conflict with allegiances to their own news organization and to their ultimate client, the audience.” Strong ties along with the considerable resources at the disposal of institutional actors, in turn, reinforce the media’s according preferential access to political elites. Activists have sometimes attempted to offset this disadvantage by forging connections with political elites so as to indirectly access the media (Sampedro 1997). Several factors shape not only the social networks that journalists forge in the process of reporting, but also how these ties affect their coverage of events. Journalistic conventions regarding the newsworthiness of subjects and events constitute one of the most important of these factors.

News Values

By defining and applying criteria regarding what constitutes a newsworthy event, members of the media actively construct the news. A typical list of news value criteria includes prominence or importance, human interest and human drama, conflict or controversy, the unusual, timeliness, and proximity (e.g., Altheide and Snow 1979; Gans 1980; Schulz 1982; Ryan 1991; Weimann and Brosius 1991; Hocke 1998, Shoemaker and Resse 1991). We propose that institutional politics also constitutes a news value. As members of the fourth estate, journalists feel obligated to cover the formulation and implementation of government policies likely to significantly impact the lives of their readers. Accordingly, the press devotes considerable and choice space to covering legislative debates, executive decisions, and judicial hearings. In public policy-making centers such as state and national capitals, political elites form the core readership of the major newspapers. The press in these locations, therefore, has an additional incentive for highlighting institutional politics.

Given this competition, to receive high volumes of prominently featured coverage, extra-institutional message events must either connect their message—in its content and form of delivery—with institutional political processes or rank especially high on other news values dimensions. Because of the newsworthiness of institutional politics, extra-institutional events that address legislative issues, judicial decisions, and election campaigns may increase their news value over similar events that do not interface with institutional politics. For instance, events with messages critical of public officials have increased their coverage because of the newsworthiness of the persons criticized (Lester and Molotch 1974).

Interfacing with institutional politics, however, may be of limited benefit to social movement organizations because of negative evaluations of protests as an event form. More than a few journalists hold a pluralist conception of the US political system. Formal political institutions are seen to adjudicate and reconcile the demands of competing interest groups in a reasonable and fair manner. Among extra-institutional events, protests most explicitly contradict this hegemonic conception of American politics. If these perceptions typify the views of mainstream journalists, this would help to explain why the media frequently deride protests or summarily dismiss their relevance while editors locate event coverage in non-political sections of the paper (Gitlin 1981; Sampedro 1997).

By adopting forms of collective action traditionally associated with institutional politics, social movement organizations increase their likelihood of being viewed as legitimate political players in the eyes of mainstream journalists. Otherwise, protests must rank

higher on other news value dimensions to receive prominent coverage. Large, disruptive events with controversial messages, organized by coalitions representing a wide range of constituencies, and featuring prominent public figures generally have sufficient news value to warrant extensive and prominent coverage. Because of their news value, institutional political events impact both the space available for the coverage of other types of events as well as the location where such events are likely to appear.

News Holes

Newspaper editions, radio broadcasts, and television programs have limited space and time within which to present news. The chance of any particular event getting in the news is a function not only of its own news value, but also of the sheer number and news value of other potential news events that day. An event that ordinarily would be news can be crowded out by bigger news. Conversely, when news is "slow," events get covered that ordinarily would be considered to have little if any news value.

While news holes are relatively fixed, levels of both institutional and extra-institutional events vary throughout the year. Institutional political cycles as well as cycles of protest, therefore, can affect both the volume and prominence of protest event coverage. Because of their news value, legislative sessions and electoral campaigns limit space available for protest coverage. During peak periods of institutional political activity such as legislative sessions and elections, one would expect newspapers to devote less space to covering protests. When protests make it into the news, their coverage is either buried in items focusing on other matters or relegated to the back pages of the back sections.

Just as protest events compete for coverage with institutional political events, they also compete with each other. With fixed space available for protest coverage, peaks in protest cycles result in fewer events being covered and less extensive coverage for those events making the news (Oliver and Meyers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000). Ironically, any positive coverage effects of linking extra-institutional events to institutional politics can be offset by a restricted news hole resulting from high levels of both institutional and extra-institutional activity. Public officials time their events or release of information to coincide with slow news days to maximize coverage. Activists may benefit by doing the same as well as by fitting their events into journalists' news routines.

News Routines

A combination of news values and limited resources lead to news routines regulating what events receive coverage and how these events are covered (e.g., Sigal 1973; Sigelman 1973; Epstein 1974; Gitlin 1980; Schudson 1982; Lee and Solomon 1990; Gamson et al 1992). Section editors assign staff to locations where events fitting with the section's topical focus are most likely to occur (Mueller 1995; Fillieule 1998; Beissinger 1998). Logistical considerations favor the coverage of events scheduled well in advance of their actual occurrence such as annual events (Tuchman 1978). Reporters work their beats during times of the day and days of the week when events of interest are most likely to take place. For instance, reporters for newspapers with morning editions generally work from the late morning through the early evening (Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986:78). Events

falling outside these routines are unlikely to be covered let alone covered extensively and prominently featured.

For most major local newspapers, the news section is the first and largest section appearing in each edition. Since institutional political events dominate event coverage in the section, editors assign staff to political beats including legislative assemblies, city halls, courthouses, and election campaign trails (Kielbowiez and Scherer 1986). Often heavy reliance upon official sources by journalists promotes frequent, prominent, and favorable coverage of bill signings, press conferences by government spokespersons, and public hearings (e.g., Sigal 1973; Gans 1979). Protest taking place at times and in locations falling within political beats are more likely to receive extensive and prominent coverage than those that do not. Reporters covering a public hearing or a campaign speech can readily incorporate into their stories a protest taking place nearby and addressing the same issues. In effect, demonstrators may be able to tap into news routines centered on institutional politics to get their own views conveyed by the media.

News routines involve not only where and when events are reported, but also how they are reported. Journalists search for thematic hooks on which to hang their articles. Succinct, catchy, and sensational quotes by participants basically write the story for reporters facing tight submission deadlines. Captivating images also make for good stand-alone graphics accompanied by captions. By offering an abundance of these materials in short periods of time, ceremonies, speeches, and displays are tailor-made for the rapid production of news items. Because organizers of these events often have media coverage as their primary goal, considerable efforts are often taken to make good copy. Experienced activists understand reporters' constraints and standards of newsworthiness, and seek to create an event with a time-tied "peg" or intrinsic news value, time the event appropriately for deadlines, notify the media about the event well in advance, and prepare press releases that can be the basis for a story (Epstein 1973; Gans 1979; Cohn and Gallagher 1984; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; Ryan 1991; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Salzman 1998). On the other hand, as the routinization of protest in the US and Western Europe diminishes the disruptiveness and, therefore, the news value of these events, the routinization of event reporting may contribute to event forms traditionally associated with institutional politics receiving relatively superior coverage. Accordingly, social movements have increasingly deployed these forms to make political claims (Lofland and Fink 1982; McCarthy and McPhail 1998; Oliver and Marwell 1992; Staggenborg 1988; Tarrow 1994).

Methods

Data Sources and Search Methods

Data on collective public events came from either computerized or handwritten records provided by four public agencies in Madison—the Capitol Police, the Metropolitan Police, the Street-Use Committee, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Campus Police. Records included police dispatch logs and permit records. Logs and permits differed considerably from one another in the types of events that each identified (see Maney and Oliver 2001). In addition to standard protest events such as marches, rallies, unpermitted protests, and vigils, we gathered information on a variety of other message events that form an increasing part of the social movement repertoire such as ceremonies, displays,

festivals, and speeches. For the purposes of this analysis, we have included all events of the types listed above taking place during 1996.

To develop measures of newspaper coverage, we conducted electronic database searches on two newspapers with the largest distributions in Madison—the Capital Times and the Wisconsin State Journal. The Capital Times primarily circulates in the city of Madison and has the reputation of being liberal to progressive in its outlook. The Wisconsin State Journal has a larger distribution extending beyond Madison and is generally viewed as having a moderate to conservative perspective. When searching the NEXIS database, we used an event specific protocol whereby event information from police records was systematically entered into search strings (see Maney and Oliver 2001 for details). Undergraduate assistants searched for event related newspaper items in issues up to six months before and twelve months after the date of the event. Assistants saved and coded all articles and stand-alone graphics with captions that provided event information such as the name of the event or a combination of event identifiers such as the event's location, activities taking place during the event, and the issue addressed by the event. We then created a dataset listing basic features of media coverage for each event included in the analysis. Pairing undergraduate coding assistants and periodic checks of their work by the authors ensured a high degree of inter-coder reliability.

Measures—Volume and Prominence

This study focuses upon factors related to two features of media event coverage—volume and prominence. Volume entails the amount of newspaper space devoted to covering an event. We coded the number of news items (articles and stand-alone graphics with captions) for each event. Because these items vary significantly in length, we counted both the total number of event specific and event related words appearing in all news items on an event. Event specific words include text mentioning details of the event such as the event's name, location, time, date, activities taking place, persons in attendance, and quotes from participants. Since event organizers seek to stimulate broader discussion of their issues, we also coded event relevant words. Event relevant words include not only event specific words, but also broader discussion of issues, persons, and activities addressed by, associated with, or responding to the event. Accordingly, the total number of event relevant words serves as our primary measure of the volume.

A high volume of coverage matters less if it is located in places less likely to be read. Prominence entails the use of newspaper space in ways that facilitate a reader's locating event related text and images. We coded four measures of prominence: location on the front page of the newspaper, location on the front page of any section of the newspaper (i.e. 1B, 1C, etc.), location within the front or "news" section of the newspaper, and mention of the event in the article's headline. Each of these measures taps a different dimension of the prominence of news coverage that has been considered important in media studies. We should note that protest events studies often focus only on the "news" section of a newspaper.

Measures—Ties between activists and reporters

To develop measures of prior levels of contact between activists and reporters, we conducted NEXIS searches for the number of newspaper items mentioning the activities of the event's sponsor(s) that appeared within a year's time prior to the event. To our knowledge, this is the first quantitative analysis of the effect of organizational networks on media coverage of protest. Police or media records provided the names of organizations sponsoring 130 of the 143 events identified as taking place in 1996. We categorized past organizational coverage according to the geographic area of the described activity (inside Dane County where Madison is located; specific locations in Wisconsin outside of Dane County; state-wide; and national-level). Events with no organizational sponsor were coded as having zero prior organizational coverage. In keeping with our assumption that organizational ties increase with closer geographic proximity, only the Dane County measure proved robust when included in regression models. Events sponsored by the Dane County branches of the Democratic and Republican Parties received disproportionately high levels of prior organizational coverage as well as high levels of event coverage. To control for outliers, we performed a log transformation on the measure of past organizational coverage in Dane County.

Measures—news value

Based on prior research, news value is measured with an event's size – whether it exceeds 100 people – and whether it involves conflict. To reflect institutional politics as a news value, we created a dummy variable for whether the event addressed public policies, issues being debated by the state legislature or Congress, issues being considered by courts, or the suitability of election candidates. We expect all three factors to be positively related to all measures of news coverage.

Measures—news holes and routines

With regard to news holes and institutional political cycles, we developed a dummy variable for whether the Wisconsin state legislature was in session on the day that the event occurred. We expected coverage of legislative activities to crowd out coverage of extra-institutional events. We also created a moving average for the total number of events taking place within thirty-one days of the event as a proxy measure for protest cycles.

For news routines, we created dichotomous measures for whether an event took place on the grounds of the state Capitol along with the time of day the event occurred. With political beats focused on the state legislature, we expected extra-institutional message events taking place at the Capitol to receive more extensive if not more prominent coverage. With journalists working mostly from the late morning through the early afternoon, we expected that events taking place during these hours would receive extensive and prominent coverage compared to events taking place at other times. To test the hypothesis that the news media respond differently to protests than to other event forms, we created a dummy variable for whether an event was a protest (i.e. march, rally, unpermitted protest, or vigil) or another event form (i.e. ceremony, display, festival, or speech).

Results

We analyzed the data in a variety of different ways and controlling for all the factors that have previously been found to affect news coverage. The results we present have been checked to verify that the substantive conclusions do not depend upon the particular mode of analysis. As Cook-Weisberg tests generally revealed problems with heteroskedasticity, Huber-White sandwich estimators generated by Stata's "robust" option were used (Greene 2000:522). Logit regression is used for examining the dichotomy of whether an event received any coverage. Other variables are counts, making Poisson regression the appropriate, except where tests reveal over-dispersion in which case negative binomial regression is used.

Selection

To provide comparability to other results, we begin by finding the predictors of an event's receiving any newspaper coverage from among independent variables that have been found relevant in prior research. Table 1 shows the results of a standard logit regression for these cases. As expected, the most consistent effect on newspaper selection is the size of the event. The news hole effect is also strong: events are much less likely to receive news coverage if the legislature is in session, although this effect is stronger for protests. Protests are less likely to received coverage than other event forms. Other factors appear to vary with the event form. Protests are more likely to be covered when they involve conflict and occur in the afternoon or evening, while other event forms are more likely to be covered if they occur at the capitol or are sponsored by mainstream political parties.

Volume

To assess the predictors of receiving a high volume of coverage, we select only those cases that received at least some news coverage. Sixty-five cases received at least some news coverage, with the total volume of coverage ranging from 49 to 8751 words. Table 2 provides the results for the multivariate negative binomial regressions of the volume of event coverage on selected independent variables for all cases together and then separately for protest and non-protest forms. Taking all event forms together, events involving conflict and large events received a much higher volume of coverage than others; these effects are as expected from news value theory. Considering prior coverage of the event's organizational sponsor, there is an interaction effect. If the event is linked to institutional politics, the effect of prior organization coverage is positive, while if the event is not linked to institutional politics, the effect of prior organizational coverage is negative.

Both event types received more coverage if they involved conflict. The effect of prior organizational coverage is also consistent across event forms. For both protests and other event forms, it is the combination of a link to institutional politics and a high level of prior coverage of the sponsoring organization that leads to a larger volume of published words about the event. The effect of ties to institutional politics is negative if there is no prior coverage of the organization, and the effect of prior organization coverage is negative if the event is not linked to institutional politics.

The effects of other predictors differed by type of event. Protest forms received a greater volume of news coverage if they were large and received less coverage if the legislature

was in session, they occurred in the afternoon or evening, had an organizational sponsor (net of the effect of prior coverage of the organization) or were sponsored by a mainstream political party. Other event forms received less coverage if there were many other events occurring within the same 31-day period. Thus both event forms exhibited news hole effects, although protests were more affected by whether the legislature was in session and other forms were more affected by other events in the data set.

Prominence

We examined four measures of the prominence of news coverage of an event: whether it was on the front page, on the front page of a section (including the local and features sections as well as the news section), whether it was in the news section (rather than one of the other sections), and whether the event was mentioned in the headline.

Front page

Of the 65 events that received any news coverage, 35% got one or more front-page mention. Table 3 shows the regressions for the number of times an event made the front page. (Negative binomial regression was used for "other" event forms due to overdispersion, while the distributions of all events and protests fit the Poisson assumptions.) The effects of prior organizational coverage exhibit the same pattern as for volume: the combination of relation to institutional politics and high prior organizational coverage has a positive effect, while the main effects of relation to institutional politics and prior coverage of the sponsoring organization are negative. Although the selection model showed that events with no organizational sponsor were much less likely to receive any coverage, the few such events that did receive coverage (all protests) were more likely to receive front-page coverage than other events. As expected, larger events were more likely to receive front-page coverage across all event types. Protests show the effect of additional factors: protest forms at the capitol, involving conflict, and occurring when the legislature was not in session received more front-page coverage.

Section front page

Table 4 shows the regressions for the number of times an event was covered on a section front page, given that it received some coverage. This variable includes the front page of the main news section plus the front pages of the other sections. The effects for this variable are generally weaker. Only conflict and not being a protest form predict such coverage for all events taken together. Only not occurring in the afternoon or evening predicts it for protest forms; the other two significant coefficients are tapping one case each. The effect of prior coverage has the same form as for the other variables, but is significant only for the "other" event forms.

Event in News Section

This variable taps the extent to which the event was covered in the main news section, rather than in the local or features section. Results are shown in Table 5. The most notable result in table 5 is that the independent variables explain more of the difference in making being in the news section for protest forms than for other forms. Taking all the events together, prior coverage of organizational sponsors has no effect on being covered in the news section. Instead, the explanatory factors are the news value variables – size, conflict – the news hole factors – legislature in session, number of events within 31 days –

and not being a protest and not having an organizational sponsor. When the "other" event forms are considered, only the presence of conflict has a significant effect; there is other variance explained by the joint effect of relation to institutional politics and prior organizational coverage, but these factors are too collinear to be pulled apart for this variable. For the protest forms, by contrast, we see both the strong impact of the news value and news hole factors, along with the strong effect of the interaction we have seen before between prior organization coverage and relation to institutional politics. Additionally, the one protest form sponsored by a political candidate got relatively little coverage in the news section. And the one non-conflict protest event got substantial coverage in the news section.

Event in Headline

Headlines are not written by the reporter but are added later in the newspaper production process. Results are shown in table 6. Again, our variables have much more explanatory power for protest forms than for other forms, and the interaction we have seen between prior organizational coverage and relation to institutional politics reemerges. Taking all events together, being a large event and the interaction of prior organization coverage and relation to institutional politics are the significant predictors of an event being mentioned in the headline. For "other" event forms, only the relation to institutional politics is marginally significant (and the effect is positive). For protests, we see a strong positive interaction between relation to institutional politics and prior organization coverage, with the main effect of each of these being negative. Protests (but not other forms) are more likely to be mentioned in the headline if they are larger, and if there are fewer competing events in the 31-day period. The one protest form not involving conflict was mentioned in the headline, and the one protest form involving a political candidate was not.

Conclusion

Table 7 provides a summary of the findings across dependent variables. These results condition prior research on the factors affecting news coverage. The predictors of getting any coverage are not necessarily the same as getting a lot of coverage or prominently placed coverage.

News Value

We confirm one of the most robust findings, that large protest events are more likely to get any news coverage and, given that they get it, are generally likely to get more coverage and more prominent coverage on the newspaper's front page, in the news section, and in the headline. However, we find that although event size predicts whether other non-protest events get any coverage and whether they make the front page of the newspaper, event size has much weaker effects on the volume or prominence of coverage for other events than for protest events. Size, however, has no effect on whether any event is covered on a section front page. Similarly, conflict has a large effect on whether events, especially protests, obtain any coverage and on the volume of coverage and their placement in the news section. However, given that an event has received any news coverage, conflict did not help the event to make the front page of the newspaper or a section, or get the event in the headline. Net of the effects of size and conflict, events with the standard protest forms

were less likely to receive news coverage and, given that they got any coverage, less likely to make the front page of the newspaper or a section of the newspaper.

Events tied to institutional politics are much more likely to get news coverage but, given that they get it, the tie to institutional politics does not directly predict the volume or prominence of coverage. The size of an event is a large determiner of whether an event gets any news coverage and whether it gets front page coverage, but only affects the volume of coverage or placement in the news section for protests, not for other event forms. Conflict is a strong predictor of getting coverage and of receiving front page or section front page coverage, especially for non-protest events. Occurring at the capitol affects whether non-protests get news coverage at all, while it is a major factor in predicting whether the news coverage a protest receives will be prominent, by all measures of prominence. Events involving mainstream political parties were mentioned in long articles about the election, but were not exceptionally likely to receive prominent news coverage.

News holes and routines

Consistent with our prior research, the legislature being in session reduced the chances of any event being covered by the newspaper and, if it was covered, reduced the chances of a protest being covered on the front page or in the news section. The effects of the other news hole variable, the number of events occurring within a 31-day period, were also generally negative as predicted, but generally weaker.

Although much prior research has emphasized the timing of events we found the effects of time of day to be inconsistent. Similarly, the location of the event at the capitol increased the likelihood of coverage, especially for non-protest events, and increased the likelihood that protests would be covered on the front page.

Networks and Relations

An event's having ties to institutional politics and an event's organizational sponsor having received prior news coverage had very little impact on the likelihood that an event got news coverage: the effect coefficient for these factors exceeded the standard error only for protests, and the weak negative interaction effect means that their combination was not helpful. However, for those events that received some news coverage, there was a strong and consistent positive interaction effect. Events that were both related to institutional politics and sponsored by organizations that had received substantial prior news coverage got more words of coverage and more front-page coverage; the interaction also significantly affected protests' placement in the news section and mention in headlines, and significantly affected other events' placement on a section front page. The negative coefficients on the main effects mean that the volume and prominence of coverage was lower for events tied to institutional politics but not sponsored by a previously-covered organization or events sponsored by a previously-covered organization that were not tied to institutional politics. Although events with no listed organizational sponsor were less likely to receive news coverage than other events, protests that had no organizational sponsor that got any news coverage received more coverage and more prominent coverage than protests sponsored by organizations that had not received prior news coverage.

Discussion

Our conversations with reporters and editors suggested that many of them resist being asked to provide "publicity" or serve as a "mouthpiece" for organizations or causes that they feel lack news value. Our data suggest that a link to institutional politics is the key to "news value" for the events and newspapers we studied. The implication of this is that it can be difficult to bring a new issue forward which is not already part of institutional politics. Protests can successfully compete for coverage when they are sponsored by organizations already in the public arena and address issues already part of public institutional politics, but it is more difficult for protests to add new issues to the public arena. In separate analyses, we found that small protests were especially unlikely to receive any news coverage, much less likely than other equally small events. Similarly, events addressing conflicts outside institutional politics received much less coverage than those addressing conflicts tied to institutional politics.

Our research suggests that the mainstream press privileges groups that are tied to institutional politics and are media "insiders," both in the large amount of text devoted to covering its participants and its events and with the highly visible location of that text. This privilege often comes at the expense of the amount and the quality of coverage devoted to social movements, their participants, and their events. Legislative debates, judicial hearings, and election campaigns receive top billing and news routines center on political elites and their activities. In the process, elites form long-term relationships with journalists that further ensure voluminous and prominent coverage of their events. The flipside of high levels of coverage of institutional politics is marginal coverage of extra-institutional events and events sponsored by those who are not media insiders.

What do these results suggest about how issues can move into the newspapers if they are not both tied to institutional politics and sponsored by media insiders? Several strategies for securing better coverage present themselves, each with their advantages and drawbacks. SMOs can attempt to compete with institutional politics by putting on standard forms of protest scoring high on other news values such as conflict and size. Hefty portions of these event attributes almost guarantee a high volume of prominently featured text. Unfortunately, the likely sensational and decontextualized content of this same coverage may serve to discredit the movement. Alternatively, SMOs can also wait to hold protests on days when few institutional political events take place. Our data suggest that a local campaign on a new issue not already part of institutional politics should be timed to occur in political downtimes, when the legislature is not in session and supreme courts are not announcing major decisions. SMOs' views on issues already part of institutional politics are more likely to be heard if they have become media insiders who have received prior news coverage. But our data suggest that prior coverage of an organization can make them be treated as "old news" if they try to raise issues which are not already part of the political process.

The world of institutional politics comes fraught with peril, including susceptibility to cooptation by elites and the moderation of demands. Entering the world of the mainstream media, surprisingly, remains a relatively unexplored possibility. Research has characterized the relationship between SMOs and media outlets as a kind of spot-market exchange where each side attempts to use the dependency of the other to assert their will. Because of the greater supply of than demand for events, journalists generally possess greater power in the

relationship. Nonetheless, our research suggests the possibility of longer-term relationships between journalists and activists characterized more by interdependence, familiarity, and reciprocity. Because of the media's news values and routines, SMOs are at a disadvantage in forming these relationships when compared to the major political parties. Yet some organizations that have dared enter waters previously uncharted by scholars have reaped dividends in the form of higher media profiles.

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Tables

8/11/03

Table 1. Logit regression of receiving any media coverage on independent variables (all cases)

	All		Protest		Other	
Independent Variables	***Coef.***	***SE.***	***Coef.***	***SE***	***Coef***	***SE***
Large (>100)	1.80**	.53	1.73**	.66	3.37**	1.12
Conflict	.88*	.52	3.58**	.87	- .42	.71
Leg in session	-1.28**	.55	-2.12**	.86	-1.62*	.92
# events	.49	1.39	- .95	2.25	1.62	2.32
Aft/eve	.64	.49	1.33**	.65	- .13	1.00
At Capitol	1.03**	.48	.56	.90	2.24**	1.11
Org. sponsor	1.09	.98	.82	1.14	- -(a)	
Related to instit. Polit.	- .61	.63	1.34	1.16	1.29	1.04
Prior org. news	- .03	.27	.99	.64	- .38	.42
InstPol * Prior	.14	.34	- .91	.69	.35	.52
Dem./ Rep.	- .17	1.09	-1.52	1.24	++(a)	
Protest (vs other)	-1.02**	.52				
Constant	-3.52	2.78	-1.62**	0.41	-4.75	4.84
Pseudo R2	.24		.34		.28(a)	
N	143		75		63 (+5)	
Log Likelihood	-75.07		-33.40		-31.52	

(a) One case dropped because any organization = 0 predicts failure perfectly, and four cases dropped because DemRepub=1 predicts success perfectly. Effective R-squared is thus underestimated.

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression of total relevant words on independent variables, for events that received at least some news coverage

	All		Protest		Other	
	Coef.	**SE**	**Coef**	**SE**	**Coef**	**SE**
Large (>100)	.72**	.24	1.19**	.26	.27	.32
Conflict	1.09**	.36	2.68**	.61	.79*	.42
Leg. In session	- .12	.41	- .95**	.36	.34	.53
# events	-1.22	.75	-1.26	.84	-2.79**	.87
Aft/eve	- .19	.27	- .52**	.21	.24	.60
At Capitol	.06	.22	- .13	.37	.15	.48
Org. Sponsor	-.57	.37	-1.16**	.02	#	
Related to Instit. Polit	- .29	.32	- .63	.59	- .27	.41
Prior org news	- .30**	.10	- .53*	.32	- .17	.11
InstPol * Prior	.54**	.16	.83**	.40	.57**	.20
Dem/Rep	-.33	.69	-2.04**	.68	-.35	1.05
Protest	-.19	.26				
Constant	8.87**	1.43	8.23**	2.21	10.72**	1.52
Pseudo R2	.04		.07		.05	
N	65		31		34	
Alpha	.65	.10	.31		.67	
Log Likelihood	-520.73		-241.55		-266.94	

Note: # dropped, no "other" forms lacked organizational sponsor. *p<.1 two tailed, ** p<.05 two tailed. All standard errors are robust Huber/White/sandwich estimators.

Table 3. Poisson or negative binomial regression of number of front page articles on independent variables, for events that received some news coverage.

	All (Poisson)		Protests (Poisson)		Other (NBReg)	
	Coef.	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Large (>100)	2.31**	.47	3.38**	.65	1.88**	.86
Conflict	.25	.69	9.21**	1.56	.26	.69
Leg in session	- .65	.44	-1.14*	.68	- .15	.57
# events	-1.91	1.20	- .64	1.19	-2.41	1.88
Aft/eve	.27	.54	-1.04	.98	.33	.90
At Capitol	.46	.61	1.84**	.65	.67	1.15
Org. Sponsor	-2.98**	.72	-4.58**	.93	#	
Related to Instit. Polit.	-1.11*	.58	-1.31	.89	-1.30	.86
Prior org news	-1.31**	.37	-1.82**	.46	-0.76*	.41
InstPol * Prior	1.48**	.42	2.48**	.61	1.27*	.79
Dem/Rep	-.03	1.86	-4.28	2.66	- .72	2.88
Protest	.14	.37				
Constant	4.41	2.68	-6.21*	3.28	1.87	3.12
Pseudo R2	.32		.49		.18	
N	65		31		34	
Alpha					.72	
Log Likelihood	-58.39		-23.90		-29.05	

All standard errors are robust Huber/White/sandwich estimators.

Table 4. Poisson regression of number of number of articles in section front pages on independent variables, for events that received some news coverage

	All		Protest		Other	
	Coef.	SE.	Coef.	SE	Coef	SE
Large (>100)	- .11	27	.28	.32	- .50	.51
Conflict	.82**	.40	-1.69*(a)	.94	.52	.42
Leg is session	.27	.30	.33	.67	- .06	.39
# events	- .96	.92	-.16	.75	-1.55	1.21
Aft/eve	- .04	.29	- .64**	.25	.38	.48
At Capitol	.11	.32	.82	.51	.34	.47
Org. Sponsor	-.68	.68	- .69	.76	#	
Related to Instit. Polit	- .13	.47	- .03	.66	- .51	.50
Prior org news	- .28	.23	- .25	.45	- .72*	.42
InstPol*Prior	.46	.27	.23	.48	1.16**	.46
Dem/Rep	- .24	.72	-14.88**(a)	1.30	- .74	.77
Protest	-.56*	.30				
Constant	1.76	1.91	2.11	1.78	2.20	2.15
Pseudo R2	.14		.09		.29	
N						
Alpha						
Log Likelihood	-74.12		-30.65		-36.88	

(a) Coefficients based on one case each, a non-conflictual protest form which received one mention on a section front page and a election rally which did not.
All standard errors are robust Huber/White/sandwich estimators.

Table 5. Poisson or negative binomial regression of number of times event appears in the front news section on independent variables, for events that received some news coverage

	All (nbreg)		Protest (poisson)		Other (Nbreg)	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef	SE
Large (>100)	.63**	.28	1.35**	.45	- .21	.56
Conflict	1.48**	.44	13.49**(a)	1.40	1.46*	.76
Leg is session	-1.15**	.35	-1.81**	.32	- .14	.39
# events	-1.46*	.84	-2.72**	.87	-1.29	1.69
Aft/eve	.30	.31	.41	.52	.19	.50
At Capitol	.46	.29	.42	.52	- .48	.61
Org. Sponsor	-1.63**	.41	-2.46**	.43	#	
Relation to Instit. Polit	- .45	.38	-1.20**	.51	.31	.47
Prior org news	- .23	.24	- .94**	.35	.09	.14
InstPol*Prior	.46	.28	1.27**	.42	.08	.26
Dem/Rep	-.27	.86	-1.38(a)	.99	- .50	1.09
Protest	- .82**	.27				
Constant	3.43**	1.71	-6.25**	2.60	2.00	2.75
Pseudo R2	.15		.36		.18	.
N	65		31		34	
Alpha	.36				.29	
Log Likelihood	-110.69		-44.55		-57.07	

All standard errors are robust Huber/White/sandwich estimators.

Table 6. Negative binomial or Poisson regression of number of times event appears in article headline on independent variables (N=65 events which received some news coverage)

	All (nbreg)		Protest (poisson)		Other (nbreg)	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef	SE
Large (>100)	.50*	.30	1.11**	.51	.00	.44
Conflict	.34	.40	-1.03(a)	1.00	.15	.72
Leg is session	-.12	.33	- .48	.35	.45	.34
# events	- .70	.74	-3.19**	1.11	.75	1.25
Aft/eve	.04	.32	.80*	.43	- .36	.45
At Capitol	.27	.30	- .32	.57	- .29	.48
Org. Sponsor	.33	.87	- .52	.90	#	
Related to Instit. Polit	- .04	.39	-1.29**	.61	1.07*	.61
Prior org news	- .13	.15	- .96**	.32	.10	.12
InstPol * Prior	.43**	.20	1.38**	.35	.17	.20
Dem/Rep	-.83	.81	-1.92**(a)	.99	-1.26	.80
Protest	- .31	.29				
Constant	.45	1.69	7.16**	2.74	-1.59	2.25
Pseudo R2	.10		.24		.17	
N	65		31		34	
Alpha	.20				.01	
Log Likelihood	-96.62		-.38.00		-49.13	

All standard errors are robust Huber/White/sandwich estimators.

Table 7: Summary of Significant Results

				If there was at least some coverage, quantity of:														
	Any coverage			Total words			Front page			Section front page			News section			Event in headline		
	All	Prot	Oth	All	Prot	Oth	All	Prot	Oth	All	Prot	Oth	All	Prot	Oth	All	Prot	Oth
Size >100	++	++	++	++	++	(-)	++	++	++				++	++		+	++	
Conflict	++	++		++	++	+				++	-	(+)	++	++	+		(-)	
Leg in sess	--	--	--		--		(-)	--					--	--			(-)	(+)
# events				(-)	(-)	--	(-)		(-)	(-)		(+)	-	--			--	
Aft/eve	(+)	++			--			(-)			--						++	
At capitol	++		++					++			(+)		(+)					
Org Sponsor	(+)		-	(-)	--	X	--	--	X	+		X	--	--	X			X
Inst. Polit		(+)	(+)				--	--	(-)			(-)	(-)	--			--	+
Prior Org News		(+)		--	-	(-)	--	--	-	(-)		-		--			--	
InstPol * Prior		(-)		++	++	++	++	++	+	(+)		++	(+)	++		++	++	
Dem / Rep		(-)	++		--			-			--		-	(-)		(-)	--	(-)
Protest	--	X	X		X	X		X	X	--	X	X	--	X	X	(-)	X	X
Pseudo R2	.24	.34	.28	.04	.07	.05	.32	.49	.18	.14	.09	.29	.15	.36	.18	.10	.24	.17

Legend: ++ or - - are significant at p<.05 two tailed; + or – are significant at p< .1 two tailed; (+) or (-) are coefficients greater than their standard errors that do not reach conventional significance levels. X=variable excluded due to lack of variation.