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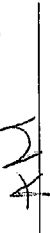
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IN NEWSPAPERS WE TRUST?

ASSESSING THE CREDIBILITY OF NEWS SOURCES THAT COVER PROTEST CAMPAIGNS

Eric Swank

ABSTRACT

The social movement literature is replete with review essays of the various theoretical formulations (i.e., Buechler 1993; Jenkins 1983; Tarrow 1989). Frequently, these intellectual histories contain descriptions of how one cohort of sociologists glamorized or debunked the favored theories of earlier generations (i.e., before the "resource mobilizers" were supplanted by the "framing" crowd, there was a supposed "collective behaviorist" heyday). While these theoretical depictions flourished, the number of methodological overviews remains small (see Crist and McCarthy 1996; Diani and Eyerman 1992; Morris and Herring 1987; Olzak 1989; Rucht, Koopmans, and Neidhardt 1998). To augment these methodological essays, this paper explores the problematic choice of using newspapers for protest information. In doing so, this inquiry initially compares some media and researcher impressions of a local protest mobilization (i.e., demonstrations against the Persian Gulf War in San Diego). Later, this paper chronicles a content analysis of 20 national, regional, and alternative news organizations. In the end, this investigation shows that every newspaper missed most of the protests and that coverage rate varied by

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newspaper. Furthermore, the widely praised *New York Times* fared badly and none of the papers displayed consistent coverage rates throughout time. With these warnings in hand, the discussion section provides some techniques that might offset these newspaper deficiencies.

INTRODUCTION

Social movements are coalitions of loosely connected groups that attempt to create intentional social change. In using noninstitutionalized tactics, challengers employ "street tactics" to coerce concessions from their social targets (the reliance on demonstrations, sit-ins, and marches is partially what separates a social movement from interest groups). In abandoning electoral tactics, the struggles between challengers and targets have transitory qualities. To the casual observer, active mobilizations seem to surface and fade during specific historical settings (on the issues of "abayed" movements see Rupp and Taylor 1989). Similarly, visible mobilizations are constantly recasting their practices because of the ever-changing political climate. Hence, movement trajectories embody the dynamic process of emergence, growth, and dissipation.

These episodic qualities have been called "movement sequences," "mobilization spirals," or "protest cycles" (Gunner, Frank, and Fuentes 1994; Lofland 1992; Meyer 1993; Minkoff 1997; Snow and Benford 1992). In outlining a protest cycle's features, Tarrow (1989) identified five of its interrelated processes. In short, movements seem to consistently produce and refine their cultural messages, go through bouts of alliance formation and destruction, expand and shrink their number of adherents, alter their tactics, and scrutinize the target's attempt to suppress, neglect, or concede to the mobilization.

Since social movements are multidimensional phenomenon, movement researchers must choose their preferred analytical foci (i.e., cultural frames, recruiting practices, organizational structures, or movement tactics). In embracing the event as a unit of analysis, most event studies have explored the dynamics of noninstitutionalized gatherings that publicly contest a political target (Tilly's definition of a protest [Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975]). With such an operationalization, a litany of private complaints and "hidden resistances" are automatically ignored (Rucht and Neidhardt 1998). Furthermore, as event studies scrutinized the dynamics of marches, teach-ins, sit-ins, or vigils, the actions at the less contentious gatherings of literature drops, mailing parties, legal sessions, or prayer meetings are commonly slighted (as will be the case in this study).

Counting Concerns

A subsection of event studies explores the size of protests and demonstrations (i.e., Everett 1992; Jenkins and Eckert 1986; McAdam 1982). One might think

that "size" studies would have sections on the proper ways of counting a crowd (see Jacobs 1967; Seidler, Meyer, and Gillivray 1976).¹ However, these "empirical articles" rarely divulge their counting techniques. Instead of offering a precise account of how the estimates were garnered, most authors have avoided such disclosures. This aversion is so widespread that Rucht and Freidhelm (1998) concluded that event researchers "tend to invest far less energy in reasoning about and documenting the process of data collection" (p. 65). With such gaps, the reliability and validity of the measures cannot be evaluated. Subsequently, readers cannot appraise on the degree of accuracy in the size counts.

These silences may be tied to an inherent weakness of movement research. First-hand collection of sound social movement data may be almost impossible thanks to the professional and familial responsibilities that seem to disrupt the implementation of perfect research designs. That is, a lack of "free-time" and limited financial resources usually eliminate the possibility of attending every protest event. Subsequently, this lack of personal crowd counts means that a researcher must rely on secondary sources of data.

In rummaging for suitable measures, many researchers abdicate the counting strategies to a surrogate estimator. With others administering size counts, a handful of studies have used police or governmental records (i.e., Tilly et. al. 1975) or activist generated histories (i.e., Hannan and Freeman 1987; Rupp and Taylor 1987). However, the vast majority of event studies have used newspapers as their primary source of data (i.e., Burstein 1985; Eisinger 1973; Everett 1992; Jenkins and Eckert 1986; Jopke 1991; Haines 1992; Kerbo and Shaffer 1992; Khawaja 1993; Koopmans 1993; McAdam 1982; Minkoff 1997; Soule 1992; Taylor and Jodice 1983; Tolnay, Deane, and Beck 1996; White 1993). In fact, from 1980 to 1993, 28 articles in core sociological journals used the newspapers as their chief source of protest information (Crist and McCarthy, 1996).

Although many of the early newspaper studies "did not pay attention to potential flaws in their sources," a few decided to publicly justify their newspaper dependency (Rucht et al. 1998). One position submits logistical rationales. This position highlights physical impossibilities—researchers cannot attend simultaneous protests, nor can retrospective studies observe bygone events. Furthermore, police rarely share their protest files and activist groups supposedly keep skimpy records. Finally, newspapers are supposed to be more thorough than televised newscasts (Rudd and Neidhardt 1998). Subsequently, newspapers became data sources by default. In exemplifying this argument, Debra Minkoff writes that "there are limitations to using media sources for event data, but for the purpose of indexing visible protest activity, the *New York Times* Index is sufficient" (1997, p. 787).

Other scholars insist that newspapers are adequate, if not outstanding sources of protest information. For example, in the *Annual Review of Sociology* Susan Olzak (1989) suggests that newspapers provide the most "complete accounts of events" (p. 128). Then in his seminal work on black insurgency, Doug McAdam (1982)

wrote it "is unlikely that the *New York Times* was guilty of failing to report a major story relevant to the [civil rights] movement" (p. 236). Finally, Rucht et al.'s (1998) methodological overview advises that newspapers are "more detailed than any of the alternatives...[they are also] more robust than one might think and easily satisfy conventional standards of methodological reliability" (p. 18).

Questioning Newspaper Credibilities

Even as movement researchers normalized newspaper use, early "communication" studies began to problematize this faith in newspapers (see Franzosi 1987; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1982; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; Snyder and Kelly 1977). When synthesizing these critiques, Rucht and Ohlemacher (1992) remind event researchers of the "selectiveness" dilemma. In addressing "selectiveness," Rucht and Ohlemacher suggest that the presence of an actual protest does not guarantee the presence of a protest news story. Therefore, researchers ought to be concerned with the percentage of real protests that make their way into newspapers. Or in more concrete terms, event studies of the Indiana Klu Klux Klan should wonder how many KKK protests were covered by the *Indianapolis Star*.

While this topic carries epistemological consequences, only a couple of studies have empirically inspected the extent of media selectivity (Hocke 1998; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Snyder and Kelly 1977). In this line of research, some studies have provided "extra-media" comparisons of the media and independent sources (i.e., media vs. police). In the United States, McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith, (1996) showed that only 7 percent of the 1,856 protests logged in District of Columbia police files were ever covered by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *ABC*, *NBC*, and *CBS*. In Europe, Peter Hocke (1998) showed that local and national German newspapers found only 37 percent and 9 percent of the police identified protests in Freiburg, while Mark Beissinger (1998) noted that eight Soviet newspapers found 2,191 protests while state officials found 7,628 Eastern Block events.

The remaining studies were "intra-media" evaluations of rival newspapers. In 1977, Snyder and Kelly documented that the *New York Times* ran a grand total of 22 stories about the protests of 1968. Conversely, local papers covered 120 protests during the same contentious year (meaning that the *Times* missed around 81 percent of the protests covered by other papers). Similarly, a study of four German newspapers found that two papers had "far superior" coverage rates (Rucht and Neidhardt, 1998).

As these studies show the mainstream media's general aversion to protest coverage, others contend that selection rates vary from movement to movement (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gitlin 1979; Hocke 1998; Mueller 1997; Sampedro 1997). In linking news coverage to movement goals, the quality and quantity of media coverage can hinge on whether the mobilization supports or counters elite priorities. For example, Shoemaker (1984) found that centrist groups were habit-

ually given the labels of "hard working," "fair," and "intelligent," while oppositional groups were typically described as "traitors" or "lunatics." Similarly, a study of the *New York Daily News* found that anticrime marchers were characterized as "courageous citizens," while *Time* magazine repeatedly glorified antidrug demonstrators as people who "gallantly fought drug dealers" (Goerlick Barlow, Barlow, and Chiricos 1995; Goerlick 1989). Conversely, numerous studies reveal that news sources disproportionately apply negative labels to unionists, environmentalists, anarchists, feminists, pro-lifers, Satanists, militians, Native-Americans, African-Americans, homosexuals, and deaf activists (Alwood 1996; Barker-Plummer 1995; Baylor 1996; Bramlett-Solomon 1988; Claussen 1998; Crouch and Damp-housse 1992; Haller 1993; Hoffert 1993; McLeod and Hertog 1992; McLead 1995; Rosenfeld and Ward 1996; Roth 1993; Terkildsen and Schell 1997; Van Zoonen 1992; Wittebols 1996). More recently, a study of Swiss newspapers showed that protest coverage rates fluctuated between who was doing the protesting (Barranco and Wisler 1999) and a U.S. study found that social movement events received lower coverage ratios than business events (Oliver and Myers 1999).

Newspapers and Antiwar Protests

With antiwar insurgencies challenging federal policies, qualitative studies suggest that newspapers frequently ignored 1960's antiwar protests (Rorabaugh 1989; Small 1994). Similarly, quantitative studies indicate that the "corporate" media tried to suppress images of opposition to the 1991 Gulf War. An analysis of televised news casts found that only 29 of the 2,855 minutes on "Desert Shield" were dedicated to stories of Gulf War opposition (Lee and Devitt 1991). Moreover, the printed press had few stories on Gulf War demonstrations. On average, national newspapers devoted 2.7 percent of their war stories to the peace movement (Keller 1992), while the *Washington Post* dedicated 2 percent of their war stories to antiwar positions (Kaid, Harville, Ballotti, and Wawrzyniaki 1993). Similarly, McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith (1996) showed the *Washington Post* missed 67 percent of Washington's Gulf War protests.

Some authors show that these low coverage rates have influenced the actions of some protesters. Todd Gitlin (1982) and Daniel Hallin (1986) argue that editors were initially indifferent to the "ordinary" and "conventional" demonstrations against the Vietnam war. Subsequently, protesters who wanted to break into the media had to exhibit a "sensational" flair in order to be considered "newsworthy" events (e.g., the spectacle of enormous size, or the exhibition of illicit behaviors by protesters).

Ironically, this editorial demand for "exciting" and "outrageous" displays commonly results in the stigmatizing of antiwar participants. In a longitudinal study, Hallin (1986) found that almost every CBS news story between 1965 and 1968 showed antiwar protestors as "traitors," "hard-core deviants," and "young misfits" who "threatened law and order." Later, two thirds of all Toronto newspaper

stories accused the Canadian peace movement of being engulfed by “drunken youths,” “obsessive women,” “unrealistic students,” “sneaky speakers” and communist plotters (Stone 1989). With a similar pejorative slant, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* suggested that the 1980s disarmament movement was led by “kooky” individuals who lacked the expertise to legitimately question the policies of the U.S. government (Entman and Rojecki 1993).

In updating these studies, Susan Yows (1992) concluded that reporters routinely insinuated that Gulf War activists were “out of touch with real American sensibilities.” Resse and Buckalew (1995) found that Texan reporters implied that protesters were violent and that Texans were overwhelmingly pro-war. Then with a national sample, Hackett and Zhao (1994) found that 46 percent of news stories showed the protesters as radicals who wanted to destroy the moral fabric of society, while another 28 percent of the stories portrayed activists as “oddballs” who were ill-informed, overly emotional, and immature. Finally, only 26 percent of the stories showed the peace movement as a group with “legitimate grievances” (for similar conclusions, see Beamish, Molotch, and Flack 1996; Husting 1999; Keller 1992; Rifas 1994).

As reporters disparage antiwar activists, they also seem to shrink crowd sizes. Todd Gitlin (1982) noticed that a *New York Times* reporter admitted that he intentionally relied on police estimates although he knew they were severe undercounts, while Small’s (1994) book *Covering Dissent* shows how mainstream newspapers deflated movement counts by using police estimates to guide their front page headlines. In a similar light, Leon Mann’s (1974) study of 22 U.S. newspapers found a statistical relationship between a paper’s editorial position on the Vietnamese conflict and its ability to count people at antiwar protesters. That is, after classifying papers into the categories of “dove” or “hawk,” Mann found that the four “dove” papers put 33,000 participants at a 1965 demonstration, while the seven “hawk” papers provided the average estimate of 20,600 for the same event. Finally, Murray Edelman (1986) highlights the extent of undercounts for “left” protests. After collecting estimates through the grid/density approach, Edelman turned to the pages of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *New York Times*.¹ Predictably, Edelman found that paper estimates for leftist demonstrations were always smaller than his grid/density counts of the same event. For example, a demonstration against the Moral Majority produced a police estimate of 100 while the grid found 1,000, an anti-KKK rally found a police count of 100-200 while the grid showed 350, and a Jesse Jackson speech drew 375 according to the police and 2,000 according to the grid.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With these media critiques in mind, a new line of researchers have reformulated the newspaper advocacy position (Koopmans 1998; Rucht and Neidhardt 1998).

While recognizing that newspapers will not cover all protests, Koopmans (1998) suggests that newspapers are thorough when covering the "hard" facts of protest timing, locality name, or the number of protesters (p. 93). Conversely, Koopmans warns that newspapers are ineffectual when covering the "soft" news of activist motives or public opinion. With another spin, Rucht and Neidhardt (1998) assure that newspapers are acceptable since they assume that large protests usually get covered, and only large protests are "relevant for social and political change" (p. 76).

In presenting these arguments, these current newspaper proponents have emphasized the concept of "stable biases." In believing that newspapers have steady practices, they insist that coverage rates will not fluctuate during a mobilization's evolution. Furthermore, this assumed consistency is considered beneficial. That is, persistent media biases are desired since they theoretically leave protest relationships intact. Hug and Wisler (1998) write "often researchers claim that as long as selectivity of a newspaper is the same across time and space, the bias from these sources is negligible and that inferences are still possible" (p. 141). Or in the words of Koopmans (1998), systematic bias is a "blessing" since it purportedly does not "infringe in any way upon the possibilities for drawing conclusions of the growth/decline [of a movement]" (p. 97).² In short, this imagined consistency presumably guarantees that recorded changes are due to protest transformations rather than altered reporting styles.

In taking less of a structural approach, I was perplexed by this "fixed bias" notion. I cannot envision a news organization that is so routinized that it maintains constant coverage rates (for similar doubts see Hug and Wisler 1998; Oliver and Myers 1999).³ Hence, the rest of this paper will explore four newspaper questions. First, how stable are media depictions of a single protest campaign? In other words, are these coverage rates and counting procedures steady and immutable, or are they fluid entities that fluctuate over different moments? Second, is it safe to assume that national newspapers will automatically cover the largest protests? Or, will the media miss significant segments of these big protests? Third, will every newspaper have similar coverage tendencies? That is, is coverage so standardized that the sources are interchangeable? Fourth, if the coverage inclinations are incompatible, what would be the ramifications of only using the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, or *Washington Post* for a research project?

STUDY PARAMETERS

When exploring these questions, this paper analyzes the media characterizations of a "left-wing" campaign. More precisely, the study will show how U.S. newspapers treated dissent during the Gulf War of 1991. The reasons for choosing these protests were practical and conceptual. Initially, this project began as a substantive inquiry. But after adhering to the newspaper protocol, I became bothered by

the glaring gaps of coverage. With these lapses demanding recourse, I perused an assortment of media journals. In doing so, it became clear that communication scholars had long ago discredited the reliability of newspapers. Thus, the early data and further readings begged for a systematic analysis of newspaper capabilities.

After embracing such a decision, I soon realized that this case study could provide some pointed insights. Media apologists might insist that protests are neglected when they address insignificant grievances. However, this highly publicized war was saturating the official news realm. Hence, with war stories permeating every newspaper, nobody can argue that the protests were ignored due to the media's inattentiveness to the Gulf War.

THE MEDIA AND SAN DIEGO PROTESTS

On September 1990 the country of Iraq invaded the country of Kuwait. Within moments, the United States began sending military troops to the country of Saudi Arabia. By October 1990 President George Bush was calling Iraqi's leader a "monster" and "Hitler" and the United States had over 300,000 soldiers in Saudi Arabia. Later the UN Security Council authorized an attack on Iraq (November 29), the U.S. Congress barely passed a war resolution (January 12), and "smart bombs" started descending on the country of Iraq (January 16). As the air war ceased on February 23, UN troops entered Kuwait and encountered little U.S. casualties. Within two weeks, UN forces occupied Southern Iraq and the leadership of Iraq declared an official surrender.

Local Research Methods

As this tense period evolved, many Americans created and sustained a mobilization against this war (Epstein 1992). With antiwar actions appearing in most U.S. cities, I started an "ethnographic" study in my hometown of San Diego (from September 1990 to March 1991). While interviewing activists, I also kept notes on the local protests (see Swank 1997). After using the grid-density to count the size of each protest, I decided to see how the figures stacked up to media statements. In creating an "extra-media" research design, I then accessed the archives of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Local Findings

In comparing the estimates, Table 1 shows that both sources covered a majority of San Diego's 33 protests. Nevertheless, the sources did not cultivate the same breadth of coverage. The *Union-Tribune* wrote on 18 of the 33 (55%) protests while I observed 29 of the 33 protests (88%).⁴ Furthermore, this was not only a

Table 1. Size Estimates for San Diego Protests

| Date | Grid | San Diego Union Tribune |
|---------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| 10-20-90 | 410 | 200 |
| 12-2-90 | 150 | --- |
| 12-9-90 | 300 | --- |
| 12-10-90 | 210 | 200 |
| 12-14-90 | 30 | --- |
| 12-16-90 | 1,000 | --- |
| 12-23-90 | 800 | 500 |
| 12-30-90 | 870 | --- |
| 1-6-91 | 2,020 | 500 |
| 1-9-91 | 2,000 | --- |
| 1-10-91 | 200 | --- |
| 1-13-91 | 2,540 | 1,000 |
| 1-14-91 | 10,890 | 10,000 |
| 1-16-91 | 4,520 | 3,000 |
| 1-16-91 | 1,000 | 600 |
| 1-17-91 | --- | 300 |
| 1-17-91 | --- | 200 |
| 1-17-91 | --- | 300 |
| 1-17-91 | --- | 100 |
| 1-17-91 | 300 | --- |
| 1-20-91 | 2520 | 5,000 |
| 1-21-91 | 1,000 | --- |
| 1-27-91 | 1,810 | 250 |
| 1-28-91 | 80 | --- |
| 2-2-91 | 100 | --- |
| 2-3-91 | 1,510 | 1,000 |
| 2-3-91 | --- | 100 |
| 2-7-91 | 400 | --- |
| 2-7-91 | 500 | --- |
| 2-10-91 | 640 | 600 |
| 2-17-91 | 350 | --- |
| 2-23-91 | 1,000 | 400 |
| 3-3-91 | 300 | 300 |
| Entire Mobilization | 37,450 | 24,550 |

cosmetic difference. After conducting a statistical test, the Analysis of Variance indicated a statistically significant discrepancy ($F\text{-ratio}=7.259, p=.011$).

Adding to these different amounts of coverage was an interesting temporal relationship. The paper concentrated on January protests as it neglected the protests on each end of the protest cycle. Hence, the *Union-Tribune* condensed the length of the mobilization by missing six of the nine 1990 protests and four of the eight February protests. Conversely, my omissions followed another sequence. Rather than dismissing earlier or later protests, my gaffes occurred during a protest spurt (January 17). While watching a march through a downtown shopping mall, I

missed some high school students who were stomping out of their assigned class rooms. Hence, the newspaper was better suited at tracking a litany of simultaneous and impromptu protests.

Bolstering these omission patterns is the issue of size discrepancies. Table 1 indicates that the sources did not agree on the entire size of the mobilization. The grid put around 37,450 protesters in the San Diego scene while the *San Diego Union-Tribune* found 24,550 protesters (the *Union-Tribune* numbers were at 65 percent of the grid's total tally). This overall difference can be attributed to the *Union-Tribune* habitually dispensing lower counts. When comparing dual estimates of the same event, there is only a single case of a newspaper overcount (January 12). In the place of overcounts, the *Tribune* submitted smaller counts for 12 of the 14 "joint estimates" (86%). Moreover, many of these undercounts reached considerable proportions. On six occasions the paper undercounted the grid by at least 500 people. More dramatically, the table demonstrates four instances in which the paper eliminated at least 1,500 participants.

Preliminary conclusions on the topic of total coverage rates suggests that the *Union-Tribune* did not fare as badly as some critics might expect. With the paper covering half of the local protests, some movement researchers may have their newspaper faith restored. However, the timing of omissions raises some concerns. Contrary to what some researchers presuppose, the paper did not show a constant coverage rate (for similar results in an European context see Barranco and Wisler 1999). Then with this patterned style of omissions, the *Union-Tribune* overemphasized the January rush since most of the pre-war protests remained undetected. In turn, a researcher who used this truncated characterization of the mobilization may incorrectly embrace certain "movement emergence" theories (i.e., with the impression that protests sprung up around the first days of bombing, one might incorrectly accept the "suddenly imposed grievance" thesis).

On the issue of crowd size, the *Union-Tribune* showed a severe case of measurement errors. Moreover, this is not a case of random mismeasurements since the paper systematically shrunk the size of individual events. Hence, the researcher who simply read the newspaper would envision a shorter and smaller protest cycle than the person who attended the actual protests.

THE NATIONAL PROTESTS AGAINST THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

After collecting this regional data, I searched for national sources. Realizing that the shortcomings of the *Union-Tribune* may not reflect the weaknesses of other papers, the matter of representativeness begged for more data. Furthermore, a national scope seemed befitting since the antiwar protests were challenging federal policies.

National Research Methods

This desire for a national analysis presented some dilemmas. By missing the protests in other cities, a reliance on secondary sources was unavoidable. Unfortunately, the national peace organizations and the FBI could not offer any complete protests records. Hence, like other studies, the newspapers became the only available data set.

When incorporating national newspapers into my analysis, I wanted to go beyond the customary sample of the *New York Times* (NYT). I realized that one paper studies are adequate only "under the debatable assumption that each paper has roughly the same level of attention" (Rucht and Neidhardt 1998, p. 74). Thus, to test the notion of compatible attention levels, I sided with some research methodologists who urged the use of multiple papers (Franzosi 1987; Haines 1992; Hug and Wisler 1998; Meyer 1991; Sampetro 1997).

With few examples of paper sampling procedures to draw from, I constructed a personalized sampling regime. Since it was impossible to assemble a random sample of 400,000 U.S. newspapers, I invented a stratified sample.⁵ In the first stratum, I embraced the nation's "prominent" newspapers (*The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*). Next, the news services of United Press International (UPI), Gannett, News Bank, and Reuters were brought into the sample.⁶

After exhausting the pool of national sources, I searched for appropriate local newspapers. In thinking like Oliver and Myers (1999), I assumed that "regional newspapers may provide a much more comprehensive documentation of events than any national newspaper" (p. 43). Striving for geographical diversity among the local papers, the regional schemata in the *City and County Data Book* was used. With these regional designations, I identified the papers with largest circulations from each region (*Newspapers Online* 1992). With these criterion, I selected the *Boston Globe* for New England, *Philadelphia Enquirer* for Middle Atlantic, *Atlanta Constitution* for the South Atlantic, *Houston Post* for West South Central, *Chicago Tribune* for West North Central, *Louisville Courier-Journal* for East South Central, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for East North Central, *Denver Post* for Mountain, *San Francisco Chronicle* for Southwest and the *Seattle Times* for Pacific.⁷

My next stratum drew from the alternative press. After scanning *The Nation*, *Z Magazine*, *The Progressive*, *Utne Reader*, and *In these Times*, I added the New York weekly, the *National Guardian*, to the sample. The *National Guardian* was embraced since Melvin Small (1994) suggests the *Guardian* provided the best coverage of the Vietnam antiwar movement and the *Guardian's* weekly antiwar column included articles that were furnished by the antiwar activists. Finally, I added the activist newsletter the *Nuclear Resister*. This Phoenix-based bimonthly was an "unofficial" clearinghouse which regularly received faxes from hundreds of antiwar coalitions.

After choosing these 20 news sources, I had to obtain the relevant news stories (advertisements and editorials were skipped). To do so, citations were found through paper-bound and computerized indexes (Newspaper Abstracts and LEXIS/NEXIS). When using the terms "antiwar/peace movements," "demonstrations/protests," and "Persian Gulf War," these directories netted 827 protest articles from October 1990 to March 1991.⁸

Since the study looked for overt meanings of particular words, the rules of a content analysis were followed (Adrain 1981; Stempel 1989; Wimer and Dominick 1987). With this reading technique, material on protest dates, protest locations, numerical representations of size, and the sources of size estimates were identified and transferred into a codebook (i.e., October 20, Miami, 600 protesters, *New York Times*). Since verbatim excerpts were copied, the coding system held some face validity. With standardized calendars, maps, and counting systems, the scales were exhaustive, exclusive, and easy to categorize. Moreover, after enlisting the help of two independent readers, I found a perfect level of inter-rater reliability since our coding of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* yielded the same figures.⁹

After reading the news stories, my analysis took two forms. To get an overview of the entire mobilization, all size estimates were collapsed into an aggregated composite. That is, data from the 20 news sources were condensed into a single index (in future passages this is called the "sample score"). Being a composite of news sources from different regions, this conglomerate is suppose to approximate the general contours of the national mobilization.

After merging this information, I started an "intra-media" analysis by returning the estimates to their original papers. With estimates attached to their sources, the inquiry switched into a comparative mode of analysis. When placing accounts next to each other, the idiosyncratic patterns became apparent. Simply put, the process of juxtaposition accentuated the extent in which papers reported or neglected the same event. Furthermore, this process highlights the variance in size estimates. In essence, readers can see which papers routinely provided higher or lower estimates of the same event.

National Findings: The Selectiveness of Prominent Sources

When inspecting the number of protests cited, Table 2 shows that the 20 news sources found a total of 1,322 antiwar protests (examine the "sample" column). Strikingly, none of the separate papers showed such a robust mobilization. Rather, each paper's abridged coverage rates seemed to dramatically shrink the mobilization's parameters. In the end, the best source, the *Los Angeles Times*, recognized 241 protests while the worst source, the *New York Times*, netted only 54 protests. Hence, all of these papers missed between 82 percent and 96 percent of the sample's protests.

Table 2. Number of Protests Covered by "Prominent Sources"

| Date | Sample | NYT | WP | LAT | USA | UPI | NB |
|-----------|--------|---------|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Oct 8-15 | 16 | 0 (0%) | 2 (13%) | 7 (44%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (6%) |
| Oct16-23 | 29 | 6 (21%) | 2 (7%) | 15 (52%) | 3 (10%) | 4 (14%) | 3 (10%) |
| Oct24-30 | 8 | 0 (0%) | 1 (13%) | 1 (13%) | 1 (13%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (38%) |
| Nov 1-7 | 11 | 0 (0%) | 1 (9%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (9%) | 2 (18%) | 0 (0%) |
| Nov 8-15 | 25 | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) | 6 (24%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (20%) |
| Nov16-23 | 35 | 1 (3%) | 1 (3%) | 9 (26%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (17%) |
| Nov 24-30 | 22 | 1 (4%) | 3 (13%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (9%) | 2 (9%) |
| Dec 1-7 | 65 | 1 (2%) | 18 (28%) | 16 (25%) | 5 (8%) | 1 (2%) | 4 (6%) |
| Dec8-15 | 45 | 1 (2%) | 5 (11%) | 14 (31%) | 1 (2%) | 1 (2%) | 5 (11%) |
| Dec16-23 | 30 | 1 (3%) | 2 (6%) | 5 (16%) | 2 (6%) | 2 (6%) | 10(33%) |
| Dec24-30 | 19 | 1 (5%) | 1 (5%) | 3 (16%) | 1 (5%) | 3 (16%) | 0 (0%) |
| Jan 1-7 | 37 | 0 (0%) | 3 (8%) | 3 (8%) | 5 (14%) | 2 (5%) | 7 (19%) |
| Jan 8-15 | 318 | 18 (5%) | 25 (8%) | 48 (15%) | 20 (6%) | 42 (13%) | 92(29%) |
| Jan16-23 | 375 | 8 (2%) | 24 (6%) | 58 (15%) | 28 (7%) | 90 (40%) | 66(17%) |
| Jan24-30 | 51 | 2 (4%) | 6 (12%) | 7 (14%) | 4 (8%) | 8 (16%) | 10(20%) |
| Feb 1-6 | 34 | 0 (0%) | 3 (9%) | 7 (20%) | 2 (6%) | 3 (9%) | 2 (6%) |
| Feb7-13 | 27 | 2 (7%) | 4 (15%) | 8 (30%) | 2 (7%) | 3 (11%) | 1 (4%) |
| Feb14-20 | 67 | 4 (6%) | 2 (3%) | 19 (28%) | 6 (9%) | 3 (4%) | 3 (4%) |
| Feb21-28 | 94 | 8 (8%) | 13 (14%) | 13 (14%) | 2 (2%) | 4 (4%) | 6 (6%) |
| Mar 1-7 | 14 | 0 (0%) | 3 (21%) | 1 (7%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) |
| Entire | 1322 | 54 (4%) | 121 (9%) | 241 (18%) | 86 (6%) | 171 (13%) | 226 (17%) |
| Duration | | | | | | | |

Notes: The *Sample* column is the aggregated number of covered protests for the entire sample. Also, the parenthesis percentages reveal a comparison between the individual paper and the sample's figures.

While incomplete glimpses were the norm, some sources were more fragmentary than others. The *Los Angeles Times* and *News Bank* stand above their counterparts with total scores of 18 percent and 17 percent. Next came *UPI* and the *Washington Post* with their 13 percent and 9 percent rates. Astonishingly, these flawed showings were undershot by the widest read U.S. papers. *USA TODAY* found only 6 percent of the demonstrations, while the esteemed *New York Times* found the meager sum of 4 percent. Hence, this lionized paper from New York held the undesirable distinction of having the scantiest coverage of Gulf War protests.

As the raw scores showed diversity an ANOVA reported a relatively high variance between the sources. With a F-score of 6.345 ($p=.000$, $df=139$), it is safe to conclude that the coverage rates were not the same. Hence, descriptive and inferential approaches show that the news sources provided incompatible images as to how many antiwar protests transpired.

When examining temporal matters, some patterns emerged. The weakest papers were consistently incomplete throughout the total mobilization. For example, the *New York Times* climbed above the lowly 6 percent line on only three occasions, while *USA TODAY* exceeded this milestone eight times. The other sources

showed some wider ranges of reporting. On rare occasions, the *Los Angeles Times* and *UPI* surpassed 40 percent, whereas other periods saw *News Bank* and the *Los Angeles Times* run in the 30 to 39 percent range (NB=2, LAT=1). Finally, the *Los Angeles Times*, *News Bank*, and the *Washington Post* had ten instances of 20 percentile durations (LAT=5, NB=3, WP=2).

The papers with some variance showed uneven signs of performance. For example, the *Washington Post*'s rates seemed to vacillate without any sort of temporal ordering. Similarly *News Bank* provided the jerky sequence of 6%, 10%, 38%, 0%, 20%, 17%, 9% and the *Los Angeles Times* zig-zagged through the weeks with 52%, 13%, 0%, 24%, 28%, 4%, and 25%. However, some progressions were more rhythmic. Until the middle part of January, *UPI* offered few protest reports. Then after a one-time burst of coverage around the movement's peak, *UPI* abruptly went back to its spotty rates of coverage.

While Table 2 profiles the lackluster nature of news reports, some critics may insist that the table overstates the magnitude of the problem. It may be argued that it is unfair to assume that a single paper should cover all U.S. protests. Instead, pundits may assert that sources are obliged to cover only the largest sorts of demonstrations. That is, a *New York Times* reporter should be exempted from the responsibility of covering small protests in Georgia. Hence, those who prioritize the "size criterion" would demand a different sort of presentation.

In responding to these considerations, Table 3 isolates the coverage rates for the 53 largest protests in the sample (large protests had over 4,000 individuals). When distilling these protests into a table, some interesting insights emerge. At a general level, the size factor seemed to improve coverage rates. When comparing the total

Table 3. Number of Large Protests Covered by "Prominent" Sources

| Protests Size | NYT | WP | LAT | USA | UPI | NB |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| All Protests over 4,000 (n = 53) | 16 (30%) | 15 (28%) | 24 (45%) | 20 (38%) | 26 (49%) | 27 (51%) |
| Size Intervals | | | | | | |
| 160,000 to 30,000 (n = 5) | 4 (80%) | 4 (80%) | 4 (80%) | 4 (80%) | 4 (80%) | 4 (80%) |
| 29,999 to 10,000 (n = 7) | 2 (28%) | 2 (28%) | 2 (28%) | 4 (57%) | 5 (71%) | 4 (57%) |
| 9,999 to 5,001 (n = 12) | 3 (25%) | 2 (16%) | 7 (58%) | 2 (16%) | 4 (33%) | 7 (58%) |
| 5,000 to 4,000 (n = 29) | 7 (24%) | 7 (24%) | 11 (38%) | 10 (34%) | 13 (45%) | 12 (41%) |

percentage scores in Tables 2 and 3, three sources elevated their ratings by about 30 percentage points (*USA TODAY*, *UPI*, and *News Bank*) and the rest saw boosts of around 20 percent (*Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*). Nonetheless, the size factor did not solve the predicament of vast omissions. The best sources found only half of the largest demonstrations, while the worst sources missed three-fourths of the largest protests. Additionally, the size factor did not eliminate contrasting coverage rates. With an absence of uniformed coverage rates, the differences between the best and worst sources still showed significance at the .05 alpha (F -score 2.28, $df=317$, $p=.046$).

Inspection of the event size categories shows that all sources did their best on the 30,000-plus demonstrations (80% of the "giant" protests). As expected, these high marks disappeared in the subsequent tiers. When looking at the 10,000 to 29,999 level, one sees smaller rates for all sources. However, the contractions were not identical as some sources slid into brevity faster than others (i.e., *UPI* shrunk to 71 percent while *NYT*, *WP*, and *LAT* contracted to 28%). In a similar fashion, the move to the third cluster saw another general deterioration of coverage allotments. For example, *UPI* and *USA TODAY* lost around 40 percent while the *Los Angeles Times* uniquely gained 30 percent. Finally, the 4,000 to 5,000 layer saw mixed results as two sources saw smaller percentages (*NB* and *LAT*), while some of the weakest sources showed slight improvements (*WP* and *USA*).

In sum, this table indicates a positive correlation. That is, larger protests generally had higher coverage percentiles. However, one must caution that this relationship was not absolute. Although most sources shrunk their breadth in the successive size tiers, there were some exceptions to the rule. Similarly, this interpretation may overstate the size impact since I lack information on other independent variables which might influence coverage rates.

In a final caveat, the size factor did not dramatically alter the comparative selectiveness of these sources (see Table 4). Even when accounting for protest size, the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* remained among the least effective sources. In a parallel trend, *News Bank* and *UPI* retained their higher statuses in both distributions. Conversely, protest event size inhibited the relative breadth of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* since they both lost two slots in the paper

Table 4. Percentages of Coverage

| Source | All Protests | Source | Large Protests |
|--------|--------------|--------|----------------|
| LAT | 18% | NB | 54% |
| NB | 17% | UPI | 49% |
| UPI | 13% | LAT | 45% |
| WP | 9% | USA | 38% |
| USA | 5% | NYT | 30% |
| NYT | 4% | WP | 28% |

Table 5. "Prominent" Sources Estimates of the Largest Protests

| <i>Location</i> | <i>NYT</i> | <i>WP</i> | <i>LAT</i> | <i>USA</i> | <i>UPI</i> | <i>NB</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Washington 1-26 | 75,000 p | 75,000 p 250,000 a | 70,000 p 300,000 a | 75,000 p | 75,000 p 250,000 a | 75,000 p 250,000 a |
| San Francisco 1-26 | 30,000 225,000 | 35,000 r 100,000 a | 35,000 | 30,000 | 35,000 50,000 | — |
| Washington 1-19 | 15,000 | 25,000 100,000 a | 25,000 100,000 a | 25,000 | 15,000 | 25,000 100,000 a |
| San Francisco 1-19 | 20,000 | 40,000 r 100,000 a | 20,000 | 40,000 r | 40,000 r | 40,000 r 100,000 a |
| Seattle 1-14 | — | — | — | — | — | 30,000 |
| Portland 1-12 | — | — | — | 15,000 | — | — |
| New York 10-20 | 5,000 r 25,000 a | 10,000 15,000 | 4,000 | 15,000 | 5,000 | 20,000 |
| Boston 12-1 | — | — | — | 8,000 r | 4,000 p 10,000 r | 10,000 |
| Minneapolis 1-13 | 2,000 | — | — | — | 2,000 | 10,000 |
| San Francisco 1-15 | — | 20,000 | — | — | 6,000 | 10,000 |
| San Francisco 1-16 | — | — | 20,000 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 |
| Portland 1-18 | — | — | — | — | — | — |

Notes: "p" means police estimate, "a" signifies an activist estimate, "r" represents a reporter estimate, and estimates that have no identified source are without an affixed letter.

hierarchy. Thus, the variable size did not eliminate large gaps in coverage nor did it dramatically modify the relative comprehensiveness of the news sources.

National Findings: Prominent Papers and their Estimating Capacities

This section considers the accuracy of the size assessments which rested in these news stories. With an emphasis on counting matters, I analyzed whether news sources reduced or exaggerated demonstration sizes. Moreover, the question of bias is addressed since I asked if sources dispensed undercounts or overcounts on a regular basis?

In probing the issue of measurement errors, Table 5 starts with the crowd counts of the largest demonstrations. Among other things, these twelve cases show that immense contrasts are widespread. Furthermore, Table 5 illustrates the lingering effects of faulty size constructs. That is, drastic under/overcounts of massive demonstrations can skew the interpretations of the mobilization's entire size. For example, a movement needs many protests to surmount the *USA TODAY* and *Los Angeles Times* difference of over 200,000 persons (1/26).

Although conflicting estimates were the norm, this table detected some similar estimates. On January 26, all sources provided roughly the same lower-end estimates of 70,000 and 30,000. With some frankness, reporters attributed these lower-end estimates to police officials. However, these instances of congruency were shattered when papers added inputs from activists and reporters. In effect, these second guesstimates doubled, tripled, or quadrupled the size of police appraisals. Thus, the data from the January 26 demonstrations provide three insights. First, every news source granted "expert status" to on-duty police officials. Second, the rare instances of compatibility appeared when news sources relied on the same police authorities. Third, the papers which depended solely on the police conveyed the smallest counts, whereas the twin-estimates always produced much larger amounts (see Beissinger 1998 for similar results in the Soviet Union).

Aside from the national demonstrations of January 19 and 26, the discussion of dual estimates becomes irrelevant. In reviews of regional protests, the papers rarely offered twin estimates of the same event (see UPI and NYT for exceptions). Additionally, papers infrequently identified the social statuses of the estimator. Hence, it is impossible to determine if tallies have been inflated or deflated through the quotation process. Similarly, the discussion of congruent estimates becomes moot. With papers offering diverse descriptions of the same event, an array of discrepancies prevailed. In fact, the contradictions became so farcical that a Manhattan protest was claimed to have twenty, fifteen, ten, five, or four thousand protesters.

When contemplating these discrepancies, the proclivities of individual news sources emerged. Both *News Bank* and the *Washington Post* tended to provide higher estimates. *News Bank* had 7 higher-end estimates, one medium estimate (San Francisco 1/15) and one low estimate (San Francisco 1/16). Similarly, the *Washington Post* had five high estimates and one medium estimate (New York 10/20). Conversely, the *New York Times* consistently supplied lower estimates. Of its six estimates, the *New York Times* reached the higher and medium peaks twice (San Francisco 1/26 and New York 10/20).

As a total, Table 5 facilitates some tentative insights (the "n" is too small to produce any definitive results). First, police estimates were always lower than activist estimates. Second, news providers rarely divulged the social statuses of their estimators. Third, when backgrounds were identified, the papers usually cited police officers more frequently than activists. Accordingly, the sources which consistently relied on police officers portrayed a smaller movement than those papers which sprinkled in a few "activist interpretations" (i.e., *USA TODAY* vs. *Washington Post*).

After examining the largest protests, Table 6 creates a composite score. When summing the estimates from the twenty sources, the sample located 1,211,166 protesters. As the sample found over a million participants, the individual papers detected less than half of that amount. With the biggest enumerations, *News Bank*

Table 6. The Total Number of Protesters for "Prominent Sources"

| Date | Sample | NYT | WP | LAT | USA | UPI | NB |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Oct 8-15 | 2,685 | 0 | 275 (10%) | 70 (4%) | 0 | 0 | 50 (2%) |
| Oct 16-23 | 28,794 | 16,625 (57%) | 9,500 (33%) | 11,800 (40%) | 15,300 (51%) | 6,200 (21%) | 21,900 (76%) |
| Oct 24-30 | 6,478 | 0 | 200 (3%) | 600 (9%) | 48 (0%) | 0 | 900 (14%) |
| Nov 1-7 | 1,246 | 0 | 50 (4%) | 0 | 0 | 300 (24%) | 0 |
| Nov 8-15 | 4,726 | 0 | 100 (21%) | 700 (15%) | 0 | 0 | 2,400 (50%) |
| Nov 16-23 | 11,195 | 85 (0%) | 300 (0%) | 1,910 (2%) | 0 | 0 | 1,700 (15%) |
| Nov 24-30 | 6,313 | 0 | 600 (9%) | 400 (2%) | 0 | 775 (12%) | 350 (5%) |
| Dec 1-7 | 40,653 | 0 | 3,000 (7%) | 5,865 (14%) | 9,470 (23%) | 7,000 (17%) | 14,725 (36%) |
| Dec 8-15 | 24,114 | 0 | 8,100 (33%) | 3,250 (13%) | 0 | 4,000 (16%) | 1,295 (5%) |
| Dec 16-23 | 7,345 | 0 | 18 (0%) | 2,220 (30%) | 135 (2%) | 0 | 900 (12%) |
| Dec 24-30 | 3,461 | 51 (1%) | 0 | 100 (3%) | 75 (2%) | 260 (8%) | 0 |
| Jan 1-7 | 18,630 | 0 | 390 (2%) | 1,600 (9%) | 5,625 (30%) | 150 (1%) | 1,645 (9%) |
| Jan 8-15 | 299,789 | 27,452 (9%) | 21,454 (7%) | 37,126 (12%) | 34,854 (12%) | 37,374 (12%) | 27,607 (9%) |
| Jan 16-23 | 362,068 | 35,633 (9%) | 171,885 (47%) | 135,038 (47%) | 99,673 (28%) | 125,243 (35%) | 195,131 (54%) |
| Jan 24-30 | 275,375 | 187,515 (68%) | 223,775 (81%) | 98,720 (36%) | 105,500 (38%) | 212,800 (77%) | 185,370 (67%) |
| Feb 1-6 | 24,732 | 0 | 3,600 (15%) | 7,025 (28%) | 1,600 (7%) | 2,000 (8%) | 450 (2%) |
| Feb 7-13 | 7,971 | 105 (1%) | 700 (9%) | 970 (12%) | 100 (1%) | 3,520 (44%) | 200 (3%) |
| Feb 14-20 | 37,128 | 6,914 (19%) | 250 (0%) | 4,045 (11%) | 1,088 (3%) | 2,340 (6%) | 5,300 (14%) |
| Feb 21-28 | 45,363 | 2,000 (4%) | 5,450 (12%) | 7,650 (17%) | 48 | 900 (2%) | 1,500 (3%) |
| Mar 1-7 | 3,100 | 0 | 1,156 (37%) | 100 (3%) | 0 | 30 (1%) | 50 (2%) |
| Entire | 1,211,166 | 276,380 (23%) | 450,803 (37%) | 319,189 (26%) | 283,516 (23%) | 402,842 (33%) | 461,473 (38%) |

Notes: The Sample column is the aggregated number of protesters for the entire sample. Also, scores in brackets represent the percentage of sample protesters that were covered by that particular paper.

and the *Washington Post* found around 450,000 protesters while the *New York Times* had the lowest tally of 276,380. Hence, all sources seriously reduced the mobilization's scope as they eliminated between 750,000 and 950,000 protesters a piece.

With the news sources offering different raw scores, the ANOVA suggested that the papers were not statistically different (F-score of 1.455, $p=.19$, $df=139$). When contemplating this lack of significance, I found some pressures which mitigated the differences among the sources. First, two clusters of papers presented somewhat similar total scores (NB-WP and NYT-USA). Second, the phenomenon itself brought a great deal of variance within. Some weeks had lows of one, two, three, or four thousand while other intervals hit triple digits. Third, the papers had better coverage rates for the national demonstrations which carried a large proportions of participants (see McCarthy et al., 1996; Rucht and Neidhardt 1998). Finally, the papers themselves had little consistency throughout the entire mobilization. In showing spasmodic qualities, the papers unevenly vacillated in their rates from week to week. For example, *News Bank* tumultuously went from 2% to 76% to 14% to 0% to 50% to 15%, and *UPI* rambled from 12% to 35% to 77% to 8% to 44% to 6%. Thus, the blend of a turbulent event with uneven percentages meant that the noticeable difference between the papers was overpowered by the immense fluctuations within all papers.¹⁰

DISCUSSION

In closing this paper, it seems apparent that newspapers do not easily satisfy the conventional standards of methodological reliability. Moreover, this paper challenges the dismissive claims about the futility of multiple source studies (see Tarrow 1989 for his derisions on the "fetish of thoroughness"). However, since this research design is not perfect, these interpretations should not be taken as definitive and uncontestable. For example, the national and local cases have different sorts of comparisons. In San Diego, a paper was juxtaposed to grid scores while the prominent papers were contrasted to a sample of twenty papers. Thus, the local study had an independent source of information, while the national example did not. In turn, this probably means the national figures may have less internal validity since they compare unreliable papers to unreliable papers.

Even with these limitations, some important insights comes forth. On the point of "selectiveness," the data indicates four trends. First, all of the papers missed large segments of the protest mobilization. At the local level, the *Union-Tribune* covered half of San Diego's protests while the other sources missed more than 80% of the sample's protests. Second, each paper portrayed the number and pace of protests in a different fashion. In fact, the intra-media variance was large enough to be considered statistically distinct entities. Subsequently, the use of one newspaper over another would result in a different interpretation of the same

event. Third, selection tendencies were not constant over time. At a local level, the *Union-Tribune* ignored most of the early and late San Diego protests. However, the prominent sources did not present any common temporal tendencies. A couple of sources routinely furnished low figures while most sources inadvertently ricocheted between better and worse coverage rates. Ergo, the convenient notion of stable biases seems quite dubious (also see Bessinger 1998 for the ways in which Soviet newspapers inconsistently jumped between coverage rates of 65%, 31%, and 10%). Fourth, as expected, the larger protests were covered more frequently than the smaller protests (for the same phenomena see also McCarthy et al. 1996; Oliver and Myers 1999). However, even with size as a factor, the majority of large protests still went unreported.

On the point of newspaper estimating habits, some tendencies appear. First, the news sources profoundly shrunk the mobilization size. Whether looking at the local or national population, every paper identified fewer protesters than their referent (the *Union-Tribune* found only 65% of the grid's yield and the best paper found 38% of the sample's total). Second, the issue of consistent undercounts is less clear. With the grid-density in place, the *Union-Tribune* continually offered the lowest body counts (12 of 14 dual estimates). However, when prominent and sampled papers were compared, only erratic and unpredictable counting schemes were glimpsed. Hence, without a presence of independent grid counts, the papers seemed to epitomize inconsistent estimating habits. Finally, size statements seem contingent upon who does the counting. In effect, police officials routinely undercut reporter estimates and reporter estimates habitually undercut the grid-density scores.

In ending, some may ask how this paper contributes to social movement research. At a fundamental level, this project reinforces the necessity of actual first-hand observations. In essence, the researchers who dedicate long hours to "field" research will probably be rewarded with better data. In effect, the active professor can see more protests, have more consistent coverage rates, and enact a standardized procedure of crowd counts. In turn, this time in the field will not simply add to the study's validity, but it will also allow for a wider use of statistical tools (for a list of such techniques, see Olzak and Olivier 1998).

If researchers cannot attend the protests, this paper also offers some warnings and suggestions. At a basic level, the data presented here refutes the notion of stable newspaper biases. Subsequently, researchers must reformulate the stability thesis. In addressing sampling procedures, it seems obvious that researchers should avoid the much too conventional routine of a sole reliance on the *New York Times*. This source did not perform well in this campaign and may not do well in others. Instead, researchers might try to incorporate papers from diverse geographical and organizational milieus. This inclusion of numerous papers should enhance the comprehensiveness of the data and can give some cues to the relative worth of the sampled papers.

In the end, this paper might trigger some methodological inquiries. Future researchers may see if selectiveness differs by variable. If so, then it is possible that the *New York Times* may be the best paper when addressing the topics of changing tactical repertoires, protester characteristics, or the goals of the formal organizations (see Rucht and Neidhardt 1998).¹¹ Along another line of inquiry, colleagues should determine the generalizability of these findings. These results may only work for antiwar protests or "new social movements," or they may apply to a wide assortment of movement manifestations. Finally, being a descriptive study, this paper does not test causal relationships. Hence, upcoming research can examine the explanatory models of "newsworthiness" or the "audience effects" of reading these protest articles (see Corbett 1999; McLeod 1995).

Finally, these findings may inspire the reexamination of the field's core propositions. That is, it would be interesting to learn how the literature's "truisms" and unsettled disputes were influenced by the reliance on a paper from New York. In fact, much of the literature's axioms and ongoing battles may have been skewed by our perpetual reliance on fallible data sources. Thus if this study does anything, it should spark reflection on the foibles of primarily relying upon printed newsources for protest information.

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NOTES

1. Jacobs' "grid/density" approach is a systematic schemata that provides an empirically based crowd count. Its procedures are as follows: (1) observe or photograph the entire crowd from an opportune vantage point; (2) apply a symmetrical grid to the crowd's established boundaries; (3) count the number of participants residing in a single quadrant; (4) multiply the number of individuals in this single quadrant by the total number of quadrants; (5) report the summation as the total crowd count.

2. To substantiate this claim, Koopmans compares two German event studies. Then he bragged that the "correlation between the two was as high as .94" (1998, p. 105). Yet this celebration seems misdirected since Koopmans used only the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and other study used the *Frankfurter Rundschau* plus another paper.

3. Oliver and Myers (1999) suggest that police records are extremely scattered and disjointed and any claim to "apparent comprehensiveness is illusionary" (p.48).

4. Interestingly Oliver and Myers (1999) study suggests that 44 percent of police recorded protests made their way into two Madison newspapers.

5. After constructing this sample, I discovered that Rucht and Neidhardt (1998) made some sampling suggestions which mirrored my final sampling decisions.

6. *News Bank* is a microfiche series of condensed stories from hundreds of metropolitan newspapers (over 600 papers were cited in 1991). In effect, this catalogue provides a yearly anthology of

"historical milestones" by saving articles that are found in small and inaccessible newspapers (inaccessible means not available in online services).

7. There are several advantages to using this schemata. First, the system encompasses every state in the nation. Second, the system clearly identifies spatial parameters as it situates each state in a region. Finally, the use of ten regions is much more precise than the East/West or North/South dichotomies that permeate casual conversation. Conversely, this improved taxonomy still has limitations. There is no uniformity in the amount of acreage covered by each region. Hence, one sees that some regions are much larger than others (i.e., the Mid-Atlantic contains New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania while the Mountain states hold Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming in its grasp). There is also a lack of cultural uniformity in some regions (e.g., the South Atlantic stretches from Delaware to Florida while New England is confined to the states between Maine and Massachusetts).

8. In my substantive paper on the Gulf War protests I found 842 stories from August 1990 to May 1991, but this comparative analysis has a shorter time frame since the very early and very late articles were never covered by two or more news sources.

9. While a content analysis is efficient at determining "who said what to whom," the emphasis on explicit phrases can exasperate the matter of selectiveness. For example Olzak and colleagues (1994) noted that only half of her *New York Times* articles provided usable "counts on participants," Rucht and Neidhardt (1998) found that only 56 percent of their German articles had discernable body counts and Oliver and Myers (1999) noted that only 41 percent of police recorded events had size estimates.

10. In finding such inconsistencies, one may infer that the estimating practices were totally random and whimsical. However, total chaos did not rule as a very "loose" regularity emerged. In some instances, the extent of "completeness" seemed linked to mobilization spurts (middle October and late January). More precisely, during mobilization surges, a couple of the sources improved their percentile scores. For example, *UPI* languished with numerous small rates until it netted 35 percent and 77 percent in the later parts of January or the *New York Times* hit spates of 57 percent and 68 percent during some surges. However, being a very loose relationship meant that numerous cases presented high scores during movement lulls and static scores during movement surges.

11. When coding the presence or absence of information in 11,179 articles they found the following percentages for missing data—location of protest 0.2%, target of protest 20%, social composition of protesters 32%, number of protesters 48%, identification of participating groups 64%, forms of action 82% (Rucht and Neidhardt 1998, p. 82).

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