Patriotic Protest, Racist Revolt, or Just Another Event: Television News Framing of the Tea Party Movement

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Tea Party Movement

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Patriotic Protest, Racist Revolt, or Just Another Event: Television News Framing of the Tea Party Movement

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ABSTRACT

Research on the relationships between mass media and social movements has focused largely on the ways in which newspapers and mainstream television networks represent leftist movements. The conservative, pro-capitalist Tea Party movement, which began to receive national news coverage in February 2009, provides an opportunity to examine the same types of relationships on the other end of the political spectrum, in order to test generalizability of existing models. The Tea Party has received extensive media coverage by 24-hour cable news networks; these networks have not been included in prior studies on media framings of social movements. Using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis, and building on the theoretical framework of elite mediation, I inquire as to whether and how three major cable news networks and three national broadcast networks differ in their coverage of this movement. I also examine the extent to which frames put forth by movement members are accurately covered by these media outlets.

Analysis of the framing devices used by each network reveals significant positive and negative biases on the parts of Fox News Channel and Microsoft National Broadcasting Company, respectively. Consistent bias over time is also found for these two networks. Analysis of media accuracy in terms of describing the goals and motivations of protest actors also reveals differences between networks. Mainstream networks are found to provide more thorough and accurate descriptions of movement motivations, while the more biased cable networks limit the depth of their coverage to that which fits the ideological bent of the target audience. The findings presented in this paper extend our current understanding of the relationship between mass media and social movements, a relationship that is more complex and nuanced than prior research on media framings of social movements has shown.
Chapter 1.
Introduction

In February of 2009, weeks after a Democratic candidate was inaugurated as president, a conservative social movement new to the United States held its first national protest,\(^1\) which appropriated the language and tactics of the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Sparked in part by CNBC commentator Rick Santelli’s call to start a “Chicago Tea Party” on a February 19 broadcast of the morning business show *Squawk Box*, in which he ranted against the new administration’s proposed economic stimulus bill, thousands of protesters took to the streets on February 27 bearing tea bags and signs with slogans such as “Taxed Enough Already” and “Free Markets, Not Free Loaders.” Those looking to the television news media for an explanation of this contemporary “Tea Party” movement would be hard-pressed to find a consistent description of the movement from one television network to the next. A guest on one cable news program, describing a Tea Party protest on April 15\(^{th}\) of 2009, said: “This is about hating a black man in the White House. This is racism straight up. That is nothing but a bunch of tea bagging rednecks.” This kind of negative portrayal of a social movement should come as no surprise to those who have studied the relationship between social movements and the media; numerous studies have found that the media frequently delegitimizes and ridicules activists (e.g. Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Sobieraj 2011). However, the host of a news program on a

\(^1\) Small, local tea party protests were held as early as January 2009. In addition, the grassroots 2008 Ron Paul presidential campaign, as well as tax protests such as those that took place in Connecticut in 1991 and California in the 1970s, were concerned with similar issues and used imagery such as the Gadsden flag, which has since come to be a symbol of the contemporary Tea Party movement. These are all very much tied to the principles and ideologies of the U.S. Libertarian Party.
rival network, describing the exact same protest event, said: “what's amazing about what has happened today all across the country, is that the American is -- they're not thinking about themselves…they're thinking about the future of this country. And that's why everybody here [at the Atlanta Tax Day Tea Party] and everybody in New York and around the country inspires me.” What accounts for these vastly different portrayals of the same protest movement?

Television news, being situated within a field of news media that includes newspapers, magazines, talk radio and the internet, is currently the most popular format for the U.S. public. With the relatively recent additions of 24-hour cable news stations, television news plays an important role in representing social movements to the general public (Avery 2009; Cohen & Tsfati 2009; Entman 1989; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson 1992; Iyengar & Reeves 1997); therefore, it is important to study the ways in which television media portrays social movements. While some theories suggest that the media routinely portrays social movements in a negative light, these theories were generally developed by examining progressive movements (e.g. Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Gitlin 1980). The few studies that examine conservative social movements suggest that they are portrayed more favorably than leftist movements (Milne 2005). However, Bernstein and Burke (2010) suggest that the relationship is more complicated, and that

2 Pew Research Center’s annual report, “State of the News Media,” in 2010 showed that most Americans get their news from multiple sources, with television being the most common source. The Internet came in second, for the first time surpassing newspapers in popularity. Over 60% of Americans got most of their news from television in 2009, compared to radio, newspapers, and the Internet, which each received less than 40%. See http://stateofthemedia.org/2010/

3 CNN was launched in 1980, and Fox News Channel and MSNBC were each launched in 1996.
coverage may differ across media outlets based on media elites’ ties to various social movements. In examining the treatment that the Tea Party movement has received from various television news media outlets, I explore the possibility that coverage differs not only because the Tea Party movement is a conservative movement, but also because specific media outlets may have ideological or financial ties to the movement or to movement opponents.

Analyzing the relationship between television media and a conservative, pro-capitalist social movement will enhance our understanding of the ways in which the media can be used as a movement resource. In addition to the mainstream broadcast networks of ABC, NBC, and CBS, I focus on the three major 24-hour cable television news networks in the U.S.: Cable News Network (CNN), Microsoft National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC), and Fox News Channel (FNC). In order to examine the relationship between the media and social movements, this research will explore the following questions: What factors affect the relationship between the dominant media and social movements? To what extent do cable networks differ from broadcast networks in their coverage of social movements? To what extent do cable networks differ from each other in their coverage of a conservative social movement? Does framing of the movement vary across networks, and if so, how?

The Tea Party’s status as a conservative, right-wing movement will provide a unique opportunity to determine whether or not theories about the relationship between the media and social movements, based on liberal, leftist movements, apply to conservative, right-wing movements. The phrase “liberal media” has become common parlance in the United States; the phrase has become a meme, a unit that carries a cultural
idea from person to person throughout society. For many Americans, the phrase “liberal media” now stands for all major media outlets that are not blatantly conservative. In contrast to this meme that the U.S. media has an inherent liberal bias, or that the U.S. mainstream media can rightly be called “the liberal media,” I argue that what truly exists is a “niche media” in which various media outlets market their “news” in a way that aligns with different ideologically divided segments of the population. A number of hosts and guests on television news programs, as well as some politicians, contend that the Tea Party movement is a creation of cable network Fox News Channel (FNC), or that television personalities on the FNC network are responsible for mobilizing the movement; analysis of FNC transcripts will uncover whether and to what extent mobilizing frames were used by FNC news anchors and program hosts. In what follows, I review the literature on the media and social movements, lay out the theoretical framework from which I derive my hypotheses, describe my methods for testing each of the hypotheses, and provide quantitative and qualitative analyses of television coverage of the Tea Party movement.
Chapter 2.
Media, Framing, and Social Movements

Many researchers have theorized that the media is a powerful force in shaping public opinions, especially in regards to political issues (e.g., Powlick & Katz 1998; Cottle 2008; Cohen and Tsfati 2009; Avery 2009). Media outlets can serve to promote, delegitimize, or act as a neutral and unbiased informant on activist groups in their coverage of protests and demonstrations. Studies have examined the media’s role in promoting some political causes (e.g., Milne 2005; Walgrave & Manssens 2000), and in undermining other political causes (e.g. Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Gitlin 2003; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail & Augustyn 2001). Others have argued that studies on media bias have actually failed to demonstrate evidence of consistent bias, either positive or negative (e.g. Eveland & Shah 2003; Gunther 1992). The links between the media and social movements that have thus far been uncovered by scholars in the fields of sociology and communications have focused almost exclusively on media representations of leftist movements (Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Entman & Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Smith et al. 2001). None have examined the way 24-hour cable news networks cover social movements; rather, those that examine television coverage each focus on mainstream networks such as ABC, NBC, and CBS, and only one (Boykoff 2006) includes CNN in his analysis. My focus on the three, behemoth cable news networks, as well as a conservative movement, fills a void that exists in the literature. I examine whether there is a clear and consistent bias on the part of the six major television networks in favor of or against the Tea Party movement, and if so, what this might tell us about the relationship between television media and social movements.
This research builds on key insights of past research on media representations of social movements. Scholars in sociology, political science, and communications have examined the ways in which the media has presented protest movements to the public, and how media representations are framed in ways that can marginalize or sensationalize these movements (Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Entman & Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980; Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue 1989; Smith et al. 2001; Sobieraj 2011). In this view, media coverage is determined by how radical a movement’s tactics are; that is, the more controversial the protest event, the more negative coverage the event will garner. Moderate voices are excluded from coverage, and the more radical voices are accentuated. More recently, others have noted that professionalism of movement organizers is positively correlated to the amount of media coverage they garner (e.g. Andrews & Caren 2010), while still others have found that movement organizers or spokespeople that are seen as “too” professional are taken as inauthentic and are ignored by some journalists (Sobieraj 2011). In contrast, Bernstein and Burke (2010), while they also see media coverage as a function of external events, highlight movement ties to particular media outlets as major factors in determining coverage. Comparing across different television broadcast and cable networks, I examine whether any of these media outlets have financial or ideological ties to the Tea Party, and whether the outlets with ties offer more coverage of the movement, thus delving further into the relationship between the media and social movements.

Many scholars have explained that social movement groups with viewpoints opposing those of elite sources tend to receive unfavorable media coverage (e.g., Entman & Rojecki 1993; Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue 1989; Oliver & Myers 1999; Smith et al.
Despite this tendency of the media to frame most social movement protests in negative ways, movement actors seek out media attention in order to validate their particular agenda and gain visibility (Rohlinger 2002; Smith et al. 2001; Sobieraj 2011). Cottle (2008) also examines this trend of activist media-seeking, and states: “it is in and through the news media especially that the politics of protest and dissent is now generally conveyed to wider audiences, and it is by this same means that wider support and legitimacy for their actions and aims can be potentially won – or lost” (2008: 853-854). Cottle asks whether the media politics of dissent have changed over the last few years, and notes that the media’s agendas have shifted over time, from being predictably critical of protests and demonstrations to sometimes showing support of new social movement protests (see also Gitlin 1980). This research answers Cottle’s call for a better understanding of the “complexities and contingencies” involved in contemporary social movement portrayal in the media.

Given the corporate control over dominant media outlets, it would follow that media coverage would accentuate instances of status quo support to assuage advertisers, due to fears of oppositional rhetoric and discourse. The huge, multi-national corporations that control most U.S. media outlets, including all of the television networks used in this study,4 are without a doubt in favor of strong capitalism, which ties each of them to the pro-capitalist Tea Party movement. British journalist Kristy Milne (2005) finds that the coverage of some social movements is indeed more positive than that of others, and

4 General Electric owns NBC and MSNBC, The Walt Disney Company owns ABC, Time Warner owns CNN, The CBS Corporation owns CBS, and The News Corporation owns FNC. Each of these five multi-national corporations owns numerous other television, radio, and newspaper outlets, as well as other publishing and consumer products industries.
argues that this is because some protests are more politically acceptable to certain sections of the British news media and thus are covered more frequently than others. She notes the contrast between leftist movements and conservative movements, and describes the ways in which the British media have positively covered those protests that are based on conservative ideologies. My research, focusing on an American social movement and the American press, expands upon her findings. This inquiry adds to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between the media and social movements in that it uncovers whether past inquiries on media bias, which focused almost exclusively on leftist movements, can truly be generalizable.

**Theoretical Framework**

My research questions stem from three basic concepts: 1. Media outlets influence discourse by covering protest events in an interpretive way that depends upon the standing of the protest movement, which in turn is determined by the movement’s (or the movement’s opponents) ties to each media outlet; 2. Each media outlet will have a different relationship to, and provide a different interpretation of the movement based on whether the outlet is mainstream, has a political focus, and whether its political focus is slanted toward a particular ideology; 3. Mainstream media outlets will focus their coverage on events rather than issues, and the motivations and goals of movement actors will largely be ignored. I derive these three concepts from Bernstein and Burke’s (2010) elite mediation theory, Rohlinger’s (2007) analysis of the differences in quality of discourse between mainstream and political media outlets, and Sobieraj’s (2011) finding that mainstream media outlets cover movements in terms of their event activity rather than the issues that drive these events.
The elite mediation theory (Bernstein & Burke 2010), which draws somewhat from Amenta’s political mediation model (Amenta, Caruthers, and Zylan 1992), is an interactive model that incorporates the actions of social movements, media elites, and practices of journalism to explain the relationship between movement outcomes and media coverage. While this model focuses on understanding movement outcomes as they are impacted by the standing that some media outlets grant them, my focus is on the discourse itself, on how and why that discourse differs between outlets. I take Bernstein and Burke’s (ibid) first set of hypotheses regarding media-movement ties and standing, and adapt them to this study. Their first hypothesis, which was supported by empirical evidence, proposed that media outlets with close ties to a social movement would provide more coverage of the movement than media outlets that had weaker connections to said movement. Their next three hypotheses, also supported by their data, proposed that these two basic types of media outlets (those tied to a movement versus those that are more mainstream) would cover the movement in question in substantially different ways based on the standing the media outlet gave to movement actors. Where they inquire as to how various actors positioned within a movement are treated by different media outlets, I inquire into the ways in which each different outlet covers the movement as a whole. The elite mediation model explains the ways in which discursive patterns unfold over time; I will also test the model by examining the variations in representation of the Tea Party movement between and within networks over the course of three movement events.

Despite the widespread perception that there exists a “liberal media” that dominates all mainstream media outlets in the U.S., evidence points to a more conservative norm in dominant media discourse. Smith et al. (2001) note the
“procapitalist bias” (p. 1416) in mainstream media; because the Tea Party movement is a pro-capitalist movement, it follows that dominant media representations would skew on the side of favorability toward the movement, and that the mainstream media would offer a positive tone of movement coverage. However, the elite mediation model links media practices to social movements and their external events in order to analyze the interaction between the media and social movements, and suggests that ties to media elites differ across media outlets. This would lead us to suspect that the tone of coverage of a pro-capitalist movement may vary within and across networks based on each network’s ties to the movement. Rohlinger’s (2007) application of field theory (Bourdieu 1993) in her analysis of media discourse led her to find that political media outlets provide higher-quality discourse than mainstream venues. The three cable networks in my analysis devote their programming almost exclusively to politics, while the three broadcast networks diversify their news programming in order to appeal to a broader audience base. While the cable networks air news 24 hours per day, the broadcast networks only air a maximum of 6 hours of national news per day, which limits the amount of political discourse that can take place. I link the elite mediation theory to Rohlinger’s findings, and inquire as to how political cable news coverage differs qualitatively from mainstream broadcast news coverage. Specifically, is standing granted differently by cable networks in comparison to the way it is granted by broadcast networks? Does the standing granted to a movement by each individual network impact the depth of coverage each network devotes to the movement?

Related to these questions is the prevailing theory that news programs tend to focus their coverage on protests events rather than the issues behind the protests (see
Smith et al. 2001; Smith 2008; Sobieraj 2011). Sobieraj (2011), for example, finds that most movements do not get the amount of media coverage they desire, and even those that do attain some amount of media exposure fail to receive the type of coverage they would prefer. She finds that, in the vast majority of cases, mainstream media covers the activity of the protest event itself, and neglects to report the substance of the issue or issues that are being protested. Sobieraj’s media analysis, though impressive, is narrow; she examines mainstream newspaper coverage only. By examining national broadcast and cable television news coverage, which, as stated earlier, claims a larger audience than that of newspapers, I examine both political and mainstream outlets in order to compare the depth to which each type of network covers the Tea Party. By depth, I refer to the issues underlying protest events.

**Hypotheses**

This research reconsiders the relationship between the media and social movements as being uniformly or mostly negative, and looks into the connections between media elites and movement organizers in order to provide a broader picture of the relationship between social movements and the dominant media, and to provide a test of Bernstein and Burke’s elite mediation model. The elite mediation model suggests that media outlets that have ties to a movement not only provide more coverage of the movement, but also provide more coverage of the movement’s preferred frames (Bernstein & Burke 2010). This theory is based on the idea that ties exist between movements and media elites, and that these ties cause movements to be represented in different ways by different media outlets. I expand on this by suggesting that cable television differs from broadcast television in terms of both its coverage of and its ties to
different movements, and that cable news networks differ from each other in these same ways. In order to determine the ways in which cable news networks may provide distinct and contrasting coverage of a movement, I classify the three cable networks in terms of their ideological and financial ties to the Tea Party movement.

Fox News Channel

Glenn Beck was the host of the Fox News Channel (FNC) primetime program *Glenn Beck*, which aired from January 2009 to June 2011. On his radio show, which is syndicated by Premier Radio Networks, Beck announced on April 9, 2009 that he would be holding a $500 per plate fundraiser for the Tax Day Tea Party in San Antonio. In addition, Fox Nation, a website affiliated with Fox News (nation.foxnews.com), hosted a “virtual tea party” on April 15, 2009 that was promoted on some FNC programs. Fox News Channel also has ties to at least two of the groups that organize and fund national Tea Party events. FreedomWorks, led by lobbyist and former Republican congressman Dick Armey, has organized and funded numerous Tea Party events, including tax day tea parties and the 9/12 March on Washington. Steve Forbes, former Republican presidential hopeful and CEO of publishing giant Forbes, Inc., is on the board of directors of FreedomWorks and has a show on FNC called *Forbes on Fox*. Glenn Beck was also paid by FreedomWorks to do “live-read” advertisements in which he encouraged his radio listeners to join FreedomWorks. The 501(c)(4) corporation Americans for Prosperity has also provided funding for many national Tea Party events. Americans for Prosperity Policy Director Phil Kerpen has a column at FoxNews.com. It is also worthwhile to mention that News Corp., the media giant that owns FNC, is owned by Rupert Murdoch, who is well-known for his conservative ideological bent. These facts lead me to classify
FNC as a media outlet that has both ideological and financial ties to the Tea Party movement.

*Microsoft National Broadcasting Company*

Microsoft National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC) originally started as a network that provided a variety of views on political topics. Perhaps realizing their ratings would improve by attracting potential viewers on the left, rather than competing for FNC’s viewers, MSNBC began marketing its news and commentary programs toward the political left after the failure of several conservative programs such as *Alan Keyes is Making Sense* (2002), *The Savage Nation* (2003), *Buchanan & Press* (2003), and *Tucker* (2008). Those on the left had already begun tuning in for *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* in 2006, when Olbermann began his regular “special comments” segment, in which he was harshly critical of the conservative Bush administration. Two liberal, progressive radio talk show hosts, Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz, were then recruited to the network. *Rachel Maddow* and *The Ed Show* were added to the MSNBC lineup on September 8, 2008 and April 6, 2009, respectively. Ed Schultz also spoke at the “One Nation” rally and march in Washington, D.C. on October 2, 2010. This rally, which was heavily promoted by Schultz on both his television and radio programs, was touted as “the antidote to the Tea Party” by NAACP President Ben Jealous. In addition, in November 2010, Olbermann was fired from the network for contributing $2400 to Raul Grijalva’s congressional campaign the same day that Grijalva appeared on Olbermann’s program. Grijalva, the Democratic representative from Arizona’s 7th congressional
district, was ardently opposed by Arizona Tea Party groups. Currently, the promotional slogan for MSNBC programming is “Lean Forward,” connoting the network’s marketing toward a progressive audience. MSNBC’s marketing toward opponents of the conservative ideologies that the Tea Party promotes, as well as Olbermann’s financial contributions to anti-Tea Party candidates, leads me to classify MSNBC as having ideological and financial ties to movement opponents.

Cable News Network

I have uncovered no ties between Cable News Network (CNN) and either the Tea Party movement or its opponents; however, weak ties may exist between CNN employees and both movement activists and opponents. For example, Lou Dobbs, who is well known for his conservative viewpoints, hosted a program on CNN during the time frame used in my sample. Weak ideological ties may exist between Lou Dobbs and Tea Party proponents. Campbell Brown, daughter of a former Louisiana Democratic State Senator, also hosted a program on CNN during the time frame used in my sample. Based on her liberal background, weak ties may exist between Campbell Brown and Tea Party opponents. Because the bias that may or may not exist within CNN programming is balanced in this way, and because no financial ties have been found to exist, I classify CNN as having no ties to either the movement or to its opponents.

Based on the theoretical framework of elite mediation developed by Bernstein and Burke (2010), and with all of the above factors in mind, I derive my first testable hypothesis:

**H1:** Networks with ties to social movements will provide relatively more coverage of movement-related events than networks that have weak or no connections.

I test this hypothesis by counting the number of programs per network that offer coverage of the Tea Party movement. In order to delve further into the complexities of movement coverage across cable media outlets, I propose a set of three related hypotheses:

**H2a:** Networks with ties to social movements will provide more positive coverage of the movement than networks that have weak or no connections.

**H2b:** Networks with ties to opponents of social movements will provide more negative coverage of the movement than networks that have weak or no connections to opponents.

**H2c:** Networks without clear ties to the movement or its opponents will provide more neutral coverage of the movement overall.

I test each of these hypotheses by examining differences in frequencies of various framing devices across and within each of the three cable news networks. These four hypotheses help us to determine conclusively how the cable news networks provide disparate coverage of a movement. Because the three broadcast networks included in this study only air one to five hours of national news coverage each day, compared to the 24-hour news cycle of the cable networks, analysis of the broadcast networks, I conduct a separate inquiry into the ways mainstream broadcast coverage differs from cable coverage.

*The Broadcast Networks: ABC, NBC, and CBS*

The national news programs that air on the broadcast television networks ABC, NBC, and CBS are widely perceived to follow the normal rules of journalism, which include unbiased, balanced coverage of various events and issues (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Bennet 1996). While some accuse these mainstream outlets of having a “liberal
bias,” no peer-reviewed study has found this accusation to be true. In fact, Rohlinger (2007) found that, when comparing mainstream media outlets of *The New York Times* and ABC, NBC, and CBS nightly national news broadcasts against two liberal and two conservative media outlets in their coverage of pro-choice and anti-abortion movements, the mainstream outlets offer more balanced and inclusive coverage, and the political outlets “cover the positions with which they are most sympathetic in more comprehensive ways” (Rohlinger 2007: 134). While none of the cable news networks overtly claim to be either liberal or conservative, the ideological ties of FNC and MSNBC are apparent and I therefore classify them as political outlets. CNN, too, has the reputation of being a political news outlet, and should therefore also be included in this category. Following Rohlinger’s findings, and operationalizing quality of discourse in terms of tone and substance of coverage, I propose my next hypothesis:

**H3:** Cable news networks will differ significantly from national broadcast networks in the tone and substance of their coverage of a social movement.

By “tone,” I refer to the negative and positive frames used by the hosts and guests of news programs to describe the movement and its activities. This hypothesis is tested using both quantitative and qualitative measures. In search of the illusive “liberal bias,” I examine the ways in which each mainstream broadcast news program covers the Tea Party movement, and compare coverage across networks. I then compare the coverage of each broadcast network to each cable network.

I derive my last set of hypotheses from the idea that movement actors desire a type of coverage that they are rarely, if ever, granted. Sobieraj (2011) finds that mainstream media outlets tend to focus on the protest event itself and neglect to address the goals and motivations of activists (see also Smith et al. 2001; Smith 2008). Based on
this finding, as well as the idea that cable networks offer coverage that deviates from the journalistic norms of mainstream broadcast news, and coming from the framework of elite mediation, I propose my last set of hypotheses:

**H4a:** Networks with ties to a social movement will present the movement in a way that is consistent with the movement’s stated goals and motivations.

**H4b:** Networks with ties to opponents of a social movement will present the movement in a way that undermines or misconstrues the goals and motivations of the movement.

**H4c:** Networks with no ties to a movement or its opponents will focus on protest events more heavily than the goals and motivations of movement members.

These will be tested by comparing media descriptions of movement goals and motivations with the goals and motivations articulated in Tea Party group mission statements. These hypotheses further illuminate the differences between cable news networks and national broadcast networks, and enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between the dominant U.S. news media and social movements.

The theoretical framework of Bernstein and Burke’s elite mediation model fills gaps that expand upon the findings of Rohlinger (2007) and Sobieraj (2011), and provides a new perspective for the ways in which the media and social movements interact. I reconsider the relationship between dominant media and social movements as being uniformly or mostly negative, and look into the connections between media elites and movement organizers in order to provide a broader picture of the relationship between social movements and the media. A deeper understanding of the complexities of this relationship is necessary in order for social movement scholars to refine theories of movement strategies and outcomes.
Chapter 3. Research Design and Methods

In this analysis, I examine transcripts of television news coverage of the Tea Party movement from 2009. The programming of three 24-hour cable news networks and three national broadcast networks was chosen for the study: Fox News Channel (FNC), Cable News Network (CNN), Microsoft National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC), American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcast System (CBS), and National Broadcasting Company (NBC). I undertake multiple inquiries, some with each individual program as the unit of analysis, and some with each individual phrase spoken by the host or anchor of the program as the unit of analysis. Because a news anchor or program host would be perceived as the voice of authority for the news program, and because the host or anchor is expected to remain neutral and objective (see Tuchman 1972; Bennet 1996), the statements that a news anchor speaks tell us whether there is an underlying bias in the program. Using each entire program as the unit of analysis shows us something different; it includes statements made by guests, who are expected to give their opinion. By pooling all of the opinions voiced on a program, along with all neutral statements made about the movement, we can see whether the overall program is weighted either positively or negatively, or is neutrally balanced in terms of its general coverage of the movement.

I use a combination of quantitative content analysis (see, for example, Neuendorf 2001) and a form of discourse analysis that Altheide (1987; 1996) calls “ethnographic content analysis.” I use discourse analysis in order to examine the ways in which different networks frame the movement and its participants. Ethnographic content analysis involves a more reflective analysis of documents (Altheide 1987: 65, 67-68),
which was necessary in order to allow for the emergence of various themes as I examined the transcripts for overall tone (positive, negative, and neutral). Quantitatively, I employ content analysis to systematically analyze the frequency of the use of positive, negative, and neutral frames used by the television news media to describe the Tea Party movement, and to compare changes in the presence and frequency of particular frames between different networks. While some frames were developed deductively based on prior research, inductive analysis was also necessary due to the large number of positive frames I found, which other researchers have not found in their analyses of media coverage of leftist movements. Each of these analyses will illuminate the extent to which coverage and framing of a social movement differs by network and type of network (i.e. cable versus broadcast).

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is determined by the period of time around which three major protest events took place, along with the media limitations set above. The events included in this analysis are the first national Tea Party protest, the first Tax Day Tea Party, and the first 9/12 March on Washington D.C. I obtained transcripts of news programs from the LexisNexis News online database. Various search strings were used in order to retrieve every available transcript; searches for strings such as “tea party” and “rally” or “protest,” and for “9/12” and “march” or “protest,” as two examples, turned up 319 unique transcripts that contained discussion of a Tea Party event or the Tea Party movement in general, and came from one of the three networks during the period of time selected for the analysis.
I focus on periods of time surrounding the three main Tea Party protests of 2009. The first Tea Party protest occurred on February 27, 2009 but was sparsely attended and lacked much national media coverage. Eighteen transcripts were obtained for this time period. In order to show the origins of the movement, coverage of this event from the two-week period prior through the three-week period after the event will be included in the analysis (February 13 through March 20). I chose to examine transcripts from shows airing two weeks before each event in order to examine whether and how any networks covered the movement before the actual events took place. Messages in the media that may either discourage people from taking part in these events, or encourage and possibly recruit people to take part in these events, would be found in the weeks leading up to the event. I chose to analyze transcripts from shows aired during the three-week period after each event in order to examine whether and how networks covered the aftermath of each event; if a network were to offer consistently negative coverage of the movement, it would most likely do so after each event (it is difficult to ridicule protesters if they have yet to protest). The second Tea Party event, which was the first to gain wider attendance and media coverage, was the Tax Day protest on April 15, 2009. In order to maintain continuity in the bounds of the samples I analyze, the same 5-week time period will be used (April 1 through May 6); therefore, news coverage of this event, gathered from broadcasts aired two weeks before to three weeks after the actual event, are included in the analysis. One hundred and thirty-seven transcripts were obtained for this time period. The 9/12 March on September 12, 2009 has been the most heavily attended Tea Party protest thus far, with estimates of the crowd ranging from 30,000 to over 1,000,000 (no official estimate exists). News coverage of this event beginning on August 29 and ending
October 3 is analyzed, and 164 transcripts were obtained for this time period, leaving a total of 319 transcripts.

The ways in which social movement groups represent themselves and their goals are not always consistent with the ways the media chooses to represent them. In addition to analysis of television program transcripts, I include analysis of mission statements from official Tea Party websites, and compare these self-representations to the ways that media outlets represent the movement. Mission statements provide a point of comparison to media descriptions of the movement’s motives and agendas in order to demonstrate whether media accounts accurately reflect the movement’s stated goals and motivations.

A complete list of Tea Party groups is published online at the Tea Party Patriots website, teapartypatriots.org, and was retrieved on February 20, 2010. Each group listed has an “about” section in which the group’s mission statement can be found. A random sample of 200 of the 2,830 groups was chosen, and mission statements for each were downloaded and coded. At least one group from each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C. is represented in the sample.

Limitations

Scholars have noted that there are certain limits that should be recognized and accounted for when using the media to examine a social movement (e.g., Woolley 2000; Oliver & Myers 1999; Earl, Martin, McCarthy and Soule 2004; McCarthy et al. 1996). The three problems of using media accounts in research that McCarthy et al. (1996: 479) identify are:

(1) media bias in the selection of but a few of the many possible events to observe and report (selection bias)
(2) media bias in the descriptions of the events they do select to report (description bias)
(3) the reliability and validity of media trace recovery by researchers
(researcher bias)

In this research, description bias is what is being studied. Selection bias is not of concern
to this study, because the number of Tea Party protests that occurred is not the focus of
the analysis; rather, the content of the coverage is the focus (e.g. Ghaziani 2008). I
theoretically sampled three events in order to provide coverage of the Tea Party over a
span of time. Researcher bias proved slightly more difficult to overcome, due to the non-
existence of some program archives. Fortunately, LexisNexis and Factiva provide
complete transcripts of most programs. Both databases contain identical program lists,
and so I chose to use LexisNexis due to its ease of use in searching and downloading.

Relying on online databases for transcripts, however, poses a problem in terms of
internal validity. Although I attempted to locate transcripts from all cable news
broadcasts from multiple sources, including the websites of each network, archives of
some programs simply do not exist.\(^6\) While transcripts of all ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN
programs can be found in the LexisNexis database, many programs for the FNC and
MSNBC networks are not included in the database. Programs that aired during the
sampling frame on FNC whose transcripts are not included in the database are: *Fox and
Friends, America’s Newsroom, The Live Desk, Happening Now, Studio B with Shepard
Smith*, and *The Fox Report*. Programs that aired during the sampling frame on MSNBC
that are not included in the database are: *Andrea Mitchell Reports* and *MSNBC Live*. The
only transcripts from each of these programs that are included in the database are those

\(^6\) It should also be noted that the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, which is the
world’s most extensive archive of television news, does not have archives of any of the
programs in question.
portions of the programs that include interviews with political figures. Three such interviews from FNC programs (two from America’s Newsroom and one from Happening Now) and two from MSNBC programs (both from MSNBC Live) included discussion of the Tea Party, and they were included in this analysis.

Despite these limitations, the sample of obtained transcripts is rather large (N=319). Figure 1 shows that transcripts obtained for FNC programs outnumber those from all other networks, despite the unavailability of six of the fourteen news programs that aired during the week on FNC. In addition, 71 MSNBC transcripts were obtained, compared to the 79 transcripts from CNN, despite the unavailability of 2 of MSNBC’s daily programs compared to the full availability of all CNN programs. Network samples of this size provide adequate data from which to draw conclusions about each of the proposed hypotheses.

Frames Developed

I analyzed transcripts with the aid of QSR NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis software; the organizational capabilities of the program made analysis of the extensive amount of data significantly less challenging than it would have been otherwise. Coding
of the data included designing codes for speakers and arguments in favor of, against, and neutral to the movement. Following the approach of scholars such as Boykoff (2006) and Dardis (2006), concept categories include: neutral coverage, movement delegitimization, movement legitimization, and encouragement or recruitment of viewers to join the movement. This analysis utilizes 11 thematic codes used by the media to describe the Tea Party movement and its members (see Appendix, Table A1).

A frame is “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (Snow & Benford 1992:137). Frames are boundaries that focus on some elements while leaving other elements out of view. I employ and modify some of the frames developed by Boykoff (2006) in his study of media representations of the leftist WTO protests of 1999 for analysis of Tea Party coverage, including the ignorance frame, the freak frame, and the violence frame. The ignorance frame focuses on the lack of understanding that social movement participants have about the issues they are protesting. Boykoff’s “freak frame” places the focus on characteristics of protesters that do not align with cultural norms; I reconceptualize this into two separate frames: a delegitimizing frame and an insanity frame. The delegitimizing frame notes invalidation of the movement, characterization of Tea Party protesters as hypocrites, as being wrong about the issues, and as being a “fringe” movement. The insanity frame notes characterization of Tea Party protesters as “nut jobs,” “tea brain protesters” and “crazies.” Through the process of qualitative analysis, I developed two additional negative frames: the racism frame, and general ridicule. The racism frame is used to portray the movement as being motivated
by racism or as being composed of racist individuals. General ridicule refers to instances of Tea Partiers being referred to as “tea-baggers,” a term which has sexual connotations and was frequently followed by laughter in program transcripts. The presence of any of these frames in a program will show us the extent to which the movement was covered in a negative way.

Boykoff found only negative and neutral representations of the WTO protest movement; I expand on this typology by noting positive frames used by the media in their portrayal of Tea Party protests. Boykoff’s violence frame views protests in terms of the utilization of violent methods—regardless of whether such methods are present or not—and focuses on the presence or absence of violence. I decided to change this to a “peaceful frame,” based on qualitative inductive analysis in which I found very few references to violence or potential for violence, and rather found numerous instances of Tea Party events being described positively, as peaceful. The other positive frames I use were also derived from the qualitative process of ethnographic discourse analysis, and are as follows: legitimizing, normalizing, and patriotic. The legitimizing frame notes validation of the movement as being inevitable, of members as justifiably angry, and of the movement having a political impact. The normalizing frame focuses on movement

7 Although opponents of the movement have accused Tea Party members of being the first to refer to themselves as “tea-baggers,” I found no evidence to support this claim. I did, however, find evidence that at least one protester used the phrase “tea bag” as a verb at the first national Tea Party event. The man, protesting in Washington D.C., held a sign that read: “Tea Bag the Liberal Dems before they Tea Bag You!!” Also, in April 2009, several Tea Party websites encouraged visitors to “Tea bag the fools in DC.” See “The Evolution of the Word ‘Tea Bagger’” at http://theweek.com/article/index/202620/the-evolution-of-the-word-tea-bagger (retrieved May 7, 2010).
members being “average Americans” or as being first-time activists, working people, or just “moms and dads.” The patriotic frame focuses on movement members as being motivated by their love for America, or wanting to “take back their country.”

In addition to the positive and negative frames, I note neutral coverage and movement mobilization. Neutral coverage includes descriptions of actual events without judgment, and other statements that have no discernible bias. For example, on an April 15th episode of CNN’s Campbell Brown: No Bias, No Bull, the host stated: “All day, we have been watching thousands, some estimates say at least 10,000 people, gather at more than 300 organized anti-tax TEA Parties. In this case, TEA stands for Taxed Enough Already.” Value-free statements such as this are coded as neutral. Mobilization is noted by the “encouraging frame,” which focuses on the hosts, anchors, and guests of programs encouraging viewers to get involved in the movement. On an episode of FNC’s Fox News Watch on April 12, for example, the anchor stated: “Can't get to a tea party? FOX Nation hosts a virtual tea party. You can check it out on the site for the tea party in your area. Again, that is Wednesday, the 15th of April.” The encouraging frames goes beyond positive, to actually inciting viewers to take action and join the movement.

I did not find a single instance of a comparable “discouraging” frame to match the encouraging frame in any of the transcripts; however, the delegitimizing, insanity, ignorance and ridicule frames are all forms of what Ferree (2004) calls “soft repression.” This form of repression is deployed in the form of stigmatizing frames, which can be a force for discouraging participation in a social movement. When the anchor of a news program ridicules participants in a social movement, or claims that they are crazy or stupid, the viewer will most likely want to distance herself from the movement. There
may, therefore, be a discouraging effect, but it operates in the same way that the patriotic, legitimizing, normalizing and peaceful frames operate; the positive frames I identified can serve to “softly encourage” in the same way that the negative frames discourage. In contrast to both soft repression and the softly encouraging positive frames, the encouraging frame is blatant recruitment of viewers to participate in the movement. Blatant discouragement of participation in the movement was not found to exist in any of the programs in this sample.

I also code for overall tone per program. Rather than relying purely on qualitative analysis, as Dardis (2006) does, I look quantitatively at the number of positive, negative, and neutral frames used in each program in order to determine the overall tone of coverage. Overall tone includes phrases spoken by the host or anchor of a program, as well as program guests. In order to derive overall tone for each program, the number of positive, negative, and neutral frames used in each program was tallied, and the category with the highest score was chosen as the indicator of overall tone. When the scores of the positive and negative categories were even, the tone was coded as neutral because the program gave equal voice to both sides of the issue. One would expect most programs to have a neutral tone due to professional journalism norms of objectivity and fairness (Bennett 1996); however, in this era of niche marketing in cable news, fair and balanced reporting has become nothing more than an empty slogan for some news networks. When the scores were similar across categories, but not equal, qualitative analysis was undertaken and overall tone was gauged by an in-depth reading of the program transcript (see Dardis 2006, Altheide 1987). This method was necessary for less than 10% of all transcripts.
Statistical Analysis

The first hypothesis, which states that networks with ties to social movements will provide relatively more coverage of movement-related events than networks that have weak or no connections, is tested by a simple count of programs from each network that include discussion of the Tea Party movement or protest events; statistical significance is gauged with a chi-square test. The total number of programs per network over the full 15-week period is included in this analysis. I also examine the 5-week periods around each of the three protest events to gauge whether there is variation in the frequency of coverage over time for any of the networks.

The second set of hypotheses, which propose that some networks will provide more positive coverage of the movement and others will provide more negative coverage, is tested in two different ways. In the first analysis, I use each coded phrase spoken by the host or anchor of a program as the unit of analysis, with the dependent variable being the tone of each phrase. In the second analysis, I use each full program as the unit of analysis, with the overall tone of each program as the dependent variable. Because the dependent variable is ordinal, with three options of positive, neutral, and negative, and because the independent variable is nominal, differences in tone between the three cable networks is assessed with the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric difference of means test. The Kruskal-Wallis, or H test, is a one-way analysis of variance that does not assume a normal population and is thus suitable for ranked data (Kruskal & Wallis 1952). Lambda (a PRE statistic) is also reported.

In order to test the third hypothesis, which states that cable news networks will cover the movement differently than national broadcast networks, I take a mixed-methods
approach. I conduct an ordered logistic regression analysis to examine the impact of network on the tone of each program. I use ordinal logit due to the ordinal nature of the dependent variable (positive, neutral, negative). Rather than treating this variable as if it were continuous and applying a linear regression model, the ordinal logit model provides a more efficient and appropriate method for estimating regression for ordinal dependent variables (Winship & Mare 1984). Dummy variables were created for the independent variables CNN, MSNBC and FNC, with the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) collapsed and used as the reference category. This analysis will show whether there is a significant difference between the broadcast networks and any of the three cable networks. I also provide a qualitative analysis of the type of coverage each network provides, including whether any programs on the network deviate from or adhere to the norm of reporting the protest event rather than the motivations behind the event or the goals of the movement in general.

Self-representations of Tea Party groups, in the form of the random sample of mission statements and Declaration of Tea Party Independence, are then compared against television representations of the movement in order to test the fourth set of hypotheses. I expect that networks with ties to a movement will represent that movement in a way that aligns with their stated goals, and networks with ties to movement opponents will represent the movement in a way that undermines the movement’s stated goals. With each phrase as the unit of analysis, I compare the Tea Party’s specific goals and motivations stated in mission statements to the phrases that each network uses to describe the movement’s goals and motivations. Individual news programs that do not include any discussion of movement goals or motivations are also counted, and the
percentage of those programs are compared across networks. Prior research (e.g. Sobieraj 2011; Rohlinger 2007) leads us to expect that most mainstream news programs will neglect to address the goals and motivations of the movement; therefore, comparing the percentage of programs across networks that do address goals and motivations will further illustrate whether there are major differences between cable and broadcast networks.
Chapter 4.  
Testing the Elite Mediation Theory: Analyses and Results

The first set of hypotheses concern the connections between social movements and television networks, and how these connections affect the frequency and tone of network coverage. I take my first hypothesis directly from Bernstein and Burke’s (2010) study of newspaper coverage of a social movement, and adapt it to fit televised coverage: Networks with ties to social movements will provide relatively more coverage of movement-related events than networks that have weak or no connections. I conceptualize FNC as being closely tied to the Tea Party movement due to the unconcealed ideological bent of the majority of its news anchors and program hosts, as well as the network’s owner, Rupert Murdoch. Financial ties also exist between at least one FNC program host and the Tea Party movement; Glenn Beck has raised money for the cause. All other networks generally have no ties to the movement other than a mutual interest in capitalism. MSNBC has ties to movement opponents in much the same way that FNC has ties to the movement, and thus I would expect MSNBC to provide the least amount of coverage.

During the fifteen-week period covered in the sampling frame, 71 MSNBC programs, 79 CNN programs, and 137 FNC programs included discussion of the Tea Party. Programs on all three broadcast networks combined (ABC, CBS, and NBC) came to a total of 31. Figure 2 shows that Fox News Channel devoted significantly more airtime to the Tea Party than any of the other networks. Also of note is the huge leap in Tea Party coverage on CNN over time; figure 2 shows that CNN provided more coverage of the 9/12 March than did FNC. However, 6 programs that aired on FNC were not
Figure 2. Number of programs per network that covered the Tea Party movement.

![Figure 2](image)

Included in the analysis due to unavailability of transcripts, and the event itself occurred on a Saturday, a day of the week for which no FNC transcripts are available. Because the Fox Network ran a full-page ad in 3 national newspapers claiming to have covered the event,\(^8\) it is clear that the number of FNC programs included in this 5-week time period would have been greater if the transcripts had been available. Therefore, it is not conclusive that CNN actually provided the most coverage of this particular event.

Table 1 shows that, of the 319 programs included in the sampling frame, 42.95% of Tea Party coverage was broadcast on FNC, 24.76% on CNN, and 22.26% on MSNBC. The three broadcast networks combined only make up 10.03% of all Tea Party coverage. Because broadcast networks only air about an hour of national news coverage per day,

whereas cable networks air nearly 24 hours of news coverage per day, the disparity in coverage between broadcast and cable coverage is not surprising. What is somewhat surprising is the fact that FNC aired almost as much coverage as the other two cable networks combined. Had the six programs from FNC with unavailable transcripts been included in this analysis, the results would have undoubtedly produced even stronger evidence that FNC provided more coverage than the other two networks. Results of the two-tailed chi-square test show that the difference in the number of programs per network is statistically significant ($\chi^2=252.802$, $df=5$, $p<.001$). Thus, I reject the null hypothesis that coverage will be equal between the three networks, and conclude that the network with close ties to the movement did, in fact, provide more coverage of the movement.

Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c focus on connections between the movement and the three cable networks, and propose that FNC will provide more positive coverage than the other two cable networks, that MSNBC will provide more negative coverage, and that CNN will provide more neutral coverage than the other two networks, respectively. Framing devices were collapsed into three general categories (positive, negative and neutral) in order to create an ordinal scale of measurement. The unit of analysis for my first set of statistical tests is each phrase spoken by the host or anchor of a program. Table 2 shows that 78.71% of all positive phrases were spoken by hosts or anchors of FNC programs, which supports the hypothesis that FNC will provide the most positive

### Table 1. Total coverage of Tea Party Movement on 6 Major Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th># programs</th>
<th>% of all coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>42.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>24.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>319</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Differences in Frames By Cable Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Phrase</th>
<th></th>
<th>Per Program</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>78.71</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>24.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>87.22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>66.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>60.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coverage; 72.81% of all negative phrases were spoken by hosts or anchors of MSNBC programs, which supports the hypothesis that MSNBC will provide the most negative coverage; 66.74% of all neutral phrases were spoken by hosts or anchors of CNN programs, which supports the hypothesis that CNN will provide the most neutral coverage. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test found that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of the tone of each network (H=799.69 (df=2), p<.001). In addition, the Lambda statistic indicates that knowing the cable network on which a phrase was spoken will increase our odds of predicting the tone of the phrase by 57.3% (Lambda=.573, p<.001). It is important to note that this is a conservative test; Lambda can underestimate relationships, even when there are significant chi-square values, as is the case here.

When looking at overall tone per program, the results are very similar. The overall tone of each program takes into account the phrases spoken about the Tea Party by hosts and guests. When there was a balance in the opinions voiced on a program, and each different opinion was given relatively the same amount of airtime, I scored the program tone as neutral. When the opinions that were voiced were more positive than neutral or negative, I scored the program as positive; when the negative opinions outweighed neutral and positive opinions, I scored the program as negative. Results of
the Kruskal-Wallis H test again found that there is a statistically significant difference between the three cable networks when the unit of analysis is the program (H = 181.48, \( p < .001 \)). The Lambda statistic indicates that knowing on which cable network a program airs increases our odds of predicting the overall tone of coverage by 55.2% (Lambda = .552, \( p < .001 \)). Table 2 shows that 87.22% of cable network programs with an overall positive tone were aired on FNC programs, 71.08% of all negative cable coverage was aired on MSNBC programs, and 60.56% of all neutral cable coverage was aired on CNN programs. Therefore, each of the three hypotheses are again supported by the data.

Table 3 displays ordinal logistic regression estimates of the effect of network on the tone of coverage. The ordered logit model is preferred over other regression models when the dependent variable is ranked, as in this case where the dependent categories are positive, neutral, and negative, because other regression models have been shown to produce misleading results (Winship & Mare 1984, Long 1997). Again, network is found to be a statistically significant predictor of tone of coverage for each unit of analysis.
Table 4. Predicted Probabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unit of analysis is phrase</th>
<th>Unit of analysis is program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As network changes from CNN and FNC to MSNBC</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>-.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As network changes from CNN and MSNBC to FNC</td>
<td>-.349</td>
<td>-.150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CNN is the reference category.

MSNBC coverage of the Tea Party is significantly ($p < .001$) more negative than the other two cable networks, and FNC coverage is significantly ($p < .001$) more positive.

Table 4 shows the predicted probabilities of the ordered logit model. For a phrase spoken about the Tea Party movement by a news anchor on MSNBC, compared to those spoken by anchors on CNN and FNC, the odds that it will be negative increase by .610, the odds that it will be neutral decrease by .234, and the odds that it will be positive decrease by .376. For a phrase spoken about the Tea Party movement by a news anchor on FNC, compared to those spoken by anchors on CNN and MSNBC, the odds that it will be negative decrease by .349, the odds that it will be neutral decrease by .150, and the odds that it will be positive increase by .498. Table 4 also shows that the predicted probabilities produce similar results when the unit of analysis is the program. The second set of hypotheses regarding differences in tone of coverage among cable news networks attain consistent results; the network with ties to the movement provides more positive coverage, the network with ties to opponents provides more negative coverage, and the network with no ties provides the most neutral coverage. Therefore, I reject all three null hypotheses.
Cable News Framing Over Time

Collapsing the 11 framing devices into three value categories reveals differences in bias between the three networks, but looking at which frames were most dominant within each network across the three different movement events can reveal changes in each network over time. Table 8 shows the number of programs per network that included each of the 11 framing devices at least once. The percentage column for each network refers to the percentage of programs that used each framing device compared to all programs aired on that particular network during each event time frame. For example, 27 of the 36 programs (75%) that aired during the Tax Day Tea Party time frame on MSNBC contained the delegitimizing frame. 45 of the 55 programs, or 81.82% of FNC programs that aired during the 9/12 March time frame included the legitimizing frame. 100%, 64.71%, and 79.66% of CNN programs from each of the three events, in chronological order, contained value-neutral frames. The table shows that MSNBC provided consistently negative coverage over time, and FNC provided consistently positive coverage over time. In addition, it is clear that CNN provided consistently neutral coverage over time, but there is also the sudden appearance of the racism frame during coverage of the final protest event in the sample. The racism frame entered discourse on CNN at this time because of external events; President Jimmy Carter made headlines when he decried what he considered racism toward President Obama, and CNN anchors and guests debated whether the Tea Party was a racist movement thereafter. For CNN, we also see a significant increase in overall coverage over time, with only 17 CNN programs covering the Tax Day Tea Party in April and 59 programs covering the 9/12 March in September.
### Table 8. Dominant Frames Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Tea Party Event</th>
<th></th>
<th>Tax Day Tea Party</th>
<th></th>
<th>9/12 March on Washington</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>FNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimizing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalizing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegitimizing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ridicule</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insanity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilizing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Programs</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Neutral frames include Neutral, Positive, and Negative frames.
- Positive frames include Legitimizing, Normalizing, Patriotic, and Peaceful frames.
- Negative frames include Delegitimizing, General Ridicule, Ignorance, Insanity, Racism, and Mobilizing frames.
- The percentages are calculated based on the total number of programs for each event.
This jump in CNN coverage can be explained by two things: the prevailing theory that news programs tend to focus their coverage on protest events themselves (see Smith et al. 2001; Smith 2008; Sobieraj 2011), and the dialog that took place amongst the cable news networks regarding coverage of the Tea Party. In the weeks leading up to the 9/12 march, Tea Party organizations held a bus tour, the “Tea Party Express,” which took the Tea Party message to cities across the country, starting in Sacramento, CA on August 28, and ending in Washington D.C. for the march on September 12. This strategy on the part of Tea Party organizers was effective in terms of garnering media attention; there was a protest event or demonstration nearly every day in the weeks leading up to the march in D.C. Both CNN and FNC covered the bus tour nearly every day, with a field reporter from each network following the bus and reporting back to various news programs throughout each day. In addition to event-driven media coverage, the jump in CNN coverage could partly be explained by the dialog that took place amongst the cable news networks regarding coverage of the Tea Party. While hosts, anchors and guests of MSNBC and CNN programs frequently pointed to FNC as a mobilizing force behind the movement (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of this), FNC hosts and guests accused other media outlets of either dismissing the movement altogether, or of ridiculing or otherwise delegitimizing Tea Party activists and their concerns. FNC’s ceaseless criticism of other networks’ alleged lack of Tea Party coverage might have incited CNN producers to overcompensate in their coverage of the 9/12 March.

However, despite CNN’s increased coverage of the Tea Party, FNC continued to present itself as the only network that gave the movement adequate media coverage. On September 19, Fox News ran a full-page ad in *The Washington Post*, which showed a
photograph of a sea of protesters at the 9/12 March in D.C. with the text “How did ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, and CNN miss this?” CNN anchor Rick Sanchez spent a considerable amount of time defending CNN’s coverage of the event on the September 19th episode of Newsroom, and replayed clips of CNN’s 9/12 coverage. Sanchez also humorously pointed out that the photo used in the Fox News ad was taken by a CNN tower camera. He ended his lengthy monologue with the following statement, which was directed at FNC:

“Bottom line is, we do cover the news. And we did extensively cover this event. We didn't promote the event. That's not what real news organizations are supposed to do. We covered the event. I would invite you to look into that distinction between those two words, promote and cover. Cover is kind of like a fair and balanced way of doing things. You get it? You might want to look into that.”

This kind of conversation between the cable news networks occurred frequently, and usually centered on FNC’s promotion of the movement versus “mainstream media’s” neglect or misrepresentation of the movement.

The use of the racism frame provides another example of this dialogue. CNN programs that included the racism frame focused on the controversy that erupted after President Jimmy Carter, in an interview with Brian Williams on NBC Nightly News, accused the Tea Party movement of being motivated by racism against President Barack Obama. CNN programs that addressed this controversy always included the viewpoints of two or more guests, who debated whether or not Carter’s accusation had merit. Programs aired on MSNBC that used the racism frame also addressed this controversy; however, hosts and in-studio guests of MSNBC programs accused Tea Party members of racism as well. For example, an episode of Countdown with Keith Olbermann that aired

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1 The official FNC slogan is “Fair & Balanced.”
on April 16, 2009, included the following exchange between celebrity guest Janeane Garofalo and the program’s host:

OLBERMANN: We’re now joined by actor and activist Jeanine [sic.] Garofalo. Good to see you.
JANEANE GAROFALO, ACTOR: Thank you. You know, there is nothing more interesting than seeing a bunch of racists become confused and angry… Let’s be very honest about what this is about. It’s not about bashing Democrats. It’s not about taxes. They have no idea what the Boston Tea party was about.
OLBERMANN: That’s right.
GAROFALO: They don’t know their history at all. This is about hating a black man in the White House. This is racism straight up. That is nothing but a bunch of tea bagging rednecks. …That guy caused in them feelings they don’t know because of their limbic brain – we’ve discussed before, the limbic brain inside a right- winger or Republican or conservative or your average white power activist - - the limbic brain is much larger in their head space than in a reasonable person. And it is pushing against the frontal lobe. So their synapses are misfiring… Again, this is about racism. It could be any issue, any port in a storm. These guys hate that a black guy is in the White House…

FNC programs used video clips of this exchange to delegitimize the NBC network, which owns MSNBC. For example, on an April 20th broadcast of FNC’s The O’Reilly Factor, host Bill O’Reilly called Garofalo’s comments “the most hateful attacks on the tea party demonstrators the TV news business has ever seen in its history” and claimed: “General Electric boss Jeff Immelt and his henchman, NBC president Jeff Zucker, have encouraged personal attacks and hate speech on the air for years, trying to boost sagging ratings at NBC. But that strategy has been an enormous failure.” It is also notable that the negative racism frame was not found in any FNC programs at all. In fact, the only time discussions of racism within the Tea Party occurred on the FNC network is when FNC hosts attempted to legitimize the movement by stating that racism has nothing to do with the motivations behind the movement.

Another glaring difference between the three networks is the fact that MSNBC and CNN did not use the encouraging frame, but FNC hosts consistently encouraged their
viewers to attend Tea Party events over time (see Table 8). FNC consistently portrayed Tea Party activists as normal, everyday working people, as parents who were concerned for their children’s futures, and as patriotic Americans who wanted to “take their country back.” Those who took part in Tea Party events were referred to as “great Americans” on numerous FNC programs, implying that anyone who did not take part in the movement was un-American. An April 10th episode of *Glenn Beck* featured actor Bob Basso, dressed in colonial garb as Thomas Paine, delivering a lengthy and passionate monologue during which he likened the coming Tax Day Tea Party to a second American Revolution. Basso ended his tirade with a call to action: “Now is the right time to be a patriot. My name is Thomas Paine. I’m ready to take back America. Are you?” This type of encouragement has not been noted in any of the studies that have focused on mass media representations of social movements.

In this chapter, I have shown that dominant television news coverage of this movement varies widely between FNC, MSNBC, CNN and the three mainstream broadcast networks. FNC, the network with financial and ideological ties to the Tea Party movement, covered the movement more often and in a significantly more positive way than all other networks. Likewise, MSNBC, the network with financial and ideological ties to opponents of the Tea Party, covered the movement less frequently than the other two 24-hour networks, and did so in a significantly more negative way. These results were consistent over three protest events that spanned a nine-month period. In the next chapter, I test the last two sets of hypotheses.
Chapter 5.

Political vs. Mainstream Media Outlets

My next hypothesis proposes that cable news networks will differ significantly from national broadcast networks in the tone and substance of their coverage of a social movement. Because news programming on cable networks airs 24 hours a day, and broadcast networks only run one to five hours of national news coverage per day, cable networks have more time to spend on politics, and are therefore categorized as political media outlets. Based on previous studies of the way protest events are covered in the mainstream media (Boykoff 2006, Dardis 2006, Smith et al. 2006), one would expect that broadcast networks would provide more negative coverage than positive coverage. While this seems to be the case for news anchors on ABC, results at the phrase level of analysis show that CBS and NBC provided slightly more positive than negative coverage. Table 5 shows that all three broadcast networks and CNN are quite balanced in terms of their negative and positive coverage, and provide mostly neutral coverage, as journalistic norms would lead us to expect. The percentage of neutral coverage, in fact, is over 50% for each of the three broadcast networks and CNN. Only FNC and MSNBC differ noticeably from broadcast networks at the phrase-level analysis.

When the unit of analysis is each news program as a whole, the results are similar. Table 6 shows that all three broadcast networks aired programs that were mostly neutral in their coverage. NBC is nearly identical to CNN in terms of its percentage of negatively, neutrally, and positively toned programs. ABC provided the least amount of coverage, but it also provided the most balanced coverage overall. Although hosts of ABC news programs spoke more negative than positive phrases about the movement (see
### Table 5. Network Frames by Phrase Spoken by News Anchor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Broadcast</th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.81</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70.97</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51.61</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>293</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>108</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>499</td>
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### Table 6. Network Frames by Program

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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<td>11.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Negative</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5), the overall tone of the majority of programs was neutral; only one program was negative, and only one was positive. CBS was the most neutral of the networks, but it had no overall positive program, and FNC had no overall negative program. Coverage on broadcast networks and CNN is about what we would expect based on other studies: it is slightly more negative than it is positive, and it is largely neutral.

Table 7 displays ordinal logistic regression estimates of the effect of network on the tone of coverage with broadcast networks ABC, CBS, and NBC used as the base. The results of this analysis show that MSNBC’s coverage of the Tea Party is significantly \((p < .001)\) more negative than broadcast networks, and FNC’s coverage is significantly \((p < .001)\) more positive. The results for CNN, however, show relatively no difference from broadcast networks, and are not significant. Therefore, the difference in coverage is not actually between broadcast and cable news networks, but between networks that follow traditional norms of journalism, and those that are marketed toward a niche.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unit of analysis is phrase</th>
<th>Unit of analysis is program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>-3.12* (.251)</td>
<td>-2.59* (.468)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>2.59* (.224)</td>
<td>3.30* (.433)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>-0.002 (.210)</td>
<td>-0.203 (.396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1487</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR ( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>1132.75*</td>
<td>270.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-1064.29</td>
<td>-209.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) are collapsed as the reference category. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\(*p < .001\)
Reporters on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN news programs follow traditional rules of journalism, and provide unbiased coverage of social movements. FNC and MSNBC target viewers from one of each end of the political spectrum, and present the news in a way that resonates with the ideologies of these niche markets.

Despite the meme that there is a liberal bias in the media, the results of my first three sets of hypotheses consistently show that only cable network MSNBC has what one could call a liberal bias. In contrast, cable network FNC has a strong conservative bias, and CNN as well as the three mainstream broadcast networks provide their viewers with largely unbiased coverage. These results lead me to conclude that, because FNC and MSNBC are marketed towards two ideologically opposing ends of the viewing public, each of these two cable networks operates under different spheres of consensus.

According to Daniel C. Hallin (1986), there are three different spheres of media coverage in which a topic may be placed: the sphere of consensus, the sphere of legitimate contention, and the sphere of deviance. For CNN and the broadcast networks, social movements in general fall into the sphere of legitimate contention, in which news anchors are obliged to remain disinterested reporters because it is assumed that rational and informed people will hold differing views on the topic. Because FNC is marketed toward the conservative niche, a conservative movement like the Tea Party would fall into the sphere of consensus for that cable network. FNC anchors assume that their viewers are conservative, and so the anchors “do not feel compelled either to present opposing views point or to remain disinterested observers” (ibid., p. 117). Likewise, MSNBC is marketed toward the liberal niche; a conservative social movement falls into the sphere of deviance for MSNBC viewers. For a topic in the sphere of deviance, reporters play the
role of “condemning… those who violate or challenge the political consensus” (ibid.), hence MSNBC news anchors feel free to ridicule and question the motives of Tea Party activists.

I have demonstrated the ways in which broadcast networks differed from cable networks in their tone of coverage of the Tea Party movement. Next, I will focus on the second part of my third hypothesis: that broadcast networks will differ from cable networks in the substance of their coverage of the movement. Again, we would expect coverage to be different based on Rohlinger’s (2007) findings that political media outlets provide more high-quality political discourse.

The vast majority of broadcast network programs only covered the Tea Party when an event was taking place, or had just taken place. Protest events were covered the day of the event, the day after, and the weekend after on national broadcast news programs. On those few occasions when the Tea Party was mentioned more than seven days before or after a protest event, it was mentioned by a guest rather than the anchor of the program (1 ABC program, 2 NBC programs, and 3 CBS programs). This is consistent with the scholarship that shows media coverage of social movements to be largely event-based (e.g. Sobieraj 2011). In contrast, the vast majority of cable news programs that covered the Tea Party did so in the weeks leading up to and following major protest events. Hosts, anchors, and guests on cable news programs discussed the Tea Party movement and its political implications far more frequently than broadcast news programs; over 60% of programming on each cable news network covered the movement when no events were taking place.
Another way in which broadcast networks differ from cable networks is in their coverage of the movement. Hosts and anchors of cable news programs were seemingly obsessed with the way the Tea Party was being covered on other cable networks, sometimes spending entire segments discussing the coverage, or lack of coverage, on another network (see chapter 4 for an example of such a segment). On the April 19th episode of CNN’s Reliable Sources, the host described coverage of the Tax Day Tea Parties as: “a classic case of media subjectivity, of night-and-day decisions about what’s important and what’s ephemeral. For Fox News, this week’s TEA party tax protests were a huge story. For CNN, a rather modest story. And for MSNBC, a great story to make fun of.” Figure 3 shows that no programs on FNC mentioned any other network promoting the movement, and no programs on MSNBC mentioned any other network dismissing it. However, a handful of guests appearing on FNC programs (including one Tea Party activist) did accuse FNC itself of promoting the movement. FNC program hosts cited CNN reporter Susan Roesgen’s biased coverage of the Tax Day Tea Party multiple times, and more frequently cited the “mainstream media” or “liberal
media” or just plain “the media”—as if FNC is not part of the media—as dismissive of the movement, or of “not getting it.” For all of FNC’s criticism of other networks, not once did an FNC anchor or host utter the name of MSNBC or any of its programs. Even when both Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly spent an entire segment of each of their FNC shows, Hannity and The O’Reilly Factor, respectively, discussing the way the Tea Party was described by a guest on MSNBC’s Countdown With Keith Olberman, both hosts repeatedly referred to MSNBC as NBC. They both played the same clip of the Countdown episode in which guest Janeane Garofalo accuses Tea Party activists of being racist, yet they consistently refer to the program as an NBC news program. Hannity went so far as to say that Tom Brokaw, long-time news anchor of NBC Nightly News, should be ashamed of his network. This resistance to naming the actual perpetrator, and in fact accusing the wrong network of bias, could be FNC’s way of dismissing MSNBC as a legitimate news source and of convincing FNC viewers that mainstream media such as NBC is not as “fair and balanced” as FNC claims to be. MSNBC program hosts, on the other hand, had no problem naming names, and consistently named Fox News Channel, Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, and Neil Cavuto as promoters and recruiters of the Tea Party movement. CNN, meanwhile, covered other media coverage much less often than either FNC or MSNBC, and noted that its own reporter, Susan Roesgen, was responsible for a very dismissive segment on the movement.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of programs on broadcast networks in which time was spent discussing the ways the movement was covered by other networks. Comparing the three broadcast networks to the niche-marketed cable networks of FNC and MSNBC shows a clear difference; however, comparing broadcast networks to CNN, we see little
Figure 4. Broadcast News Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Other Media Dismissing</th>
<th>Other Media Promoting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABC</strong></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CBS</strong></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NBC</strong></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

difference. ABC is the outlier; it mentions other networks promoting the Tea Party more often, as a proportion of its programming, than CNN. Three ABC programs discussed FNC’s promotion of the events, and included clips of FNC hosts and anchors encouraging their viewers to attend a Tea Party protest. CBS and NBC look very much like CNN in their frequency of discussion about other media. Interestingly, and despite O’Reilly’s opinions to the contrary, NBC, which is MSNBC’s sister network, discussed the ways in which other media outlets were dismissing the movement twice as often as they mentioned other media (they never mention FNC) promoting the movement.

I have shown two ways in which the substance of broadcast news coverage of the Tea Party differed from that of niche-marketed cable news coverage. Broadcast news focused on protest events more heavily than all cable news programs, and the hosts and anchors of niche-marketed cable network programs spent much more time discussing the ways in which other networks covered the movement than did the hosts and anchors of CNN and broadcast news programs. In the section that follows, I will discuss the results.
of my fourth set of hypotheses, which will further illuminate the ways in which broadcast news coverage of the movement differs substantively from cable coverage.

**Tea Party Self-Representations vs. Media Representations**

In order to test the fourth set of hypotheses, which inquire into accuracy of media representations compared to self-representations of Tea Party activists, I compare media coverage to the mission statements of 200 local-level Tea Party groups, which I randomly selected and downloaded from the website teapartypatriots.org/allgroups.aspx in February 2010. This website lists 2,830 local-level Tea Party groups nationwide, by state, along with information about each group and links to each group’s website, when applicable. The website teapartypatriots.org is the official site of the Tea Party Patriots, Inc., which is one of the first national Tea Party organizations to have formed in 2009. It is a 501(c)(4) and describes itself as “non-partisan, non-profit social welfare organization” on its website. Its social networking site, at teapartypatriots.ning.com, boasts the headline: “Official Home of the Tea Party Movement.” Although the Tea Party Patriots, Inc. has its own mission statement, I believe that the mission statements of small, local, and genuinely grassroots organizations are more appropriate to examine, in order to gauge the overall motivations and goals of the movement as defined by the people who are actually doing the protesting rather than large, national umbrella groups.

**Motivations**

One hundred and fifty-nine mission statements, nearly 80%, mention at least one motivation of the movement. Figure 5 displays the frequency of each articulated motivation from Tea Party mission statements. Slightly over half of all mission statements mention the constitution as an important motivating factor of the movement.
Many claim that the constitution is being threatened, or that the U.S. government is already operating unconstitutionally. A group from Alaska describes itself as: “A group of Americans that believe in defending the US Constitution.” Many others cite the constitution as the document that all of their political beliefs are based on, such as the economy and the size of government. Table 9 shows that all networks under-represented the Tea Party’s concern over the constitution, and CNN covered this motivation more than any other network. ABC and CBS do not mention the constitution at all in their Tea Party coverage. The second most common motivation, mentioned in 36% of mission statements, is the concern that government has grown too big, and needs to be limited. The belief in limited government is usually tied to the constitution; for example, a Tea Party group in California seeks to “defend our constitution by fighting for Constitutionally limited Government.” I coded this statement as being motivated both by a belief in limited government and by the constitution. Again, CNN mentions this motivation more than any other network. As a percentage of all programming NBC is next in line, covering the concern over big government in 38% of its programs, and FNC
### Table 9. Percentages of Media Representations of Tea Party Motivations by Network*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statements</th>
<th>FNC</th>
<th>MSNBC</th>
<th>CNN</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>CBS</th>
<th>NBC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit Gov’t</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/ Liberty</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Beck</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Socialist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Generation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Immigration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Anti-Obama</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>Anti-Health Care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole. More than one motivation was mentioned in many broadcasts, and no motivations were mentioned in others, hence columns do not add to 100.

comes in third with 25%. ABC, CBS, and MSNBC rarely mention this motivation.

Connected to both the constitution and a limited government is the motivating factor of freedom and liberty being at stake, which appears in 29% of mission statements. For example, a group in Kentucky claims: “We are a group of like-minded citizens who are alarmed by what we see our government is doing to our freedoms and country and want to do our part to stop it before it is too late.” Likewise, a group in Louisiana states: “We will take to the streets every chance we get to make our voices heard and spread the word that our freedom, our very way of life is under attack.” Surprisingly, CBS covered this motivation more often, as a percentage of its total program coverage of the Tea Party, than any other network. Not surprisingly, this motivation occurs on CBS and all other networks in the form of interviews with Tea Party activists. In most cases, it is the protesters themselves that describe the movement as being motivated by a need to preserve freedom and liberty, and not news anchors or program hosts making these claims.

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The economy came in as a close third among mission statement motivations. Various concerns about the economy, including government spending, the stimulus package, and the national debt occur in 34% of all mission statements. One of many groups from Texas is “concerned about reckless overspending.” Others cite the growing national debt and a lack of “fiscal responsibility” and “free market values” as motivations for the movement. All networks cited the economy as a motivating factor for the movement (see Table 9), each of them citing government spending as one of the most salient issues. Concern over high taxes made up only 15% of mission statement motivations. The mission statement of a group from New Mexico puts it in strong terms, describing the group as being comprised of: “Non-partisan citizens working to affect policy to keep our freedoms and liberties safe and guard against tyrannical taxation.”

Most Tea Party groups seem much more concerned about the state of the economy in general than in the current tax rates. All networks also covered the concern over high taxes, and, with the exception of NBC, they each overrepresented taxes as a motivating factor. More than half of all tax references occurred on programs that aired during the Tax Day Tea Party time frame; all broadcast network coverage of taxes as a motivating factor occurred during the Tax Day Tea Party, with the exception of one ABC broadcast the day after the 9/12 march, in which an activist mentioned her opposition to taxes. Again, this would be expected due to event-based coverage.

A deep concern for future generations is also a common theme in mission statements. A group from Massachusetts urges: “Save the next generation from economic ruin!” while a group from Indiana brings partisan politics into view: “We must take our country back at all levels of government in the next election cycles replacing the
big spending, big government progressive liberals with constitutional conservatives to save our republic for the next generation.” Television news programs also link the concern for future generations to concerns over the economy, in particular, government debt. The three broadcast networks and CNN covered this motivation in mostly neutral terms, while FNC and MSNBC covered it somewhat differently. The day of the Tax Day Tea Party protests, a pundit on MSNBC’s *The Rachel Maddow Show* seemed to attempt to delegitimize the movement when she said: “There were a surprising number of children being forced to hold propaganda that had to do with holding their future for ransom.” A few days later, reflecting on the same event, a pundit on FNC’s *Fox News Sunday* legitimized the movement when he said: “It's the public's credit that it's prospective and it's about their children and their grandchildren…It's very much, I think, to these protesters' credit that they actually care about the future, and they think these are unwise policies.” The general theme of motivations being used to delegitimize the movement ran through MSNBC’s coverage, while the general theme of motivations being used to legitimize the movement ran through FNC’s coverage and all other networks were largely neutral.

In addition to concerns about future generations, the economy and growing government, many groups are motivated by their opposition to policies, ideologies, and the President. One such motivating factor is opposition to immigration, or having some sort of resistance to immigration, as the mission statement of a group from El Paso, Texas demonstrates:

We are cosmopolitan American citizens who, while appreciating the vast array of talents & skills immigrants can offer our economy and culture, strongly believe that our naturalization laws need to be followed so as not to be made a mockery of; & if those laws structurally make foreigners less likely to assimilate, those
laws must be amended so as to make them pragmatic & fair to all those desiring to become legal American citizens, just like us [sic].

Only 3% of mission statements mention opposition to immigration, and the three cable networks cover this motivation in an equitable amount. None of the broadcast networks mention immigration, which could stem from with the fact that none of the protest events themselves were tied to anti-immigration issues.

I code as “anti-socialist” any statement that refers to being opposed to socialism, communism, or Marxists. A group from Greene County, Indiana includes all three in their mission statement: “Organized for the purpose of apposing [sic] socialism, communism and other Marxist philosophy in our local, state and federal governments.”

Again, while FNC, CNN and the broadcast networks covered this motivation in mostly neutral terms, either citing the presence of protest signs that mentioned socialism or airing activists speaking to that message, MSNBC used the anti-socialist motivation to ridicule protesters. For example, on an episode of The Ed Show that aired on September 18, host Ed Schultz said: “Look at this disgusting image that TEA Partiers are pushing. The president depicted as a witch doctor. His name associated with a hammer and sickle.” In mission statements, opposition to socialism is sometimes connected to the motivating factor of President Obama, whom some believe is a socialist or communist. Only 2% of mission statements cite opposition to Obama as one of their motivations. A group from Boston claims: “Not knowing your enemy has caused the American people to be duped into supporting a Communist, Obama, whose friends include urban guerillas from the Weathermen and Saudi princes who oppress their own people.” All networks over-represent opposition to Obama as a motivating factor behind the movement, and
there was no significant difference between networks as to how this motivation was framed.

I code any mention of Glenn Beck or his 9/12 Project as evidence that the group was motivated by Beck. Beck launched his “9/12 Project,” complete with website (http://the912-project.com), in March of 2009 on a special episode of his FNC program. The 9/12 Project is an activist training program that is based on a list of 9 principles and 12 values, which Beck claims are based on 28 principles that the Founding Fathers used to build the country. While all of the other motivating factors I discuss refer to issues of concern, Glenn Beck represents an inspirational motivating factor for twenty (10%) of the Tea Party groups in this sample. For example, the mission statement of a group from Charlotte, North Carolina, which calls itself CAUTION (Common Americans United to Inspire Our Nation) states: “CAUTION is a Conservative action group formed as a response to Glenn Beck’s 912 project [sic].” In this way, Glenn Beck is cited as a person who has motivated the founders of this group to take action. Other than Beck’s promotion of the 9/12 Project and march on his own program, Greta Van Susteren was the only FNC host to link the 9/12 march with Beck’s 9/12 Project. On September 14, Van Susteren said: “Saturday was the big event, and it was, of course, promoted most by Glenn Beck.” CNN and MSNBC also noted Beck’s promotion of the event, CNN using neutral language like that of Van Susteren, and MSNBC mostly making fun of Beck. For example, on the September 1, 2009 episode of *Countdown With Keith Olberman*, Olberman claimed that Beck was “insisting that if you do not attend his phony-baloney 9/12 rally, it will lead to slavery. He actually said that.” On the broadcast network side, ABC and NBC refrained from mentioning Glenn Beck’s involvement with the
movement, while two CBS programs mentioned Beck’s influence. Both CBS programs mentioned Beck in the same neutral way that most CNN programs did; one CBS anchor claimed that the 9/12 march “got a boost from FOX News talk show Glenn Beck, who urged his viewers to come today,” and a Sunday morning program included a clip of a Tea Party protester saying: “Glenn Beck is the one that we want to thank for a lot of this.”

The two motivations with the least occurrence in the mission statements are the concern over protecting the second amendment or the importance of owning guns, and opposition to health care reform. A group from Southern Utah claims: “We espouse the attributes and values that made this country so great [such as]...the right to bear arms.” Both CNN and MSNBC used the concern over guns to question the legitimacy of the movement, citing in particular the tendency for activists to bring guns to Tea Party events. Only one FNC program noted this motivation; Glenn Beck hosted a special episode of his program on April 1, 2009, in which he spent the hour talking with Tea Party activists, and at one point said: “There are more gun owners here in this group than there are in the entire island of Manhattan.” None of the broadcast networks noted the presence of guns at rallies or any concern over the second amendment. Only one of the 200 mission statements mentioned opposition to health care reform as a motivating factor. This group, from Texas, describes its membership as: “Concerned citizens of NE Tarrant County who are ready to fight government run healthcare, Cap and Trade, and the overall move towards Socialized Government.” However, all networks noted opposition to health care as a major motivating factor, especially for the 9/12 march. While most networks covered this motivation in a neutral way, citing protest signs and quoting
activists’ views on health care reform, MSNBC used the motivation, once again, to undermine the movement. Hosts of MSNBC programs frequently brought up the use of protest signs that read “Bury Obamacare with Kennedy,” which, less than 3 weeks after Senator Ted Kennedy died of cancer, made the protesters look cold-blooded and ignorant.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of all programs from each network that mentioned at least one motivation; the number of programs from each network is denoted above the bar. All three broadcast networks, as a proportion of their respective programming, covered the motivations of the movement more often than any of the cable news networks. Every ABC program mentioned at least one of the 12 motivations. CNN came closest to the broadcast networks in the proportion of its programming that included movement motivations. The four motivations that MSNBC covered most frequently were almost always linked to a negative frame: the economy and taxes were linked to the ignorance frame, anti-socialism was linked to the insanity frame, and opposition to Obama was linked to the racism frame. While the comparatively low proportion of
FNC programs that covered a motivation of the movement may seem surprising, it is consistent with recent research that shows depth of movement coverage correlated to the use of negative frames. Defining “in-depth” coverage as including discussions of activists’ goals and motivations, Gunby (2011) found that depth of coverage of the WTO protests was significantly correlated with the use of negative frames such as ignorance and the freak frame (see also Boykoff 2006). FNC programs contain the lowest amount of negative frames, and spent more time discussing legitimacy and normalizing activists (see Table 8) than discussing the motivations behind the movement. The motivations covered by MSNBC were nearly always linked to a negative frame, which is consistent with Gunby’s (2011) results. However, motivations mentioned by CNN and the broadcast networks are tied to neutral coverage rather than negative. This discrepancy could be caused by the tendency for WTO protests, which are usually considered leftist and anti-capitalist, to be covered negatively in general. The Tea Party, on the other hand, as a right wing and pro-capitalist movement, is covered far less negatively and more neutrally by the mainstream, broadcast media.

Goals

Over half of the sampled mission statements (118) include at least one statement of a goal. The following are the five most common goals among all sampled Tea Party groups: educating the public, affecting legislation or public policy, electing candidates for public office, taking back the country, and being heard. Figure 7 shows the percentage of sampled mission statements that stated each of these 5 goals. The most frequently mentioned goal of the movement was to educate people. Similar to many others in the sample, the mission statement of a group from Kodiak, Alaska states: “Education is our
main purpose. We have started a Tea Party and a book club where we will study the Constitution, Federalist Papers, The 5000 year leap [sic] and several others.” Table 10 shows that very few cable programs and no broadcast programs mention the goal of education in their coverage of the Tea Party. It was Tea Party activists themselves that mentioned their goal of educating the public on all FNC programs, while program hosts on CNN and MSNBC mentioned education as a goal of the movement. Once again, CNN discussed education neutrally, while in the case of MSNBC, the goal was mentioned in a way that ridiculed the movement.

The second most prevalent goal stated in mission statements is to have some affect on policy. A group from Aurora, Colorado articulated a broad goal common to many groups: “Our mission is to attract, educate, organize, and mobilize our fellow citizens to secure public policy consistent with our three core values of Fiscal Responsibility, Constitutionally Limited Government and Free Markets.” No broadcast network mentioned this goal. All three cable networks reported this goal in a generally
neutral manner. Related to the goal of affecting legislation is the goal of finding political candidates to support, which 16% of sampled mission statements articulate. A group from Montpelier, Idaho states: “Our purpose is to help elect candidates that will represent our core values in federal and state government,” and a group from Globe-Miami, Arizona “seeks to elect, at every level of government, conservative officials who will honor the high ideals set forth in the U.S. Constitution.” No broadcast networks mentioned this goal, nor did any MSNBC programs. One FNC program and 2 CNN programs covered this goal, all neutrally.

Twenty-eight mission statements cite the somewhat vague goal of taking back the country, though whom they wish to take the country back from is never clear, as evidenced by the mission statement of a group from the Central Coast of California, which exclaims: “WE ARE TAKING BACK AMERICA!” Only FNC and CNN covered this goal, and they did so in a mostly neutral manner. The more immediate goal of being heard occurs in 22 mission statements, such as this one, from a New Jersey group: “It is the goal of this freely formed citizen's group to have our voices heard by our elected representatives, whether they are Republican, Democrat, Liberal or Conservative.” Being heard is an event-related goal in that it is by holding protest events that members attempt to make their voices heard. All six networks covered this goal, and all did so in a mostly neutral manner.

Table 10 shows that CNN provided the most in-depth coverage of movement goals. Only CNN and FNC covered all 5 goals, and the only goal that FNC mentioned more often than CNN was the event-based goal of being heard. The broadcast networks, which focused the majority of their coverage on movement events, each only mentioned
the event-related goal of being heard. Among cable networks, MSNBC provided the least amount of goal-related coverage. In contrast to motivations, goals were not linked with negative frames on MSNBC. For this niche network, delegitimizing the Tea Party seemed to be the goal of most of its coverage of the movement; hence, coverage of the motivations of the movement, which MSNBC found easier to ridicule, was more prominent than coverage of the goals of the movement, which were covered rather neutrally.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of mission statements and programs on each network that mentioned at least one goal of the movement, with the number of programs (or mission statements) denoted at the top of each bar. None of the six networks did a particularly impressive job of presenting the goals of the movement to its viewers. Although the three broadcast networks focused on events themselves, they were able to capture motivations by interviewing activists and describing the protest signs that were displayed. Getting at the goals of the movement involves a deeper inspection and more thorough interviews with activists, and CNN did this best, though FNC did so slightly more often.
Results

I proposed, in hypothesis 4a, that networks with ties to a social movement would present the movement in a way that is consistent with the movement’s stated goals and motivations. While FNC did cover all of the most prominent goals and motivations of the movement, and did so in a way that was consistent with the goals and motivations stated in mission statements, CNN actually described the goals and motivations more often than FNC, and in a way that correlates with proportions found in Tea Party mission statements. Although FNC covered each goal and motivation of the movement, it emphasized goals and motivations that appeared much less frequently in mission statements, and downplayed goals and motivations that appeared most frequently. Table 11 shows that 57 FNC programs that mentioned the Tea Party failed to discuss a goal or motivation of the movement; only 58% of FNC programs covered a goal or motivation, which is the lowest proportion of all networks. Though CNN has no ties to the movement, it covered the movement’s goals and motivations more accurately when
Table 11. Programs that Failed to Mention any Goal or Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># Programs</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNC</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

compared to mission statements. My data supports the hypothesis that the network with ties to the movement will portray the movement in a way that is consistent with its stated goals and motivations; however, all four of the networks with no ties covered the motivations of the movement better than FNC, and CNN, the cable network with no ties to the movement, covered both motivations and goals better than did FNC.

In hypothesis 4b, I predicted that networks with ties to opponents of social movements would present the movement in a way that undermines or misconstrues the goals and motivations of the movement. MSNBC, the network with ties to Tea Party opponents, did in fact undermine the goals and motivations of the movement. About 68% of MSNBC programs covered a goal or motivation of the movement, and nearly all of these programs included a larger number of negative frames than neutral or positive. In addition, nearly every time a movement motivation was discussed, it was done so in a way that framed movement members as ignorant, insane, or racist. Rather than simply portraying Tea Party activists as people who are against high taxes and government spending, as other networks did, MSNBC hosts portrayed activists as people who do not understand policy, blame the wrong President for the state of the economy, or do not realize that tax rates for working people were lower under President Obama than they were under President George W. Bush. Again, while the proportion of MSNBC
programs that covered a goal or motivation of the movement is greater than that of FNC, this result converges with Gunby’s (2011) finding that negative coverage is correlated with depth of coverage.

Hypothesis 4c proposed that networks with no ties to the movement or its opponents would focus on protest events more heavily than the goals and motivations of movement members. While the cable networks tended to discuss the tea party movement even when there were no events taking place, the three broadcast networks limited their coverage of the movement to the days surrounding the actual protest events, and limited their discussions mainly to the protest events themselves. Hosts and guests of cable network programs would discuss the Tea Party movement during the weeks surrounding an event, and would frequently discuss the motivations and implications of the movement without mentioning protest activities at all. In contrast, the Tea Party was rarely mentioned without discussion of actual events on the broadcast network programs. All three broadcast networks also failed to mention any of the goals of the movement other than the event-related goal of being heard, which is consistent with the results of hypothesis 3, that broadcast networks would cover the movement differently than cable networks. Broadcast networks, having no ties to the movement, tend to focus on events. CNN also focused on events, and we saw its coverage of the Tea Party increase in the weeks leading up to the 9/12 march due to the daily events that were taking place during that time. Programs on CNN followed the Tea Party Express bus tour and provided coverage of the events surrounding that tour every day for the two weeks leading up to the 9/12 march. Despite the tendency for media outlets with no ties to the movement to focus on events, or perhaps because of this tendency, the motivations of activists were
covered quite well by these 4 networks. Motivations are often displayed in the protest signs captured by news cameras and read aloud by field reporters and news anchors, and they are captured in the snippets of live interviews that field reporters do with activists. Objective event coverage actually leads to more in-depth coverage, at least when it comes to movement motivations. This stands in direct contrast with other research, such as Rohlinger’s (2007), which would lead us to expect broadcast coverage to be less in-depth than the political cable news networks, and Sobieraj’s (2011), which would lead us to expect that the issues important to activists would be ignored by the media in favor of focus on the protest event itself. My results show that the relationship between the media and movements is more nuanced, and that event coverage does not preclude coverage of the goals and motivations of the event.

Table 11 shows that the two most biased networks, FNC and MSNBC, provided the least in-depth coverage (58% and 68%, respectively) of the movement; they spent so much time on opinions that they failed to cover the goals and motivations of the movement as often as all other networks did. Over 80% of all broadcast network programs mentioned at least one goal or motivation of the movement; nearly 75% of CNN programs did the same. Though these results may seem to contradict the established literature, they are somewhat consistent with Gunby’s (2011) findings that negative frames correlate with depth of coverage. They are also somewhat consistent with Sobieraj’s (2011) findings that events garner more coverage than do issues. The goals that all networks mentioned most frequently were the most salient goals of each particular event: for the Tax Day Tea Parties, taxes were portrayed as the prevalent motivation; during the 9/12 march, a health care reform plan was being debated in
congress and the media focused on health care as a motivating factor. However, the work that other scholars have done in explaining the relationship between the media and social movements cannot adequately explain the anomaly that is the Tea Party movement. The “circus” and “freak” frames that the media has used to cover other movement events (see Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Gunby 2011; Sobieraj 2011) were not used in descriptions of Tea Party events. This movement was portrayed more positively than leftist movements by mainstream broadcast news outlets and CNN, and was heavily promoted by cable news network FNC. The ties between corporate-owned media and a pro-capitalist movement cannot be ignored; such even-handed, neutral coverage by these media outlets has not been found for any other protest movement. The even stronger ties between a movement and a cable news network that is marketed toward the ideological niche from which said movement springs are all the more apparent. These ties lead not only to more coverage, but to more positive coverage, and to actual attempts at mobilization by the media. This is a new phenomenon that I have explained using the framework of elite mediation and incorporating Hallin’s (1986) spheres of consensus. The financial and ideological ties that FNC employees have with the Tea Party affect the type of coverage this movement has received from FNC; the financial and ideological ties that MSNBC employees have with opponents of the movement also affect the type of coverage MSNBC offers. Intertwined with these elite mediations is the niche media affect of biased coverage; niche media gives its viewers what they believe their targeted audience will find digestible. The spheres of consensus for FNC and MSNBC are ideologically opposed, and hence the coverage of a movement such as the Tea Party is biased in one way or another on each of these networks.
Chapter 6.
Conclusion

I set out in this study to examine the relationship between television news media and social movements. The work of other researchers has shown that dominant media in general tends to cover protest movements in a negative way (e.g., Boykoff 2006; Dardis 2006; Entman & Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980; Olien et al. 1989; Oliver & Myers 1999; Smith et al. 2001). This analysis moves beyond looking at the ways in which the media undermines movements to examine the complexities in media coverage based on Bernstein and Burke’s elite mediation model. Various factors affect the relationship between the media and social movements, including media ties to a movement or its opponents, what kind of audience the media outlet is targeting, and whether the host of a program is an objective journalist or ideologically biased. Coverage of the Tea Party movement differs across media outlets not only because it is a conservative movement, but also because some media outlets have ties to the movement or to movement opponents.

I derived my first four hypotheses from the theoretical framework of elite mediation, and found strong support for each. I conclude that the network with close ties to the movement did, in fact, provide significantly more coverage of the movement. I also conclude that this network provided significantly more positive coverage of the movement when compared to all other networks. In addition, the network with ties to opponents of the movement provided the most negative coverage of the movement, and the networks with no clear ties to either the movement or its opponents provided the most neutral coverage. These findings were shown to be consistent over three waves of protest events.
I tested a fifth hypothesis based on Rohlinger’s (2007) finding that political print media provides higher quality political discourse than do mainstream print and television media. I speculated that movement coverage on political cable news networks would differ in tone and substance from mainstream, broadcast television news networks. I found that broadcast networks do indeed provide different kinds of portraits of a protest movement in comparison to cable networks. Broadcast news tends to be event-driven and relatively shallow, while cable news has more time to spend on debates about the movement as well political issues that are tangentially related to the underlying issues of a protest; the substance of coverage does differ between cable and broadcast networks. However, the broadcast networks are not different in tone from all cable networks per se; they are largely neutral, and quite similar to CNN. On the other hand, all broadcast networks and CNN are very different in tone from the cable networks FNC and MSNBC. Rather than there being a difference between political media and mainstream media, this is a difference between mainstream journalism and niche media news. FNC and MSNBC are each targeting ideologically opposing niches in the market, and the way they each frame the news is biased in either direction, while CNN and the broadcast networks market their news to a broader audience and maintain mostly objective standards of journalism, hence presenting a neutral tone of coverage of this movement.

The variation in tone of coverage between the three cable news networks can be explained in part by ties between the movement and media elites, by the competitive nature of for-profit news media, and by the different social spheres each news network operates within. Financial and ideological ties between a protest movement or its opponents and the elites who have the authority to portray this movement to the wider
public do impact the manner and quality of the media presentation. In this era of 24-hour cable news, competing networks need to market their coverage towards specific types of audiences in order to distinguish themselves in the media field. I found that a dialogue occurs between networks, and coverage on one network can affect coverage on a competing network. This was only found to be true for cable networks, and broadcast news was not noticeably influenced by coverage on other networks, broadcast or cable.

The social spheres of discourse, once thought to be homogenous across a society’s news media depending on mainstream common knowledge at any given point in time (Hallin 1986), are actually dependent on a news network’s target audience. Networks that wish to attract a broad base of viewers tend to follow traditional rules of journalism in presenting the news, and a social protest movement that supports status-quo capitalism falls into the sphere of legitimate contention for these types of networks. Networks that attempt to target viewers that adhere to a specific political ideology will operate within a different sphere. Issues that are commonly supported by the right, such as laissez-faire capitalism, will fall into the sphere of consensus for networks that are marketed toward the conservative niche, and will fall into the sphere of deviance for networks that are marketed toward the liberal niche. This niche marketing creates three distinct types of news coverage for any given issue. Depending on which network an individual is tuned into, they will be given one of three significantly different pictures of an issue; it is now possible to spend an entire day watching the news and only receive information that aligns with your personal political ideology. The possible effects of this phenomenon should provide fruitful paths of inquiry to scholars of public opinion and communication as well as social movements. For example, one can ask how niche media impacts public
and private discourse, voting behavior, participation in politics including social protest, and public awareness of important local and global issues.

My last set of hypotheses, also based in part on elite mediation, showed even more complexities within television news. Although the network with ties to the movement did portray the goals and motivations of the Tea Party in a way that was similar to the self-representations of movement members, networks with no ties to the movement did so in a more thorough and representative way. FNC hosts tended to portray those aspects of the movement that best align with the ideological viewpoint of the network in general and failed to mention many of the aspects that might have contradicted their views in some way. The network with ties to opponents did portray the movement in a way that undermined the movement’s goals and motivations; while MSNBC covered motivations of the movement more often than FNC, it did so in a way that delegitimized or ridiculed those motivations. Broadcast networks with no ties also focused on events rather than general goals and motivations; when they did cover motivations and goals they focused on the most salient ones of each particular event. These findings, along with Gunby’s (2011), should be used to move forward the literature on media coverage of protest movements, which until now has failed to note the connection between negative frames and depth of coverage.

Though scholars of the media and social movements have made many advances regarding our understanding of coverage of anti-capitalist, anti-war, and moral issue movements, there are other nuances that come to light when examining media coverage of this pro-capitalist protest movement. In contrast to the meme that the U.S. media is overrun with “liberal bias,” I have provided evidence that mainstream media outlets
actually covered this conservative movement in a rather positive or neutral way, and that
theories of social movements and the media need to be altered to account for this seeming
anomaly. I have also shown that there is a “niche media” in operation in the U.S. There
are different spheres of consensus functioning here; various media outlets market their
“news” in a way that aligns with different ideologically divided segments of the
population. FNC and MSNBC operate within two different spheres because they each
have a target audience that sits on one or the other end of the ideological political
spectrum; the Tea Party falls into the sphere of consensus for FNC viewers, and the
sphere of deviance for MSNBC viewers. For each of the other networks in this study, the
Tea Party falls in the sphere of legitimate contention. Whether the Tea Party is actually
racist, patriotic, neither or both is not the question I have tried to answer. What is more
important is that, for those who watch FNC on a regular basis, the Tea Party is a patriotic
movement; for those who watch MSNBC on a regular basis, the Tea Party is a racist
movement; for all others, the Tea Party is just another protest movement and each viewer
can decide on his or her own what to make of it, without the influence of a biased news
anchor.

Another important finding is that only programs on FNC contained the
encouraging frame. Forty-six phrases that contained mobilizing statements were spoken
by FNC hosts during the 15-week time frame in my sample, and 37 individual FNC
programs contained at least one encouraging frame. In our new communication age,
many are studying the effects of the Internet on movement mobilization (e.g. Brunsting &
Postmes 2002; Carty 2010; Earl, Kimport, Prieto, Rush & Reynoso 2010; Fisher &
Boekkooi 2010; Loader 2008; Van Laer 2010). While these inquiries are important, we
must now consider cable news networks as another form of communication and as another possible spur to mobilization. The top media priority for movement actors may no longer be just about gaining coverage, positive or negative; cable networks may actually influence mobilization. Looking at the relationship between the media and social movements in this way opens up new avenues in social movement research. Future studies should examine whether the encouraging framing device, as used by FNC, had any effect on mobilization of this movement. If a substantial portion of Tea Party movement members are found to have been spurred to action by FNC programming, then the field of mass media needs to be reconsidered as a site of mobilization rather than simply a site of public discourse in which knowledge of a movement can be dispersed, and opinions about a movement can be manipulated.

These findings are also useful for those who wish to study the strategies and outcomes of social protest movements. Television news coverage of social movements has been assumed by many to be homogenous across networks. With the relatively new tendency of cable networks to target their coverage toward niche markets, this is no longer the case. While the blanketed claim that there is a liberal media bias is unfounded, this research shows that at least one cable news network does indeed have a liberal bias, but one other has a conservative bias. Mainstream television media in general still provides mostly unbiased coverage of this social movement, although that coverage does include slightly more negative frames than positive. Knowledge of these intricacies will better inform not only the strategic choices of movement activists, but also scholars who study those strategies and their outcomes. In contrast to other studies, many of which seem to assume there is a universal force referred to generally as “the media,” I
differentiate between media types and find consistent differences between cable and broadcast television media. I have empirically demonstrated a clear difference between mainstream television news, which attempts to appeal to the broadest range of viewers, and niche media, which aims its news coverage to one of two ends of the U.S. political spectrum. An understanding of these differences needs to be incorporated into future research on protest movement strategies in order to better explain and predict movement outcomes.
### Appendix

**Table A1. Description of Frames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegitimizing</td>
<td>Invalidation of the movement as a fake movement or as having no clear issue to protest. Description of movement members as being hypocrites, not representative of America, or not representative of average conservatives. Discussion of issues that the Tea Party is focusing on, when discussion includes host or guest disagreeing with the movement’s stand on the issues.</td>
<td>From CNN <em>Campbell Brown: No Bias, No Bull</em> 4-15-09: “CHRIS KOFINIS, DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST: …This is what I refer to as -- as everyone refers to as kind of Astroturfing. The only people that think these protests are real are the people that think George Bush was a good president. I mean, the fact is, you know, to be brutal about it, this is a Milli Vanilli type of movement. It sounds real, but it's not.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insanity</td>
<td>Movement members described as crazy, foolish or insane.</td>
<td>From MSNBC <em>The Ed Show</em> 4-13-09: “Have you heard about these tea parties conservatives are organizing? They’re revolting against government spending and TV converter box brainwashing. That’s right. You heard it right. That’s crazy things that these tea brain protesters are saying.”</td>
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<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Discussion of Tea Party movement or members not understanding or being incorrect as to what they are protesting.</td>
<td>From MSNBC <em>Countdown with Keith Olbermann</em> 4-17-09: “But how do you get people out there on Wednesday complaining, &quot;Barack Obama is going to raise my taxes&quot; when, actually, Barack Obama is going to cut their taxes?”</td>
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<td>General Ridicule</td>
<td>Purposely insulting or making jokes about movement members or the movement in general, especially referring to members as “tea baggers,” which</td>
<td>From CNN <em>Anderson Cooper 360</em> 4-14-09: “GERGEN: So, Republicans have got a way -- they still haven't found their voice, Anderson. They're still -- this happens to a minority party after it's lost a couple of bad elections, but they're searching for their voice. COOPER: It's hard to talk when”</td>
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has a sexual connotation.

Racist Description of movement members as racist, or as being motivated by racism.

From MSNBC Countdown with Keith Olbermann 4-16-09: “GAROFALO: They don’t know their history at all. This is about hating a black man in the White House. This is racism straight up.”

Positive Legitimizing Validation of movement as necessary, inevitable, of members as justifiably angry, etc. Discussion of issues that the Tea Party is focusing on, when discussion includes host or guest agreeing with the movement’s stand on the issues.

From CNN Anderson Cooper 360 4-15-09: “And most of the people who are there are clearly very angry about bailing out these big companies, too much regulation, too much Washington. That is a perfectly legitimate cause to protest. And a lot of people are right -- feel strongly about it.”

Normalizing Description of movement members as average Americans, first-time protesters, normal family people, normal working people, etc.

From FNC Glenn Beck 4-1-09: “the mom or the dad who's a plumber going to the streets for the tea parties.”
From FNC Hannity 4-15-09: “All across the country, Americans like you have taken to the streets by the thousands.”

Patriotic Description of movement or members taking back their country, or being motivated by their love of America.

From FNC On the Record with Greta Van Susteren 8-31-09: “So these are great Americans, though! It's fantastic! These are patriots! They're people who -- who don't want the government to be telling -- dictating how much money they give for bail-outs”

Peaceful Description of movement members as peaceful, or noting lack of violence and arrests.

From FNC Glenn Beck 4-16-09: “I haven't heard about a single report of violence. Have you? Imagine that kind of peace at a Code Pink protest with the low ball media estimate of 260,000 people, or all that peace happening with the clowns at the G-20 summit.”

Mobilizing Encouraging Host or guest encourages viewers to get involved in the movement; host of show claims to have attended

From FNC Glenn Beck 4-6-09: “This year, Americans across the country are holding tea parties to let politicians know that we have had enough. Celebrate with FOX News. This is what we're doing next.
| Neutral | Description of actual events without judgment; letting protesters describe the movement, rather than host or anchor offering an opinion on the movement. | From CNN Newsroom 4-15-09: “MARY SNOW, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, Heidi, there are going to be a couple of events throughout the day. But here, there is a rally going to get underway in just about an hour from now here at the state house. You might be able to see some people starting to gather outside the state house.” |
Bibliography


Dardis, Frank. 2006. “Marginalization Devices in the U.S. Press Coverage or Iraq War


