THE MOBILIZING EFFECT OF THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY:
A MIXED MODEL ANALYSIS OF THE
OCCUPY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

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Social movement scholars have taken a renewed interest in the role that breakdowns, strains, and threats play in motivating collective action. Once viewed as a constraint on the possibility for social movement emergence, extant scholarship no longer regards threat as the inverse of opportunity. This paper extends and refines our understanding of the nuanced interplay between threat and opportunity through a county-level study of the Occupy movement. The findings indicate a segmented response to economic threats based on the movement’s grievances and claims after controlling for state-to-state differences. For the Occupy movement, the greater the level of economic inequality in a county, the greater the prospect for the formation of a group in that county. Conversely, there is less support for the finding that the formation of Occupy groups in counties across the continental United States were a defensive reaction to the threats posed by rising unemployment rates or declining median household incomes. These findings are robust in the presence of other predictors derived from the dominant resource mobilization and political opportunity perspectives. Threats and opportunities may often combine in dynamic ways to motivate the emergence of social movements.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and sister who have both contributed immensely to my personal, intellectual, and spiritual growth
INTRODUCTION

A growing number of social movement scholars have sought to revive interest in the role that breakdowns, strains, and threats play in motivating collective action (see Bergstrand 2014; Buechler 2003; Goldstone and Tilly 2001; Johnson and Frickel 2011; McVeigh 1999; Piven and Cloward 1992; Snow et al. 1998; Useem 1998; Van Dyke and Soule 2002). Once viewed as a constraint on the possibility for movement emergence, extant scholarship no longer regards threat as the inverse of opportunity. However, while threat mechanisms have increasingly been incorporated into research on social movements, the question as to how structural pressures operate alongside opportunities to motivate collective action remains to some extent underdeveloped. This paper seeks to extend and refine our understanding of the interplay of threat and opportunity through a study of the Occupy movement.

The aversion of contemporary scholars to the various breakdown and strain theories prominent in the 1950s and 1960s is understandable given the tendency of those perspectives to view protestors as malintegrated individuals guided by irrational or, at the very least, non-rational motives (Piven and Cloward 1992; Snow et al. 1998; Useem 1998). Nonetheless, macro-level structural strains have shown to be important drivers in the emergence of a variety of social movements (McVeigh 1999; Johnson and Frickel 2011; Van Dyke and Soule 2002). In order to reconcile the apparent conflict, more efforts are needed to appreciate the dynamics of mobilization processes across movement forms and political contexts. By revisiting theories of strain and threat, academics in the present have the ability to avoid the pitfalls of the past while keeping its more useful analytic insights.
Although a somewhat recent occurrence, the Occupy movement has already inspired a volume of academic literature within sociology. To date, this published work has investigated the expanding role of new forms of social media in collective action (Nielsen 2013; Thorson et al. 2013), hypothesized about the organizational sustainability of decentralized movements (Leach 2013; Piven 2013), chronicled the rise of the movement in order to project its future influence (Flacks 2013; Pickerill and Krinsky 2012), explored the numerous constituencies involved in the occupations (Barker 2012; Schein 2012), and studied the response of the police and the state (Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes 2013; King 2013). Though varied, much of the scholarship so far has either been case studies, qualitative accounts, or has been speculative. Of the sixty-one sociology-related journal articles identified by search, none used an exclusively quantitative approach and only six used a mixed methods approach.¹ The lack of cross-methodological analyses limits our ability as researchers to evaluate the assumptions concerning the movement’s emergence. Further quantitative inquiry may also prove productive in advancing recent theoretical discussions through empirical study.

While a significant methodological gap exists, across the literature there is more or less a consensus among scholars that the demands made by the Occupy protestors were anything but unanimous. However, that notion is a bit misleading. It is true that most commentators have pointed out how the activists were unable to reach a univocal and directed grievance: This has been attributed to Occupy being an amalgamation of established groups oriented against a common rival

¹ The literature search was primarily conducted using the Thomson Reuters Web of Science research platform. Google Scholar was used as a supplemental source. Results were coded by the author for all English-based publications.
rather than a movement in and of itself (Calhoun 2013). The political and economic climate of the recession had simply fostered a brief moment of solidarity where diverse interests were aligned (Gitlin 2013). For some, this diversity may even help to explain the protestors’ partial success (Milkman, Lewis, and Luce 2013).

Overall, I am in agreement with these assessments. That being said, there does appear to be a more general and implicit set of demands embodied in the selection of the emblematic target, in the chosen tactics, and in the catch phrase now synonymous with the movement. The chant “We are the 99 percent” not only identified the adherents and suggested their opponents, the juxtaposition drew on the socioeconomic inequalities that existed. So although the individual demands were sweeping, they were each situated under the aegis of distributional and procedural claims for economic and social advantages and rights not presently enjoyed by a majority of Americans.2

This paper seeks to make one principal contribution to the current scholarship. Through a quantitative investigation of the Occupy movement, this study looks at the effects that select economic, political, and organizational characteristics had in predicting the mobilization of groups across the continental United States. More specifically, this paper investigates the degree to which those three factors motivated the formation of groups with a stated affinity for the movement. In doing so, this paper takes as its central interest the question that Van Dyke and Soule (2002) pose over whether structural threats may combine with opportunities to affect the emergence of groups that make claims for expanded rights or benefits. Where previous work on threat has focused on so-

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2 Scholarship on social movement spillover (Meyer and Whittier 1994), diffusion processes (McAdam and Rucht 1993), and coalition formation (Gillham and Edwards 2011) lend credence to the idea that it is not uncommon for “new” social movements to arise from diverse constituencies and to momentarily coalesce around common issues of interest.
called reactive movements, the authors muse that some other combination of threat and opportunity may prove an important predictor of proactive movements.

For Tilly (1978), the classification of a collective action as either proactive or reactive rests on an analysis of the claims being made and not on the form the action takes. Where strikes for higher wages or improved work conditions are seen as proactive, strikes in defense of threatened jobs are reactive. Nonetheless, in either case costs are associated with collective inaction. These current or anticipated harms that stem from the failure to act are interpreted as threats to those social groups involved (see Goldstone and Tilly 2001). As Van Dyke and Soule (2002) point out, for the distinction between the types of contentious action to remain analytically useful, there should be a set of threatening conditions under which each type is likely to evolve. Thus, threat itself could be segmented along lines similar to group claims, with different movements responding to different threat phenomena.\(^3\) Considering the implications of this idea for social movement theory, it is both interesting and worthy of exploration.

In this study I find significant support for the thesis of a segmented response to economic threats. Counties with greater levels of income inequality had greater prospects for the formation of Occupy groups. On the other hand, economic threats based strictly on losses were less influential. Before presenting those results, I provide a brief overview of the evolution of breakdown and strain theories in social movement studies. I then lay out a series of testable hypotheses that (1) specify the possible economic conditions under which a proactive, rather than a reactive, movement would be

\(^3\) Snow et al. (1998) also make this point when they state that the threat posed by a disruption of everyday routines is more concerned with movements that are reactive rather than proactive. Furthermore, these authors note that their contribution on quotidian disruptions is one part of a larger project to better specify the links between various “strain-like conditions” and mobilization processes (p. 3).
expected to evolve, and that (2) pull from the leading social movement theories. I follow with a short
descriptive account of the movement, paying particular attention to the primary claims made by
constituents. I then describe the methods and data used in the analysis. After presenting the findings,
I offer a brief discussion of the results and conclude with possible directions for future research.

THREAT, OPPORTUNITY, AND MOBILIZATION

Theories of Malintegration

Breakdown and strain theories of collective action are rooted in a sociological tradition that extends
as far back as Gustave Le Bon ([1896] 2002) and Émile Durkheim ([1951] 2005). The common
idea underlying these perspectives is that as a society is disturbed by crises or abrupt transitions, it
becomes momentarily incapable of exercising its regulatory influence over social life. Individuals who
are unaccustomed to these changing conditions become detached from the integrative social bonds
of a higher collective order and act out through antisocial behavior. Contained in these theories are
society-level and individual-level components where as social groups come to experience breakdowns
or strains, their constituents are no longer regulated by an external social ethic and are more likely to
be swayed by crowd mentalities or inner passions.

One of the first American sociologists to take up and expand the breakdown concept of
collective behavior was Robert Ezra Park ([1904] 1972). Heavily influenced by the work of the
earlier Le Bon, Park’s social contagion theory espoused the existence of a “general will” whereby
groups of aggrieved individuals acted together as a unitary mass marked by “capriciousness,”
“suggestibility,” “one-sided opinions,” “intolerance,” and “personal disinterestedness” (ibid. 15-16).
The crowd was not merely an aggregation of individuals each with their own set of calculated
interests and motives. The crowd was an entity of its own type and was ruled by its own psychology. The line that Park drew between the rational public and this irrational crowd was left ambiguous enough that it was hard to discern where one social change group ended and the other began. Successive work by Kornhauser (1959) on the collective movements of mass societies, Smelser (1962) on value-added theory, and Davies (1962) on relative deprivation have carried over much of this bias despite their attempts to distance themselves from the previous social psychological explanations (see McAdam 1982). However, the negative connotation of actors at the whim of their desires was not lost on later critics.

Theories of Solidarity

By the 1970s, social movement scholars, working under a newly fashioned solidarity paradigm, had begun to devalue the role that grievances played in mobilizing collective action (Oberschall 1973; Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975). For these academics, enduring social movements were not made up of malintegrated individuals, but were formed by rational agents embedded in social networks of solidarity. Theories centered on the mobilization of resources and on the importance of political processes developed in opposition to past approaches that focused on the cognitive motivations of social actors (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Over a strong thesis of grievances and deprivation, they preferred a weak one.

Resource mobilization and political process theories downplayed the significance of breakdowns and strains as the initiates of collective action, and instead concentrated on the resources and political opportunities that must exist prior to a movement’s ability to effectively mobilize. Classically, resource mobilization theory viewed grievances as a routine and persistent presence
within a given society and emphasized that a lack of resources created barriers to organized action, whereas the political process model emphasized that social movements were predominantly political phenomena. According to the latter, movements existed as “attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means” (McAdam 1982:37). The development of prolonged collective movements presumed that, by that fact alone, the political environment was susceptible to the pressures exerted by an aggrieved population.

The general assessment of resource mobilization and political opportunity scholars was that structural strains, in the form of economic or political threats, led to decreased rather than increased opportunities to mobilize (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Declines in economic and organizational assets, or mounting political threats and state repression, were regarded as constraints on aspiring movements. Conversely, a growth in the monetary assets available to groups made for a fungible resource pool that could easily meet a variety of movement needs, while strategic political allies were considered crucial for effective power-brokering blocs. If social movement organizations had less discretionary funds, or if they encountered a hostile government, there was a lower rationale for mobilization. However, following the scholarship of Goldstone and Tilly (2001), this paper argues that threat, either real or perceived, acts together with opportunities to influence mobilization in a more nuanced and dynamic fashion.

Revisiting Structural Threat

Although the academic rejoinder against the earlier variants of breakdown and strain theories has not subsided, a growing number of scholars have attempted to address many of the shortcomings and
misconceptions of the scholarship in order to preserve its salient theoretical insights. Among the areas where structural threats are thought to be significant predictors of movement emergence include: where they disrupt the routines and attitudes of everyday life (Snow et al. 1998), where the collective action is nonnormative rather than normative (Piven and Cloward 1992), and where ethnic conflicts occur (Useem 1998). As these authors note, breakdowns and strains are not the only path to mobilization, but they do represent an important set of circumstances under which certain categories of movements emerge.

In place of the impulse to prematurely discard aspects of the solidarity paradigm due to the belief that nonnormative collective action is “normal” politics by another name (see Piven and Cloward 1992; Rule 1988; Tilly et al. 1975), what is needed is a greater specification of contentious action that encompasses the variability observed in social movement form (McAdam 1996). While heartily agreeing that protest does at times “break the rules defining permissible modes of political action” (Piven and Cloward 1992:303), it is also imperative to recognize that regardless of the form a collective action takes it consistently leads back to a question of power which “dissolves the common distinction between ‘pre-political’ and ‘political’ protest” (Tilly 1978:171).

Despite the general trend away from the previous individual-level strain theories, recent research in the area of social movement studies has helped to revive interest in the role that grievances and structural threats play in motivating defensive collective action. One development in this area has been the application of loss aversion theory in order to help understand how people react toward differential grievances (Bergstrand 2014; Snow et al. 1998). The findings indicate that
grievances based on losses, especially those that are attributed to the actions of a perpetrator, generate an increased willingness to participate in activism.

Recent scholarship has also recognized that threats, organizational resources, and political opportunities are not mutually exclusive motivational factors in the emergence of social movements. The contrast between them represents a false dilemma. As Van Dyke and Soule (2002) point out in their study on threat and the reactive mobilization of U.S. militia groups, “A movement may simultaneously experience opportunities in one arena and threats in another” (p. 513). Likewise, Johnson and Frickel (2011), in their work on ecological threats and U.S. environmentalist groups, comment that most academics today are “clear that threat is not simply the inverse of opportunity; instead, opportunity and threat are distinct conceptually and empirically” (p. 307). Indeed, a wide range of work has arisen within social movement literature regarding the mobilizing influence of economic, political, demographic, and ecological threats.

Support for the idea that structural threats result in a reaction by pressured groups to re-assert claims or to defend against perceived threats is extensive (McVeigh 1999; Soule and Van Dyke 1999; Van Dyke and Soule 2002), yet less is known about the mechanisms that underlie the mobilization of groups that make proactive claims. The purpose of my research at this stage is to assess whether there is any further support for social movement theories that include considerations for the mobilization of adherents due to real or perceived threats beyond the reactive type. Here, I cast the Occupy movement as grounded in proactive claims-making, although it could be tentatively maintained that it fits into the reactive category of contentious action as well. Nevertheless, as argued
below, because the movement was first and foremost presented as a struggle for expanded rights and economic advantages, the proactive moniker is certainly an apt depiction of the movement.

The central claim of this paper revolves around whether differences between particular economic indicators (i.e., Gini index values, unemployment rates, and median household incomes) across counties nationally suggested a greater propensity for certain counties to have founded an Occupy group. What is not known is the extent to which the threat (or perceived threat) of each adverse economic condition led the concerned stakeholders to mobilize into collective action. Along with this central claim, predictions put forth by the theories of resource mobilization and political opportunity will be tested.

As already discussed, recent scholarship contends that opportunity is not simply the opposite of threat. The strength of organizational resources and the presence of a sympathetic political system may combine with adverse economic conditions to inspire collective action. Given that each of these aforementioned explanations of movement emergence hold some intuitive appeal, and are backed by empirical findings, it is not within the scope of this work to weigh their respective merit. Rather, the aim is to integrate these perspectives and evaluate their relative importance to this particular case (see Lofland 1993).

The central claim is that, on average, where the structural threat of economic inequality was greater, the likelihood of the emergence of an Occupy group increased (even after considering a full set of theory-driven variables and relevant controls). The intent is to extend our current knowledge on threat through an analysis of the Occupy movement. A lack of broad empirical support for the causal mechanism of threat and opportunity working in tandem represents an important conceptual
problem. If not supported by robust evidence, the utility of frameworks that incorporate structural threat hypotheses alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity hypotheses is restricted.

From the above thesis of a segmented response to threat based on movement claims, I posit the first two hypotheses about which type of adverse economic conditions should have precipitated the appearance of Occupy groups if the movement is to be meaningfully considered a proactive, rather than a reactive, contentious action (all other factors being held equal):

H1: Structural threats based on the unequal distribution of economic advantages should be associated with the emergence of Occupy groups.

H2: Structural threats based strictly on economic losses should be less associated with the emergence of Occupy groups.

Next, from the resource mobilization perspective offered by McCarthy and Zald (1977), I posit the additional hypothesis about the supportive organizational conditions that should have led to the emergence of groups for the Occupy movement (all other factors being held equal):

H3: Higher numbers of supportive organizations in a given population enhance the chances for the emergence of Occupy groups.

Lastly, from the political opportunity perspective offered by McAdam (1996), I posit the two final hypotheses about the political conditions that should have enabled or constrained the opportunities available for the formation of Occupy groups (all other factors being held equal):

H4: A sympathetic political system generates greater opportunities for the emergence of Occupy groups.
H5: Repression by law enforcement places constraints on the opportunities for the emergence of Occupy groups.

Together these five hypotheses form the backbone of this inquiry. But, how do these different conditions actually relate to the Occupy movement? Was there a certain structural context under which groups got their start? If so, contrary to the portrayals of the protestor’s claims as hopelessly disparate, was there a common thread of grievances wound throughout the movement?

INEQUALITY, RIGHTS, AND #OCCUPY

On July 13, 2011, Canadian anti-consumerist magazine Adbusters, in an online blog post called on a new generation of “redeemers,” “rebels,” and “radicals” to mobilize and inundate lower Manhattan on September 17 with “tents, kitchens, and peaceful barricades” (Adbusters 2011). As suggested, their aim should be to first take and then occupy Wall Street for a matter of months. In the aftermath of the worldwide financial crisis, the challenge put forth to the would-be activists was for them to secure their ailing democracy from the growing influence of financial elites in American politics. Following the model set by the encampments of the Egyptian Revolution and the acampadas of the Spanish Indignados, the prospective protestors in New York were encouraged to embrace the tactic of a land occupation.

According to the publication, the reason why the Tahrir Square demonstrators succeeded, where others so often failed, was because the Egyptian revolutionaries collectively made one straightforward and unifying demand for longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak to be removed from power. Those protestors had come together, in an ostensibly leaderless fashion, and had toppled a notoriously repressive regime. After this fundamental shift in movement tactics, Adbusters asked,
what was on the agenda for a new America? Later that year, on the exact day the magazine proposed, a fledgling group of activists descended into the financial district of lower Manhattan with the intent to answer that question.4

**Figure 1.** United States Counties with Occupy Groups (in Gray), 2011


Occupy Wall Street may have seemed to begin with a flurry of spontaneous action, yet planning for the protest started months before any marchers took to the streets or tents were erected in Zuccotti Park. After the initial online call to action, local activists, working in conjunction with seasoned organizers of the international uprisings and members of Adbusters’ staff, responded to the challenge (Kroll 2011). Soon, a group of around 30 people would begin to meet in an artists’ space

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4 See Gillham et al. (2013) for a more detailed account of the New York City mobilization.
on the fourth floor of 16 Beaver Street, just one block southeast of the iconic charging bull statue, to hash out the beginnings of a plan. At that time, these founding members could not have been less aware of the impact those first planning sessions would have. From this humble start, the Occupy movement would eventually spread to some 625 counties and county equivalents across the continental United States (see Figure 1).

![Flowchart of the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, 2011](image)

**Figure 2.** Flowchart of the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City, 2011


*Artist:* Rachel Schragis.

At its inception, those who would help to spark the occupation phenomena positioned their protest as a response to the inequalities present in society and to the largely inaccessible decision-
making processes in government and in private enterprise. The core members of the movement’s early meetings and general assemblies viewed the multitude of their individual grievances not as separate from one another, but as intricately tied to a web of disadvantage which members attempted to codify (see Figure 2). Apparently, this set of comprehensive concerns was not unique to those activists in New York City because by virtually every indication in media reports, and in the subsequent scholarship, the spirit of that declaration was carried over as the movement expanded.

Even as Gitlin (2012) demarcates the “inner movement,” made up of the core activists, from the “outer movement,” made up of secondary activists from around the nation, he also recognizes how both aspects of the movement implicitly agreed that inequality and a political system beholden to the wealthy were at the center of their moral indignation. While the proliferation of movement complaints gave the impression of an expansion *ad infinitum*, many of the issues the protestors highlighted could be reduced to claims about the maldistribution of economic prosperity and the enclosure of political influence in the United States.

In regard to the distributional claims, Bennet (2012) shows through a semantic network analysis that from September 17 to mid-October 2011 coverage in all available online media (including news outlets and blogs) closely attached stories on economic inequality to the movement. By the end of November, the quantity of media articles that referenced both Occupy and inequality as those terms co-occurred numbered in the thousands per month, dominating the discourse on the topic. It would seem that it was not only later academic interpretations that projected the frame of inequality onto the activists. In this case, the online media to a significant degree picked up on this larger message as well.
In regard to the procedural claims, Maharawal (2013) remarks that ingrained in the tactic of occupation, with its inclusive consensus decision-making, is a critique of the modern liberal notion that citizens are similarly positioned to participate in everyday political practice. Occupy at its roots was an attempt to challenge the dominant hierarchical structures in society that work to the benefit of those nearer the top. Together these commonalities in the stated interests and alternative practices of the activists formed the immanent grievances of the movement. This examination focuses squarely on the distributional claims, leaving assessments into the significance of the procedural claims to future research.

Another noted characteristic of the Occupy Wall Street protestors was their use of new social media forms to facilitate communication between existing communities of activists and to bring in new adherents (see Nielsen 2013; Thorson et al. 2013). In a survey cited by Gamson and Sifry (2013), the principal resources protestors used for information about the movement were, in order of importance, word-of-mouth followed closely by movement websites. But, contemporary activists not only look to the internet for the latest movement news, digital media itself can reduce the costs associated with connecting people; helping groups offset the rational apathy of the public without the need to depend on formal organizations.

According to the work of Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2003), the elimination of barriers to communication witnessed in the new social media landscape undermines the logic of the traditional free rider dilemma. Where in the past resource-rich bureaucratic structures incentivized movement participation by reducing personal costs, individuals today are more able to satisfy the organizational
needs of a group in its early stages simply because the equation has changed. Cost-benefit analyses for participation have to be altered accordingly.
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As the number of groups expanded across the United States, websites were created to give potential members the ability to find meetings and to track developments. The use of these digital platforms allowed once isolated activists to engage with others in their area. This study utilizes these online records of the movement as a starting point for the construction of the dependent variable.

**Dependent Variable**

The data for county-level groups come from the Occupy Directory (2011), a compiled list of Occupy groups assembled from a number of sources including Occupy Together, We All Occupy, The Guardian newspaper, and others. According to the handbook developed by the directory’s curators, an Occupy group was defined as a geographically-based aggregation of constituents that (1) had a protracted physical meet up and (2) had an unambiguous and stated affinity with the movement. Excluded from this definition were one-off events and web-based organizations. While a group was not required to be an encampment with tents, it was required to have hosted working groups or activities in a unique geography. As the definition offered is appropriate to the analysis at hand, it is used in an unaltered manner pending a reliability check to ensure the rules were adhered to in a consistent manner.

The dependent variable is conceptualized as the establishment of a group, rather than as a raw count of the number of active constituents, because of the limitations inherent to the dataset. Additionally, the use of a singular presence (or absence) per county facilitates the elimination of possible double counts in the directory data and gives a conservative estimate of the number of

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5 For access to the dataset see datahub.io/dataset/occupy-global-map.
groups founded. The county-level dependent variable thus takes on a dichotomous value that is amenable to a logistic regression. While acknowledging that the analysis would be reinforced by the ability to determine the relative size and degree of mobilization through counts of groups or member numbers, those figures are not specified. The reconstruction of such data is beyond this analysis and, quite possibly, any subsequent analyses. The dichotomous dependent variable is then utilized for the practical reason that it is the data currently available for research.

The largest potential issue of validity in this study is with the measurement of the Occupy groups themselves. Since the response rate for the directory is unknown, it is not safe to assume that movement participants would consistently self-select to be listed or that the directory’s curators accurately captured movement activity. The data that was aggregated into the directory relied considerably on the listings of those sympathetic to the movement and who may have had incentives to increase their number. Conversely, certain groups may have had unknown limitations, such as geographical isolation, which kept them from being listed or entering into media accounts. It has been noted that the use of newspapers in the creation of datasets may inaccurately represent the number of groups involved in collective action due to a combination of selection and description bias (Earl et al. 2004). There is no way to establish beforehand what effect, if any, these biases may have had on the analysis that is presented in this paper.

To employ this dataset with confidence, it was necessary to run checks for both accuracy and completeness. The verification processes used a random selection process at a 10 percent rate, which amounted to 63 cases reviewed for their accuracy and 311 counties reviewed to confirm the directory was complete. Cases randomly flagged for further review were then compared to news article archives.
or the results of web-based searches. The indication of an Occupy group in a county listed in the directory corroborates that the directory is accurate. The indication of an Occupy group in a county not listed in the directory contradicts the notion that the directory is complete. Based on the outcome of that data quality check, it is believed that the dependent variable is as proper a reflection of the movement’s county-level presence.6

Independent Variables

The first set of independent variables consists of the threat hypothesis predictors: unemployment, median household income, and income inequality. As threat implies a departure from an average, a norm, or a status quo, the variables should represent that comparative element. Additionally, the variables should be precipitating factors that incorporate causal time-order sequencing. That is to say, they should come from a period prior to the onset of the Occupy movement. In this vein, the measures of unemployment and median household income are constructed as a change value between the initial time point in 2007, the highest point before the economic downturn, and a secondary time point in 2010, the lowest point of the recession. The change in unemployment is represented as a percentage change, while the change in median household income is represented as an actual change in inflation-adjusted constant dollars. For the regression models the measure of median household income is scaled and its inverse is used to aid in interpretation. Thus, a larger

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6 The reliability and validity checks of the dependent variable used a combination of web-based searches. A number of pages maintained by the Wikipedia community aided in the location of news articles for those counties that were listed in the directory. LexisNexis enabled the search of news articles archives by state, allowing for the systematic location of possible missing cases. All searches on LexisNexis were restricted to a date range from September 17, 2011, the beginning of the Occupy movement, to December 31, 2011, over a month after the mass eviction of many Occupy encampments.
number in a positive direction indicates a larger decline in median income between the measurement periods. All other tables, however, use the income change measure in its unaltered form.

Building on the notion of loss aversion, a large growth in the unemployment rate, or a large decline in the median household income, should signify a threat to a given population. These threats are in line with what would be predicted to motivate a reactive type of collective action. Data for the measures comes from the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (USDA 2014). Somewhat different is the measure of income inequality as captured by the Gini index. This measure reflects a cross-sectional contrast in socioeconomic status: the higher the index value, the greater the threat of inequality. Where the unemployment and median household income measures are intended to get at the defensive mechanism of threat that motivates reactive mobilizations, findings in support of the Gini index are interpreted as a proactive desire on the part of the activists for a more equal share in the nation’s economic prosperity. Data for the income inequality measure comes from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Summary File (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). ACS data on income inequality are based on the county-level distribution of household income. As conceptualized, the different economic predictors are expected to reveal how specific types of threat translate into a segmented response that stimulates the formation of groups where those precipitating factors are consistent with the principal movement claims. In other words, stronger evidence for rising unemployment rates and declining median household incomes as the principal drivers of the county-level mobilization processes would go against the idea that Occupy was a proactive movement, whereas stronger evidence for the income inequality measure would lend support to the proactive conceptualization of the movement.
In order to understand how organizational resources can create opportunities for social movements, the third set of variables includes predictors based on counts of religious, civic, and labor organizations. These organizations, which are hypothesized in the resource mobilization perspective to be “supportive institutions,” are predicted to positively impact the ability of movements to mobilize support (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1235). That is, all else being equal, the greater the number of supportive institutions in a given population, the greater the ability of potential movements to effectively build off of these existing support bases. Data for these predictors come from the Northeast Regional Center of Rural Development (Rupasingha and Goetz 2008).

In addition to organizational resources increasing the odds of movement emergence, the opening of political opportunities are regarded as a boon for social movements. Conversely, the closure of those opportunities due to state or police repression should place constraints on the ability of movement groups to form or to gain sufficient traction. The fourth set of variables pull from McAdam’s (1996) specification of the dimensions of political opportunities—specifically targeted are the “relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system” and the “state’s capacity and propensity for repression” (p.27). With concern to the former dimension, data for the number of political organizations again come from the work of Rupasingha and Goetz (2008), while the percentage that voted Democrat in the 2008 Presidential election was determined using the now discontinued CenStats USA Counties database from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). With respect to the latter dimension, the variable for the number of county law enforcement officers per 10,000 residents was constructed from data provided by the yearly produced Uniform Crime Reports (FBI 2011). However, the measure is not without issues. Due to
problems of data missing not at random, the use of the county police employment predictor leads to an inconsistent number of observations across the regression models.⁷

Following the hypotheses set by political opportunity theory, the expectation is that openness, as reflected by a larger number of political organizations and a higher percentage of Democratic voters, encourages collective action, while the capacity for repression, as reflected by the police strength measure of enforcement officers per 10,000 residents, acts as a hindrance to collective action. Although the repression measure does not capture the propensity for the use of police force, the measure of the capacity for repression may work through a combination of structural and signal mechanisms to reduce the odds of group formation.⁸

*Control Variables*

The controls are based on a mix of geographic and demographic factors. Included are the percent of students in the county enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution, the population density of the county, the percent of the county population that reported their race as white, and, lastly, whether or not the county contained a state capital city. The first two indicators come from the ACS 5-year Summary File (U.S. Census Bureau 2011), while the third was constructed from data taken

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⁷ Data missing not at random (or MNAR) cannot easily be imputed unless there is significant knowledge of the reasons for its omission (Enders 2010). A simple, albeit bias-inducing technique known as last observation carried forward was used to recover missing observations with information from the previous five years of Uniform Crime Report data. The recovered data accounts for approximately 7.5 percent of the total non-missing cases.

⁸ As Jacobs and Helms (1997) found in their longitudinal study, there is some evidence that increased levels of economic inequality can lead to increased levels of social control. However, counter to their findings, I find no support for a correlation between levels of economic inequality in the preceding period and police strength in the latter period (see Appendix B, Table 3). This may be an artifact of the time period studied, of the methods used, and of a mismatch between how those scholars’ operationalized inequality and police strength and how those measures are used here.
from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The fourth control variable for state capital was assembled from readily available information.

Control measures taken from the ACS are multiyear averages extending from January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2011. Each data point represents an estimated value over the five-year time period. Large demographic shifts in either a positive or negative direction are thus likely to be moderated. For instance, the measurement of students enrolled in a post-secondary institution may have been higher in last few years of the observed time period than in the early years, but due to the estimation averaging this trend would be lost. That said, the measure is the best indication for the number of higher education students available and is a suitable proxy for the presence of post-secondary institutions in a county. Likewise, all other population-level estimates given by the ACS are subject to a similar bias, including those related to income inequality. Finally, the measure of population density is logarithmically transformed due to its extreme right-tailed distribution. The use of logarithmic transformations can effectively narrow the range of skewed variables, making their coefficient estimates less sensitive to outliers (Wooldridge 2009).

Based partially on prior accounts of known constituencies, higher levels of college and university students, and higher levels of population density, are predicted to serve as a larger pool of possible constituents from which the movement could draw support (Piven 2013; Pickerill and Krinskey 2012; Milkman et al. 2013). It is also predicted that capital cities had an increased likelihood of group presence compared to non-capital cities. This could be attributed to a targeting mechanism whereby activists chose strategic sites based on their political importance. Lastly, the control for percent white is utilized because, as Juris et al. (2012) note in their discussion on power
and difference within Occupy, despite the best intentions of the activists, contemporary mass movements in the U.S. tend to be comprised of those relatively privileged actors in a society who have the time and resources needed to participate. Jointly, the controls are an extensive set of variables designed to explain a significant amount of the demographic and geographic variability observed between counties.

**Modeling Technique**

A linear mixed model is used to evaluate the relative contributions of predictors derived from the political opportunity, resource mobilization, and structural threat perspectives. Also known as hierarchical linear models, regression analyses that utilize mixed model techniques are preferred when data is geographically clustered because they relax the classical linear regression assumption of uncorrelated errors and thus can account for spatial relationships (Luke 2004). The ability of mixed models to permit the lower-order observations of counties to be grouped into the higher-order structures of states may help to explain significant variations in the data that can be attributed to unobserved differences between the states. A generalized linear mixed model follows the form:

\[
\ln\left(\frac{p_{ij}}{1-p_{ij}}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_k x_{ij} + \cdots + e_{ij} + u_j
\]

where, \( p_{ij} \) is the probability of group formation within a given county; the intercept of \( \beta_0 \) is the expected value of the outcome when all predictors are held at zero; the slopes of the first-level predictors \( x_{ij} \) are \( \beta_k \); and, finally, the error is split between the random terms \( e_{ij} \), which is the unmodeled variance of the first level, and \( u_j \), which is the unmodeled variance of the second level.

---

9 Additional models were run that replaced percent white with percent black. These models displayed the opposite effect, with percent black in a county displaying a significant but negative effect on the emergence of Occupy groups. The result hints at a problematic trend within the landscape of contemporary movements. More attention needs to be focused on how power and privilege are mirrored in the attempts of activists to bring about social “change.”
The implicit assumption made by a random intercept mixed model is that different states had different average odds of the outcome, but that the marginal effects of the county-level predictors were the same across states.

Without the use of mixed models under conditions of autocorrelation, as is the case with spatially clustered units, parameter estimates and their standard errors may be unduly biased (Guo and Zhao 2000). The result is an increased chance of Type I (or false positive) errors. When used properly, mixed models estimate the appropriate and unbiased standard errors. As can be seen in Figure 1, significant clusters of Occupy groups were formed in states along the West Coast and in the Northeast. This is a preliminary indication that a mixed model is a suitable modeling strategy. A secondary statistical test of a null specified model reveals that the intraclass correlation coefficient, commonly signified by the Greek letter $\rho$, is .25, which indicates that up to 25 percent of the total differences observed in the county-level outcome are attributable to unobserved state-level factors. This affirms that a mixed model is a suitable course for the statistical analysis.
ANALYSIS

The primary hypothesis tested is that increases in economic inequality at the county level coincided with an increased chance for a county to have founded an Occupy group net state-to-state differences. The secondary hypothesis, however, is that economic threats based strictly on losses are a less salient predictor of group emergence. To test the nuanced links between the different economic threats, organizational resources, political opportunities, and mobilization, an additive modeling method was employed using theory-driven indicators and relevant controls. Combining the first two hypotheses with the others, the significance of the economic threats across the board are hypothesized to exhibit a segmented response. Nevertheless, the significance of economic inequality in particular should be robust in the presence of the resource mobilization and political opportunity measures. To that end, a final saturated model includes all of the predictors utilized in the previous models.

Descriptive statistics for the explanatory variables are found in Table 1. Of particular interest is that among the economic threat measures there is substantial variation. As would be expected, median household incomes on average declined from 2007 to 2010, yet certain counties actually experienced large increases over the same time period. For the ACS measure of income inequality, there is a considerable amount of variation across counties, but that variation is somewhat less than that demonstrated by the other economic measures. Approximately 68.2 percent of the observations for the Gini index values fall within a range that extends from 39.74 to 46.96. Likewise, looking at the descriptive results for the additional measures, it is largely demonstrated that there is sizable
amount of dissimilarity between counties, though there are a few important caveats, such as labor and civic organizations (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Occupy Movement, 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Threat</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (%Δ)</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income ($Δ)</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>-1,582.56</td>
<td>2,743.58</td>
<td>-14.653</td>
<td>14,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini Index</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>43.35</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>20.01</td>
<td>67.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Mobilization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Organizationsa</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Organizationsa</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Organizationsa</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Opportunity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Organizationsa</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted Democrat (%)</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>41.51</td>
<td>13.85</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>92.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Police Officers††</td>
<td>3021</td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>264.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrolled (%)</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (%)</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>84.24</td>
<td>16.13</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>3108</td>
<td>261.02</td>
<td>1,733.24</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>69,464.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Variables per 10,000 residents. ††Inconsistent number of observations due to data missing not at random.

Turning to the logistic regression results (see Table 2), a review of the control model (Model 1) endorses the view that the Occupy movement was largely an urban phenomenon, which targeted capital cities and which drew support from white and college enrolled populations. On average, state capitals exhibited increased odds of county group formation, by a factor of 153.4 times, over the odds of non-capital cities holding all else equal. Though the results are indicative of potential outlying cases, capital cities with Occupy groups represented only 47 of the 625 total cases (or approximately 7.5 percent) and their inclusion does not meaningfully bias the results. Models that omit these potentially bias-inducing cases are not statistically different from those where the observations are kept.
Table 2. Odds Ratios from Mixed Model Logistic Regression of the Occupy Movement, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Threat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (%Δ)</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0507)</td>
<td>(0.0507)</td>
<td>(0.0541)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income ($Δ / 100)†</td>
<td>1.006*</td>
<td>1.006*</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00292)</td>
<td>(0.00295)</td>
<td>(0.00307)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini Index</td>
<td>1.145***</td>
<td>1.144***</td>
<td>1.153***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0273)</td>
<td>(0.0278)</td>
<td>(0.0298)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Organizationsª</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.898***</td>
<td>0.923***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0237)</td>
<td>(0.0259)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Organizationsª</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.144*</td>
<td>1.148*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0795)</td>
<td>(0.0885)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Organizationsª</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.754***</td>
<td>1.587***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.193)</td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Organizationsª</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.632</td>
<td>(0.725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted Democrat (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.028***</td>
<td>(0.00827)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Police Officersª</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.939***</td>
<td>(0.0170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>153.4***</td>
<td>166.1***</td>
<td>155.0***</td>
<td>98.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(206.9)</td>
<td>(218.7)</td>
<td>(255.5)</td>
<td>(165.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrolled (%)</td>
<td>1.190***</td>
<td>1.158***</td>
<td>1.155***</td>
<td>1.128***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0199)</td>
<td>(0.0207)</td>
<td>(0.0207)</td>
<td>(0.0206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (%)</td>
<td>1.012*</td>
<td>1.019***</td>
<td>1.020***</td>
<td>1.028***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00624)</td>
<td>(0.00649)</td>
<td>(0.00648)</td>
<td>(0.00752)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density (ln)</td>
<td>2.957***</td>
<td>2.918***</td>
<td>2.582***</td>
<td>2.673***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.185)</td>
<td>(0.193)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
<td>(0.203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.000354***</td>
<td>6.97e-07***</td>
<td>1.62e-06***</td>
<td>2.49e-07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000251)</td>
<td>(9.65e-07)</td>
<td>(2.24e-06)</td>
<td>(3.79e-07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Component†</td>
<td>9.831***</td>
<td>10.14***</td>
<td>5.969***</td>
<td>6.024***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.504)</td>
<td>(5.816)</td>
<td>(2.815)</td>
<td>(2.990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45††</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-913.6777</td>
<td>-895.5714</td>
<td>-876.9763</td>
<td>-815.8608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. N1 are counties and N2 are states, plus the District of Columbia.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
† Inverse used. ‡ Variables per 10,000 residents. † State-level intercept variance. †† Inconsistent number of observations due to data missing not at random.
The model of economic threat indicators (Model 2) returns with the expected mixed results. The observed changes in the unemployment rate and median household income from the height of the economic boom to the depths of the recession had little to no significant impact on the odds of a county to have had an Occupy group. This is in line with the stated hypotheses on a segmented response to economic threat. Nonetheless, it should be noted that median household income is initially significant at below the $p = 0.10$ level, but, translated into a practical effect, the results are limited. Even given the large range in values, on average, for each $100$ increase in the median household income gap, the odds that an Occupy group was present only increased by a factor of $1.006$ ceteris paribus.

The result on the measure of income inequality, however, is strongly statistically significant. Furthermore, given the range of the index values between counties, the result is also substantively significant compared to those returned by the median household income measure. On average, the higher the observed value of the Gini index, the higher the odds that an Occupy group was present holding all else equal. This remains to be the case across each of the subsequent models. In terms of the predicted probabilities, as the Gini index values deviated from their mean value there is a noticeable difference in the chance that a group was present. From a value of one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean, the predicted probability that a group was present rose by approximately $10$ percent (see Appendix A, Figure 3). The results of the threat-based model lend statistical weight to the combined hypotheses of a segmented response between the economic predictors. Moreover, that response is statistically robust. Theoretically speaking, the results give credence to view that higher levels of economic inequality, where stark contrasts in
income are most visible, is perhaps a more relevant predictor of the proactive movement’s emergence than the defensive threat posed by an average decline in actual incomes or employment rates within a county-level population.

The results of Model 3, which introduces the suite of resource mobilization variables, are also somewhat promising. Religious organizations, civic organizations, and labor organizations per 10,000 residents are all at least moderately statistically significant. However, the direction of the predictor for religious organizations is not as theorized, which indicates that perhaps not all religious organizations are created equal. While a higher number of some religious organizations may indeed foster a supportive environment for nascent social movements, the presence of a large number of religious organizations is also likely to indicate a certain level of conservatism in a given population. Outside of that issue, the predictor for labor organizations is strongly significant below the $p = 0.01$ level. Everything else held constant, for each additional labor organization per 10,000 residents in a county, the odds that an Occupy group was present in that county increased by a factor of 1.75 times. The practical impact of the result, however, is toned-down by the fact that the mean number of labor organizations per 10,000 residents was .38, with a standard deviation of .59 (see Table 1). While labor organizations played a role in determining whether an Occupy group was founded in a county, that role was presumably limited. The results for civic organizations are similarly marginal.

There is stronger support for the political opportunity variables in Model 4. Although the measure of political organizations is not statistically significant, the other predictors are both significant and in the direction that is anticipated. As the results show, Democratic strongholds had greater odds of an Occupy group being present compared to the odds of counties that voted for non-
Democrats in the 2008 general election. This is consistent with the general narrative and the expected support base of the Occupy movement. What is perhaps more interesting is the result on county law enforcement officers. For each additional officer at the county level per 10,000 residents, there was an on average decrease in the odds of a group presence by a factor of .061. As with the measure of income inequality, while the number seems small, the wide range of values that the variable takes on makes the result substantively significant. Even though McAdam (1996) appears skeptical of the idea that the capacity for the use of repressive force equates with the propensity for its use, these findings may indicate that there could have existed a deleterious perceptual influence whereby group emergence was negatively impacted based on a signal of repressive capability.

Although these results endorse the hypothesized relationship between repressive capacity and the lowered potential for mobilization, they should be interpreted cautiously as questions remain as to whether the predictor for county police strength is reflecting the intended aspect of social control. While statistically significant, it is possible that the police strength variable is acting as a proximate measure for some other unobserved factor. That said, the results should not be discounted off-hand. As the number of county police officers per 10,000 residents rose to one standard deviation above their mean value, the probability that an Occupy group was present declined by approximately 5 percent (see Appendix A, Figure 4). Subsequent work should explore further the possible effects of social control as a structural or signal deterrent on movement mobilization using improved measures that span across other units of analysis.
Conclusion

The above results emphasize the importance of bringing the notion of threat back into the study of movement emergence. It is hard to overlook that the threat of income inequality was a significant contextual factor in the emergence of Occupy groups in counties across the continental United States. Social movement scholars have begun to reincorporate elements of breakdown and strain into theories of collective action, and the available evidence suggests that this move is well founded. However, not all structural threats work in the same way for all movements. Just as some academics have argued that government repression does not always lead to movement decline (see Goldstone and Tilly 2001), structural threats do not always enable (or hinder) the mobilization of groups.

Further, the evidence supports the thesis of a segmented, movement-by-movement response to distinct economic threats. In reply to Van Dyke and Soule (2002), it appears that threat does remain a salient predictor even in the mobilization of proactive groups, though these threats take a different form than the losses that reactive movements contest. If one accepts the premise that the Occupy movement was an illustrative example of a proactive movement, then the evidence strongly supports that threat can be a precipitating factor that applies more broadly across Tilly et al.’s (1975) typology than has previously been shown. Scholars would do well to include macro-level threat variables alongside variables drawn from the resource mobilization and the political opportunity perspectives when looking at movements other than the reactive type. The key point is that theories of social movement emergence should consider threat mechanisms as one of many significant factors that affect mobilization processes beyond those already theorized and empirically demonstrated.
Although the findings are revealing, there are several ways in which this study is limited. One such limitation is the use of county-level data. Where the statistical evidence does tie the structural condition of income inequality in counties to the emergence of Occupy groups, it does not allow for the demonstration that individuals who experienced this inequality (and perceived it as a problem) were also those who actively engaged in the movement. Similarly, the finding that county police strength hampered the formation of groups should be interpreted carefully. As noted before, the capacity for the use of force does not equate with its use. The measure could be reflecting other county characteristics beyond the intended aspect of social control. Additional work is needed across different levels of analysis in order to gain a greater understanding how these processes operated.

Another possible direction for future research is the comparison of these results with those that led to the emergence of Tea Party groups. As McVeigh et al. (2014) found in their county-level analysis, disparities in educational attainment were a significant predictor in the emergence of that movement’s groups. Where the implication of this study is that the want for distributive economic justice motivated collective action, their findings suggest that the unequal distribution of advantages within a given county provided the needed justification for those activists to guard against a more equitable sharing of resources. A comparative examination of the two movements is an intriguing prospect—one that may help further refine our understanding of threat, opportunity, and their combined relation to both proactive and reactive movements.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of Occupy Group by Gini Index
(with 95% Confidence Interval)

Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Occupy Group by County Police Officers
(with 95% Confidence Interval)
## APPENDIX B

### Table 3. Correlation Matrix for the Independent Variables of the Occupy Movement, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Unemp. (%Δ)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median HH Inc.</td>
<td>-.403***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gini Index</td>
<td>.126***</td>
<td>0.003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relig. Orgs.ᵃ</td>
<td>-.355***</td>
<td>.300***</td>
<td>-.043*</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Orgs.ᵃ</td>
<td>-.247***</td>
<td>.125***</td>
<td>-.073***</td>
<td>.228***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor Orgs.ᵃ</td>
<td>.041*</td>
<td>-.103***</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.132***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. Orgs.ᵃ</td>
<td>-.041*</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.047**</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.048**</td>
<td>.055**</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voted Dem.</td>
<td>.189***</td>
<td>-.195***</td>
<td>.220***</td>
<td>-.252***</td>
<td>.054**</td>
<td>.223***</td>
<td>.055**</td>
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<td>Officers⁷⁷</td>
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<td>-0.020</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-.110***</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-.089***</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
ᵃVariables per 10,000 residents. ⁷⁷Inconsistent number of observations due to data missing not at random.