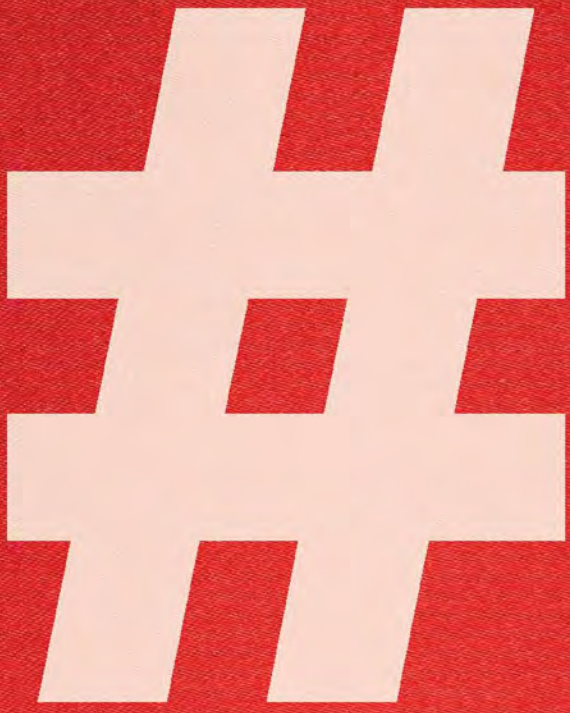

THE REVOLUTION THAT *WASN'T*

How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives

JEN SCHRADIE

The Revolution That Wasn't

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Jen Schradie

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To all the revolutionaries that were

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PREFACE

The False Promise of Digital Activism

For almost two decades, the internet has been hailed as a revolutionary leveling force that is reshaping activism, particularly following the rise of social media. In 2017 alone, one could find examples in several powerful hashtag protests. There was #MeToo, launched in the wake of a Hollywood sexual harassment scandal that would eventually topple celebrities and politicians alike well into 2018. There was #WomensMarch, which ignited some of the largest simultaneous mass protests the world had ever seen. Activism seemed cheap, accessible, fast, and open to all. With the right hashtag, it appeared that all it takes to start a movement is the right status update, and suddenly, a nobody from nowhere can change the world.

However, after having the playing field largely to itself for years, this celebratory narrative now finds itself competing with an increasingly sinister view of the internet. A murmur of dissent on digital platforms and politics grew into a roar following the election of President Trump. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter, once the darlings of digital democracy, were suddenly on the defensive for their role in promoting fake news. Concerns about privacy multiplied as revelations grew that some companies may be harvesting

social media data to manipulate voters. Russia's role was being heavily scrutinized. Harassment, particularly of women, seemed unstoppable. Terrorists were turning to social media to spread violent propaganda. Trolls, bots, and hackers were subjects of congressional hearings. And above it all was a growing fear that the internet was a thing beyond anyone's control, that it had opened the door to an activism far darker and more destructive than once thought possible.

The earlier Edward Snowden revelations of the government's digital spying had put a crack in the utopian digital vision of the internet. But it had taken several years, and the shock election of Trump, for much of the Western world to wake up to the ways the internet could be used to stifle democratic movements. By early 2018, the battle for the soul of digital activism was in full swing. Young students took to social media to demand more protection from gun violence. Swarms of Twitter bots flew into action to shout them down online.

Good. Bad. Utopian. Dystopian. The impact of digital technologies on political activism has exploded into a global conversation, a furious debate over the role that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube now play in giving voice to those previously unheard. While this may be new territory for many, it has been central to the questions that my research has explored over the past decade: Who is able and motivated to make use of these new digital tools? And how does this shape their activism?

The impetus to explore the intersection of digital media and activism is both personal and professional for me. It derives from my experiences on the ground with communication technologies and social movements, experiences that inspired me to want to push beyond breezy headlines about hashtag activism. In 1988, as an undergraduate at Duke University, I spent time in Central America, where the United States was waging a covert war against popular movements. In an effort to stop the American military intervention, local activists encouraged me and other North Americans to get the word out about what we had witnessed. And thousands of internationalists like me did just that. Back in this pre-internet age, I wrote articles for student and community publications. Others were doing everything from writing letters to the editor and in newsletters to speaking in church basements and universities.

Later, I embraced video as a way for local people to be able to tell their stories directly, rather than through intermediaries like me. I was hooked.

The availability of VHS video seemed to be a revolutionary way for stories about the disenfranchised to reach a wider audience. While still a student at Duke University, I disseminated one copy of a video that the United Farmworkers had made to promote their California grape boycott in protest of the toxic chemicals that agribusinesses were using. I showed the video of farmworkers' own voices (with the help of a celebrity voiceover) to different campus groups, classes, and administrators, eventually convincing the university to support their boycott.

After college, I stumbled into a career as a documentary filmmaker. I started modestly, wanting to get the stories out about injustices in the American Black Belt South. A friend and I made a documentary about a group of Black farmers and residents whose drinking water had been contaminated from a nearby factory. If I had known how much work went into making such a video, I'm not sure I would have ever started. But I fell in love with the power of people being able to tell their own story. Yet it was still indirect and time-delayed.

I continued to do a variety of communication work for nonprofit groups, from producing videos and designing newsletters to making buttons and T-shirts. But video was my passion, even though time and gaining access to equipment remained big hurdles. I would often borrow cameras from schools and universities or take advantage of public access stations. These used to be some of the only ways that everyday people could use professional video-editing equipment and get their videos broadcast.

By the mid-to-late 1990s, digital video cameras and editing radically transformed shooting and editing film. I went into the Philippine jungle with a filmmaking partner to interview rebel guerillas for one of my documentaries. We were spared having to haul a large, analog video camera, let alone a 16mm camera with large reels of film, as we hiked at night to avoid government detection. In our case, two people were enough to shoot countless hours of footage and edit it on a Mac. By the time this film premiered in 1999, it felt like we were part of another media revolution. Even so, distribution of video itself had not changed. Social movement groups were launching their own websites, but I still had to distribute videos through touring, film festivals and public television.

The real game changer for technology that activists would eventually embrace in public displays of digital activism came in 2006. YouTube exploded into the public's eye with its sale to Google, Facebook became

available to the general public for the first time, and Twitter was launched. *Time* magazine named online content creators the "Person of the Year." Streaming and communicating were more direct than ever before and, with mobile devices, were taking the tech scene by storm.

Wanting to investigate the intersection of these digital technologies with inequalities and social movements, I began my graduate studies at Harvard University that same year. I was intrigued by their potential, but skeptical that such a phenomenon would truly level the field, especially given how much work I knew it took to digitally produce and distribute compelling political stories. And yet, my own career made it clear that each new technological evolutionary step had profound consequences for who told stories and how. It was critical for me to fully grasp who was benefiting and who was being left behind as the digital sands shifted.

When I began my sociology doctoral studies at the University of California at Berkeley in 2007, I first tackled fundamental questions of the digital divide, looking at who was able to take advantage of creating online content—and who was not. From there, I took my digital questions more directly to the social movement realm in 2011. At that point, much of the digital activism analysis seemed to revolve around headline-grabbing protests such those in the Middle East and on Wall Street. But these studies seemed inevitably to focus solely on left-leaning groups and flashpoints. Having been part of activism campaigns that spanned years and seen the intensity of labor involved and the drudgery of the tasks it took to build a movement step by step, I wanted to find out how everyday people and movements were using digital technology for their activism.

But how? To compare different types of social movement groups and how they used the internet, I had to find one issue that included a variety of people. I didn't want to start at the tip of the digital activism iceberg—the high-profile movements that had already made it to the top. I wasn't interested in cherry-picking a movement that we already knew used the internet and then make claims about how the internet has changed social movements. I was interested in the opposite—how different types of social movement groups might change how they used the internet.

So it made sense to go back to North Carolina, which not only had the far-right, moderate conservatives, and liberals, but also far-left groups. I already had a good lay of the political land, so to speak, and I was familiar with one issue that captured all these differences: public employees' struggle

for union rights. I was familiar with this issue as I had been a state worker myself, having worked for several years as a video producer for the North Carolina Agency for Public Telecommunications. I had even made a video for North Carolina Public Television about the challenges faced by low-paid public employees.

I had remained aware from a distance of the various political and economic battles facing North Carolina public workers. I knew that the growth of the Tea Party and other conservative groups had taken on this issue of public-employee collective bargaining with a passionate opposition. So I began diving back into this landscape to map out the political battleground and players.

All in all, I found 34 groups who were active around this issue—some poor, others with money; some left-leaning, others right-leaning; some horizontal, others hierarchical. I also found new and young groups, as well as those that had been around awhile with older members. The groups ranged from labor unions and worker centers to civil rights and student groups, all supporting the labor rights issue. Opposing unionization were Tea Party and other far-right Patriot groups, as well as conservative think tanks and professional political organizations. The research was built on a foundation of data I gathered from their use of Twitter, Facebook, and websites. But it was shaped equally by the many hours I spent visiting and observing individuals and organizations across this universe of 34 groups, attending town halls and meetups and organizing drives.

I found three main factors that shaped digital activism, which I used to organize this book. While I include all 34 groups in my digital activism index, each chapter zooms into a few organizations that exemplify a specific factor. The introductory chapter unpacks both the conventional wisdom and intellectual puzzles around digital activism differences. In this chapter, I also explain how North Carolina, as a battleground state with both a high-tech industry and top universities, as well as some of the poorest areas in the country, is an ideal place to capture the gamut of experiences that social movement groups might encounter in using digital technologies.

Chapter 1 tackles the foundational question about whether or not digital activism levels the playing field between those from different socioeconomic classes. I measured not only how much different groups were posting and interacting online, but also how the actual content varied, depending on the class makeup of the group. I uncovered mechanisms of digital differences

that go beyond whether or not groups have access to digital gadgets or if they have the skills to go online. By spending time with predominantly African American public employees in the far reaches of rural North Carolina, I learned how harnessing the power of the internet may not be so simple in a context of repression and racism.

Chapter 2 confronts the common wisdom that digital activism has flourished across horizontal movements, as opposed to digitally stifling hierarchical organizations. I analyze measures of hierarchy and bureaucracy, such as decision-making levels and numbers of staff, in comparison to a group's level of digital engagement. And with an in-depth look at everyday digital organizing practices, I compare both a structured teachers' union and a horizontal student group. Both groups embraced the internet, but it turned out that digital engagement thrives on organizational roots more than even I had expected.

Chapters 3 and 4 delve more deeply into the political motivation of social movement groups to use the internet. In Chapter 3, I compare right and left activists but focus on grassroots conservative groups. This digital account of Tea Party and far-right Prepper activists dispels the myth of conservatives as dupes in a Koch brothers' conspiracy. They were digital evangelizers in their own right. By peeling back the layers of hype, I show how average conservative activists used the internet to go around a mainstream media they believed didn't represent them anymore.

But political ideology is not simply a right-versus-left phenomenon, so Chapter 4 takes a look at how groups' political strategies—whether they lobby for reform or protest for radical social change—can impact their digital use. To explain this facet of the digital activist gap, I compare two different labor unions: one is reformist and focuses on influencing powerful decision makers, and the other is radical and focuses on organizing the powerless. In the process, both of these unions found themselves on opposite sides of an insurgent social justice movement, Moral Monday, which emerged in North Carolina in 2013 and sparked waves of protests across the state. This protest movement led to one of the most surprising findings of digital activism in the book, countering the prototypical view of an online warrior as a radical leftist.

Finally, the book's conclusion raises the issue of what is at stake with this digital activism gap, in light of the moral panic around Trump's tweets, Russian bots, or cries of fake news. This pendulum swing of fear around the internet and politics fails to consider the people and organizations on the

ground who are the ones generating, regurgitating, remixing, and replying to online information, whether on the right or on the left.

It is my hope that people from both sides of the ideological divide will find the following stories, data, and theories of interest—whether they are activists, policy makers, journalists, tech workers, or the general public. The book is for those who want a deep digital dive into what it takes to do everything from organize a protest to click on a political meme. As an academic, I am in direct conversation with other sociologists and political scientists, as well as colleagues in communication, media, and journalism. But because I delve into current debates around inequality, organizations, movements, unions, and, yes, politics, this book is for anyone concerned about these issues.

Throughout my work, the digital tools being used in the political realm have never ceased to evolve and multiply. New tools like messaging apps and Snapchat have grown in power. The Facebook of 2019 is not the Facebook of 2009. Not only are the features infinitely more rich and nuanced, but the platform reaches more than 2 billion people on the planet. The only thing we can predict today is that this iteration will never end, and new gadgets and faster connections will offer new twists and turns.

But each of these generations of digital tools eventually collides with the reality of people's lives and circumstances. Whether it's a VHS cassette tape, or a Russian bot, there are some basic truths about the potential of new technologies to augment political activism. This book is an attempt to shed light on the reality of what happens where the activist meets the digital.

The Revolution That Wasn't

Introduction

Public Unions, Patriots, and the Battle for the Internet

THE DAY STARTED CALMLY ENOUGH for the approximately 50 protesters gathered in the basement of Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was April 29, 2013, and the group of students, ministers, and racial justice leaders had assembled that Monday to review the list of grievances that had pushed them to this point. For several years, this southern state seemed to be inching toward a more progressive future, having voted for Barack Obama in 2008 and just barely falling short a second time in 2012. But since then, dreams of that future had been smashed by the election of a Republican governor and legislature that moved with staggering swiftness to enact a radically conservative agenda, one that few political observers had seen coming.

Speaking that day in the basement, the protesters took turns listing their complaints. Legislation that would require photo IDs at voting booths. Rejections of expanded Medicaid programs. Cuts to tax credits aimed at working-class people. Cuts to aid for higher education. A bill to make Christianity the official state religion. And restrictions on public employee unions. Suddenly, it felt like people of color and blue-collar workers were under assault more than ever, and it was time to take a bold stand and speak out against what the group felt was the hypocrisy of a political movement that claimed to be religious. "If you remove all the scriptures dealing with

poverty and justice, the Bible would literally fall apart," said Rev. William J. Barber, president of the North Carolina chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NC-NAACP), according to one report.

The group of 50 exited the basement and marched solemnly toward the General Assembly building, where they entered and then knelt in prayer. The police were on the scene, making attempts to get the group to disperse as a crowd looked on. As the protesters sang, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," a staple of the civil rights movement, one officer attempted to shout above the noise with the help of a megaphone. When that failed, the police moved in and arrested 17 protesters, including Barber, placing zip ties on their wrists, and then taking them to jail where they would spend a night.

After years of marching in the streets, these protesters had decided that it was time for a different tactic: civil disobedience and arrests. Yet the arrests following that "pray-in" only generated news coverage of a few paragraphs from the Associated Press and the *News & Observer* of Raleigh. And why should they warrant more? After all, in the age of the internet and social media, when it often feels like a simple breeze of discontent can quickly blow into a spontaneous hurricane of protest, a movement, we are told, can be summoned on demand with a tweet or Facebook status update. Just two years earlier, *Time* magazine had named "The Protester" its Person of the Year," opining: "Massive and effective street protest was a global oxymoron until—suddenly, shockingly—starting exactly a year ago, it became the defining trope of our times. And the protester once again became a maker of history." Summing up the work it took to organize in the digital age, *Time* wrote: "If you tweet it, they will come."

While that North Carolina pray-in may have appeared to be a rather modest undertaking compared to the great social movements many believed were being fueled by internet activism in the Middle East or on Wall Street, it still managed to provide the spark of what would come to be known as the "Moral Monday" movement. The civil disobedience protests at the General Assembly continued each Monday for weeks as the number of protesters swelled. By the 12th consecutive week, the crowd had grown into the thousands, and the numbers arrested by police since April topped 950. Not since the civil rights movement 50 years earlier had the state witnessed such large protests and mass civil disobedience.

Indeed, in the coming months, and years, Moral Monday would gain national, and then international attention, especially in the wake of Donald Trump's election as president. The protests would evolve into a national Poor People's Campaign, and Rev. Barber was soon speaking across the country, offering words of encouragement and inspiration for people wanting to organize their own communities in the face of a conservative wave that seemed to control all levels of government. But what remained remarkable, in glancing back at the origins of this movement, was the analog nature of its inception.

Two weeks after those first April arrests in 2013, Larsene, the vice president of her union local, UE 150, traveled from her home in Goldsboro to Raleigh to participate in the latest Moral Monday protest.[1] Larsene, who earns less than $20,000 a year as a health care assistant at a public mental hospital, had been active in her union for over ten years. But she could not get a union contract at her place of employment because North Carolina is one of three states that outlaws collective bargaining for public employees.[2] Among the bills Larsene and her Moral Monday compatriots were protesting was one that would enshrine this law into the state constitution and cut other union rights and unemployment benefits.

On a Monday afternoon in May, on the ground floor of the state legislative building, Larsene was arrested alongside other union members during Moral Monday, as well as public workers, such as teachers and firefighters who had joined the cause.

What was notable about Larsene's act of defiance was what led her and many others to the state capital that day. In Larsene's case, she had heard about the protests from her union, a workers' center, and from her hometown minister, who happened to be Rev. Barber. In face-to-face conversations, they all played a role in inspiring her to join the protests. In this new age of activism, this movement began without almost any of the checklist of digital tools that were supposed to be driving the resurgence of global protests. This participatory movement did not emerge online, and the internet was not responsible for its initial popularity and diffusion. As of late June 2013, the lead organization of Moral Monday, the NC-NAACP, had no working Twitter feed and their website was a relic of early 1990s HTML technology. Though the NC-NAACP now has more sophisticated internet platforms, social media was not critical to the initial Moral Monday mobilizations.

One month into the Moral Monday movement, I talked with Rob, the NC-NAACP's communication staff person, about the methods they used, and did not use, to mobilize protesters: "I'm not on Twitter. I really want to be. It's something I can't get my head around yet. . . . [I do] a little Facebook. . . . There are different modes of communication, especially for NAACP folks. . . . People are mobilizing on buses and talking to people. It's grassroots: e-mail, postcards . . . pre-rallies, and robo-calls."

Many Moral Monday protesters that spring and early summer said they did not hear about the events on Facebook or Twitter. Some laughed outright at the idea. People found out about the protests in various ways, but many said they got involved through their local organizations. In the early months, people showed up to Moral Mondays because the NC-NAACP organized county-by-county events in churches, coordinated with other progressive organizations in the state, and engaged in traditional forms of grassroots organizing, such as house visits and phone calls.

Some of the groups involved in these protests had been working for years on the particular issue of collective bargaining rights for public employees. North Carolina state, county, and city workers had never legally been able to negotiate a contract. So this statewide civil disobedience action around this union issue was noteworthy. Members of three active organizations in North Carolina public sector unionizing—Coalition Against Racism, Black Workers for Justice, and UE 150—were some of the first Moral Monday arrestees, like Larsene, yet these groups had even *less* digital presence than the NC-NAACP. Two of these groups did not have a functioning website and only sporadically used Facebook, and none used Twitter.

As social and digital technologies have spread across the globe, we are constantly being told that they have ushered in a new age of activism. In this new era, many believe that an individual can spark an uprising with a tweet or a heart-tugging Facebook post or a powerful YouTube video. As with so many other facets of our lives, technology promises to liberate us from the tedious, labor-intensive work that traditionally lies behind the drudgery of building a social movement. No more knocking on doors late at night, or begging people to attend meetings in drafty church basements or handing out pamphlets in front of factories spewing plumes of smog into the atmosphere. Technology has "flattened" the world of activism, as we believe it has with selling books or starting a company, giving everyone an equal chance to launch an on-demand revolution with the push of a button.[3]

This idea is powerful and alluring, promising to bring sweeping social revolutions where traditional political ideas, differences, and organizations are made less relevant. If we are bound no more by the ossified structures that seemed to have created such deep divisions and served as barriers to change, then perhaps progress will occur at an accelerated rate. No more patiently waiting for history to unfold. Now a better world is just a click away, at least according to the popular press.[4]

Without digging too deep, it is obvious that digital tools are playing a growing role in social movements. Whether we are talking about the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, or the Worldwide Women's March, at some point, these tools helped amplify the energy and momentum of these events.[5] All one has to do is look at the related Twitter feeds or Facebook pages to know that activists did embrace such platforms eventually, and they used them to spread information, gather new followers, and organize protests. And yet, communication has always been a crucial element of any social moment. Whether they were slave uprisings or the Populist Movement of the 19th century or Poland's Solidarity, activists have always found ways to build channels of communications using the tools and the technologies at hand. And so we must ask: Is the internet truly a revolutionary tool? Or is it merely a wrinkle to these time-worn methods?

Grappling with these questions, some scholars have chipped away at the initial digital euphoria around activism.[6] Still, the direction of the academic needle has tilted in the direction of digital activism as not only essential for modern social movements but also as leading to more democratic participation.[7]

Perhaps an old democracy debate could be answered in this new era. A classic theory of "polyarchy" argues that different types of political groups can overcome power imbalances because competing interest groups can keep power in check, creating a system wherein all citizens can make their voice heard.[8] Yet as society has grown more complex, the levers of government have come to be seen as increasingly distant from the citizenry and rigged in favor of the powerful.[9] Online activism, by flattening communication networks, seemed to hold out the possibility of reinstating the pluralist ideal, updating this democracy debate for the digital age. The basic idea behind techno-optimist rhetoric is that digital technologies offer a means of overcoming these power imbalances and returning to a (new and improved) version of polyarchy. This digital democracy would result from reducing the costs of

participation and coordination, while also creating more direct channels to connect "the people" with those in power.[10]

Yet these headline-grabbing protests put the digital spotlight on left-leaning movements.[11] As such, few were paying attention to the conservative rise of social media.[12] That changed when Trump won the Republican nomination, and his Tweets soon became daily fodder for news coverage. As many pundits scrambled to figure out what happened, the emphasis tended to be on him as an individual rather than any digital movement behind him. Many articles focused on populist sentiment but little on movements, organizations, and the digital media that connected them.

The search for answers to explain Trump's rise led to people looking outward to propaganda tools. The digital democracy euphoria became eclipsed by external online threats to democracy from invasive hacks, Russian bots, and fake news. The target of blame became corporate platforms like Facebook and Google for encouraging all of this to happen. No longer was digital technology disrupting activism for the good but disrupting politics for the bad, at least according to traditional mainstream media accounts.

Conservative outlets, by the likes of *Breitbart News* and *Fox News,* had a different story to tell. Theirs was a tale of an anti-establishment candidate taking back freedoms that had been on the brink of extinction. And digital media was their savior in making that happen.

And yet, these critiques from both right and left merely skim across the surface of a far more profound dynamic. We must peek underneath these sensationalist scenarios of the internet to see what everyday people are doing with their political work and digital technology. This book is an attempt to move beyond simplistic headlines and Silicon Valley buzzwords to reach a better understanding of social media and social movements. When I set out to do the research for this book in 2011, Trump was still just a wealthy celebrity, and digital activism was enjoying its own stardom. The rosy picture of digital activism was not easy to confirm or refute. The challenge was to develop a way to approach this problem. So I started with some guiding questions: Is digital activism as prevalent as we think? What kinds of groups use digital technology for activism? What are the factors that determine how a group uses these tools? What are the mechanisms behind differences in internet use for activism? I hoped that the information gathered along the way would help answer perhaps the most fundamental question: Has digital ac-

tivism truly created a level playing field where all groups and points of view can equally advocate for their cause?

The answers are surprising, even for those who may be skeptical of technology's promises. Not only is technology failing to erase the barriers toward organizing movements, it may be making things worse by creating a digital activism gap. Rather than offering a quick technological fix to repair our broken democracy, the advent of digital activism has simply ended up reproducing, and in some cases intensifying, preexisting power imbalances.

That's because, despite what many observers imagine, digital activism is a lot of work. It takes labor. As such, organizations with more time, money, personnel, and structure are better able to leverage the benefits of these new tools to make their voices heard and their influence felt. By that same measure, grassroots organizations that might lack such resources are at risk of falling further behind.

But in thinking about the dynamics of this growing digital activism gap, utopian and dystopian views are overly simplistic. Instead, this book provides a behind-the-scenes look at the everyday practices of digital activism. In so doing, it reveals that early optimistic reports failed to account adequately for inequalities in resources, infrastructure, and class power. By focusing on an interconnecting system of grassroots and professional right-wing organizations, the book then offers evidence contrary to recent claims that individuals like Trump, news outlets like *Breitbart,* platforms like Google, or countries like Russia were puppet masters. While the left was getting all the digital attention for campaigns and protests, a right-wing digital media ecosystem, that blossomed because of the participation of Patriot groups and others, established itself well before Trump began his campaign, foreshadowing what was to come in 2016. Initial accounts of the internet celebrated left-wing bottom-up digital participation while more recent reports dismiss conservative digital engagement as top-down and manufactured. What I found went beyond these stereotypes.

This book dismantles both the democracy and authoritarian claims by peeling back the layers of the hype to reveal an uneven digital terrain that largely abandoned left working-class groups while placing right-wing reformist groups at the forefront of digital activism.

Three overlapping factors worked together to give a distinct advantage to groups that have not only a greater *capacity* but also the *motivation* to carry

out the work of digital activism. None of these factors work in isolation but rather amplify each other:

1. Class: Groups with middle / upper-class members had an advantage with digital media. Such members had greater online access, skills, empowerment, and time to use these new tools. And well-resourced organizations themselves often had both the latest gadgets and the know-how to finesse online engagement. They could afford and benefit from digital activism, whereas working-class groups struggled to keep up online. These class gaps were further exacerbated by the fear of repression that African American activists, in particular, faced from speaking up online. Digital activism operated as a tool to reproduce existing power relationships.
2. Organization: Groups with infrastructure, such as a hierarchy of decision making, a clear division of labor, and more staffing resources, were simply more effective and efficient online. Horizontal groups without bureaucratic systems were less likely to maintain high levels of digital use and online participation. The internet was not a tool for participatory democracy.
3. Ideology: This is more than just progressives versus conservatives. Groups on the right embraced the internet for a primary mission: to get their "Truth" out about reviving the freedoms they believed were threatened by what they called the liberal media system. Conservative grassroots, professional, and media groups were unified in believing they needed to replace so-called fake news with their own political information online. Progressive groups were fragmented and often focused more on encouraging mass participation than on mass information, and the internet was only occasionally useful to this end. As a part of ideology, strategy was also a major factor. Many protest-oriented grassroots groups did not make online engagement a priority because they believed it was not a good substitute for traditional means of organizing people; such groups often saw the internet as just one of many tools, so they used it sparingly. In contrast, groups that focused on lobbying saw the internet as a pipeline to power and used it extensively.

The implications of this digital activism gap for democracy, for politics and for social justice, cannot be overstated. If money, the personal influence of lobbyists and politicians, and legacy media matter less, then it would follow that we are on the cusp of titanic shifts in terms of politics and power. The people will rise, and as Bob Dylan once sang, your sons and your daughters will be beyond your command. On the other hand, if the prom-

ises of digital activism are an illusion, if they are causing more rather than less power to accrue to big organizations, then we are in danger of deluding ourselves into believing that traditional methods of organizing are no longer valuable or relevant. And if these are cast aside for a misplaced belief in shiny new digital toys, even greater power will flow to a handful, leaving those already on the lowest social and economic rungs at a greater disadvantage.

The digital power of conservative and well-resourced organizations that I saw on the ground in North Carolina and online with their social media use eventually burst into a wider view and became a source of international controversy. Since the election of Trump, there has been a fierce, popular backlash against many of the technologies and companies that were supposedly enabling this brand of politics. From accusations about fake news, to concerns about outright manipulations, to fears that they had become hives of racist hate speech, companies like Twitter, Facebook, and Google have found themselves suddenly on the defensive and have pledged to be more vigilant. The techno-optimism has turned to mistrust, calls for regulation, and, in some corners, calls for breaking up companies that wield too much power.

And yet, amid this blowback, there is still a desire to cling to some of the myths surrounding digital activism. Popular media continue to casually bestow credit on social media for fueling protests, while academic circles are just beginning to examine whether the anger over digital tools is a temporary mood swing or something more profound. More recently, some research has scaled back the most utopian of claims.[13] But the direction of popular and scholarly wisdom continues to bend toward the belief that political movements are moving toward more direct and egalitarian participation through digital tools.

That technology might be pointing us in the wrong direction is not an easy notion to accept. But since the internet, and digital spaces, are increasingly where the public debate and media are focused and where ideas, opinions, and policies are shaped, groups either unable or unwilling to enter this fray are in growing danger of being marginalized in those public debates. If digital activism is supposed to be about egalitarian and direct participation, then online disparities may challenge that notion. This is the false promise of digital activism. Rather than creating a level playing field, where everyone's voices are equal, the internet is creating a growing disparity that is

giving an edge to some groups in surprising and unexpected ways. Digital activism may have some advantages, but not for everyone.

GIVEN THE GLOBAL EXPLOSION of protests back in 2011, there was a seemingly infinite number of targets from which I could have chosen to study digital activism. Of course, living in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time, identifying a topic in northern California would have been extremely convenient. But the problem was that the region's left-leaning politics were a bit too homogenous. That thinking led me back to North Carolina because of the vast variation in the state's population and politics. It has a dramatic racial and labor history that continues to shape its politics, and yet its demographics were also among the fastest-changing in the South. North Carolina has one of the highest rates of poverty yet one of the best public higher education systems in the nation. While it was far from Silicon Valley tech elites, it also had its own tech ecosystems. Finally, North Carolina was half-Republican and half-Democrat among voters, the result of both historic party affiliation and the influx of northerners drawn to its financial, tech, and education centers. As a result, it had become a swing state for national presidential elections.[14]

This swirl of history and transformation created a fascinating tension that made it ideal for studying digital activism because these extreme and moderate conditions could be found in close proximity. As it seeks to reconcile its past, and its future, it's not surprising the state has become a focal point of numerous social and economic conflicts.

Having selected where, I was confronted with the next question: How to design the study? The typical approach was to identify a protest, and then start to dissect it. But this was problematic for my questions around egalitarianism. If I had begun the research by preselecting one mobilization or set group of organizations, I would have introduced biases into the process. If I had chosen to study only the groups we already know are online, it would be what social scientists call "sampling on the dependent variable." In other words, only looking at what's digitally visible would have obscured my ability to detect any gaps.[15]

So rather than putting digital activism at the center of the universe, so to speak, I developed an antidote to researching digitally centric movements: I decided to pick one issue. By starting with an issue, rather than an event, it would give me a chance to monitor a distinct number of groups over a period

of time, rather than getting just a snapshot. But just as important, by selecting the issue first, I could let that lead me to the groups I would study. As a result, this method allowed me to see how groups relate to each other over time, which would not have been possible if I had chosen my sample from a published list of random organizations. My approach, then, was to apply a technique that zooms out from the internet. Instead of extrapolating from one protest, vanguard movement, or early adopters, this study takes an issue-level strategy that delves into the ordinary digital practices behind and beyond extraordinary events. This enabled me to understand the challenges and constraints that adopting a digital strategy entails over the long term.[16]

This led to the final question I needed to answer: Which issue? Within this political cauldron, and the wide range of issues it presented, it struck me that the contentious politics around labor organizing in North Carolina provided fertile ground that would naturally touch on an ecosystem of political, labor, and social movement groups in different configurations, allowing me to evaluate the concept of digital activism and egalitarianism. By attracting groups from different social classes, this issue had a key factor missing from other studies. In North Carolina, one of the most controversial labor issues for many years had been the status of public employee unions. In this respect, North Carolina offered another advantage because it was a microcosm of a larger battle being waged across the country. Large conservative funders and strategists have put an enormous amount of time and money into state-level politics.[17] And one of their chief targets was diminishing the power and influence of public employee unions, a sector that has managed to remain unionized even as private industry unions were in free fall over recent decades.

Unions in North Carolina have not been able to organize as openly as they would like because of strong anti-union politics in the state and in the South more generally. At 1.9 percent union density in 2014, North Carolina had a lower percentage of unionized workers than any state in the country.[18] Because the state is "Right-to-Work" by law, unions have voluntary rather than compulsory membership, which discourages union participation. By 2011, North Carolina was one of only three states where public workers did not have any collective bargaining rights.[19] This means that even though workers can form or join a union, they are not allowed to negotiate with the state, county, or city government for wages, hours, or other working conditions.

In 2002, a coalition of unions and other social movement and political groups formed Hear Our Public Employees (HOPE) to overturn North Carolina's statewide ban on collective bargaining for public sector workers, a ban in place since 1959. For a decade, they slowly built up their coalition and worked with supportive state legislators in the Democrat-controlled General Assembly, introducing bills along the way. But when Republicans won a supermajority in 2012, which gave them a free hand to enact extremely conservative reforms, HOPE's struggle turned to maintaining, rather than improving, labor rights.

With that defined target in hand, I identified the various groups that in some way tried to make their voices heard on either side of the fight over public employee unions. The result: 34 organizations spanning a wide range of politics, history, structures, and demographics.[20] These groups constituted the political field around the issue of collective bargaining rights for public employees in North Carolina. Some of the groups in the Moral Monday movement were part of the HOPE Coalition that had converged around this hot-button issue in 2011, the year I observed which groups were in this political arena. Groups supporting labor rights included a range of public employee unions, from teachers and professors to sanitation and transportation workers. Many had both African American and white members; some were predominantly African American. Also included on the left of this issue was a worker center, the NC-NAACP, and a student group. Those opposing collective bargaining included grassroots conservative Patriot organizations, such as Tea Party and "Prepper" far-right survivalist groups, as well as government, business, and research institutions.

The South's racialized history of fear and violence against unions made it hostile terrain for union organizing, so workers have often called on the support of community-based and social-movement groups. This solidarity network had the effect of broadening the types of groups that were involved when compared to typical union battles in other states. This political arena is not just a group of traditional and older hierarchical unions fighting against a similarly old-guard corporate monolith. Instead, it involves newer and older groups, some of which are horizontal in their decision making or looser in their structures. Only eight of the organizations are unions, and even the unions themselves vary in their socioeconomic status, with some blue-collar and others white-collar. And again, because the state is "Right-to-Work," all

groups have voluntary membership, so even unions could operate more like a social movement group.

This small, but still robust, constellation of 34 groups allowed me to accomplish two important goals. The first was to develop a sophisticated set of data around their digital media use and online participation (or nonparticipation) to understand the broader sweep of what was happening. Second, the group size was manageable enough that I could still spend substantial time with various groups observing and learning about their day-to-day internet usage to understand which barriers had fallen and which remained.

My on-the-ground fieldwork was illuminating, and I believe it can tell us much. But to measure the rate at which various groups and their constituencies used digital technologies, I needed to calculate a digital activism score for each group.[21] This digital activism score includes usage of the three most popular public online platforms at the time—websites, Facebook, and Twitter. The measurement also includes three ways that groups use online technology: creating content and posting to a platform, designing it for participation, and the engagement it creates with others. The digital activism score for each of the 34 groups, then, derived from over 90,000 online observations of these three activities on the three platforms. Each group was then ranked from highest to lowest score to create a digital activism index.

These online and offline data led to surprising findings; namely, just how much organization, resources, and conservatism matter. The group with the highest score on the digital activism index was the Koch brothers–funded North Carolina chapter of Americans for Prosperity (NC-AFP). They are a resource-rich group that is hierarchical in its structure and reformist in its conservatism. Indeed, these characteristics are shared by the top three groups in the index, and most in the top half. And these differences persist even with just the rate of online participation, not only what they are inviting people to do online.

In the case of the North Carolina groups, my data and observations paint a very different picture from the notion that somehow the internet was making things like organization, costs, and ideology less critical. Indeed, in the bottom half of the digital activism index rankings I find the opposite: a cluster of left, radical, working-class, and horizontal groups, which often struggled to participate in the digital realm or simply made no effort.[22] Representing this group at the very bottom is Coalition Against Racism (CAR).

They were a founding and leading group active on the issue of public employee rights. They had a tremendous impact in terms of organizing the HOPE Coalition in eastern North Carolina. But online, they were invisible. CAR had neither a Facebook nor website presence, let alone Twitter. They simply did not have the capacity or the motivation. If one were to examine just online data about collective bargaining rights in North Carolina, CAR would scarcely make it into that analysis, if at all. They may have been effective offline, but with journalists and policymakers increasingly chasing hashtags, the widening digital chasm was threatening the cause of pluralism.

While the online data are critical to understanding the digital landscape in this political ecosystem, explaining the digital activism gap with in-depth narratives is the core of this book. But in telling those stories, I wanted to counteract the tendency to equate the digital with the extraordinary. Often, reports of movements start at the flashpoint—that moment when they suddenly burst into public view as if from nowhere, often with a hashtag. It may draw interest from the media and public, who immediately associate hashtags with its social and digital media communications. As a way to understand and explain a protest, online metrics provide a tantalizingly easy explanation. The problem, both for the public and for a scholar, is that if one starts to scrutinize a movement from this online point of view, it's easy to overemphasize the role digital tools played in its development. And with online data becoming easier and easier to analyze with bigger and bigger social media data sets, we risk missing the societal context.[23]

In reality, the work, the organizing, and the planning that led to that point or protest may have taken months or years, done under the radar because it was not based on a social media campaign. A study of only social media platforms, or hashtags, would miss this historical context entirely. To see how much more there was to this political story in North Carolina, I decided to spend large amounts of time with as many of these groups as possible, through observation and interviews, to understand how they operated on a daily basis.

My hope was that by complementing the large amount of online data I gathered with these firsthand interviews and observations, I would get a richer, 360-degree view of how and why these groups may have used digital activism tools. This broader societal approach toward examining a phenomenon, such as technology use, is the crux of sociology. Up until recently, though, sociologists were behind at analyzing digital technology. Media and

communication scholars have been at the cutting edge of this research but generally do not emphasize societal and structural differences.[24] My hope is that this book can help reconcile these different approaches that have separated sociology and communication scholars. By the same token, with a combination of online and offline data, as well as quantitative and qualitative methods, this book is part of the process of statisticians and ethnographers finding common ground in understanding an evolving digital data world.

AS I SUMMARIZE IN THE PREFACE, the book unfolds by tracing each of the three factors that shape the variation in social movement uses of the internet. Here, I unpack how these three factors of inequality, institutions, and ideology disrupt our scholarly understanding of digital activism.

Class is the first contributor to the digital activism gap and is the subject of Chapter 1. One's class position was supposed to be something rendered less important in the digital age. The internet is believed by many to be a mechanism of egalitarian participation because of the low costs to engage in online activism. Instead, in the case of these North Carolina groups, it reproduced offline inequality because of *high* costs. The resources necessary for online activities are sometimes quite high, especially for working-class groups. The internet simply does not connect everyone equally in online activism. Like many other tools, digital technology might have egalitarian potential, but it also has an exclusionary reality. Organizations with predominantly working-class members are much *less* likely to use the internet for organizing than those with members from the middle and upper classes.

The social class gap was larger than any other difference I identified across the 34 groups I studied. For instance, on Facebook, working-class groups posted just 6 percent of what middle / upper-class groups did and generated only 2 percent of the comments made by their counterparts. Websites were archaic and rarely updated. Absent from Tweets on this topic were working-class voices. These findings fall in line with the persistence of what is commonly called the "digital divide." While more and more people have access to the internet, we know, without a doubt, that inequalities exist in the use of it. Outside of age, in the United States, education and income level are the most persistent and primary factor driving digital inequality.[25] Almost all college-educated Americans used the internet in 2016, but only two-thirds of people without a high school education were online.[26]

Digital activism implies more than just internet access or reading an online post about a protest. It is also about creating and commenting on posts. Still, most digital divide research with political engagement has focused on individuals posting their opinion, so we know less about collective action.[27] And the few foundational studies that have looked at resource differences with digital activism have focused on only a few cases, making comparisons difficult. Those that have done comparative work usually did not look at the class background of members.[28]

What I found in comparing multiple groups from different classes was that digital activism inequality goes beyond resource differences. People from working-class groups said they were intimidated by the technology. In an apt comparison, Douglas McAdam pointed out that activists from privileged backgrounds in the civil rights movement had "a sense of personal efficacy or felt mastery over one's environment that often characterizes those who are economically well off."[29]

In my North Carolina case, mastering digital technology was typically experienced by groups whose members were from the middle and upper classes, leaving behind many of the working-class groups. Instead of increasing political power through individualized and networked activism, online participation reflected and expanded power differences that further define class itself. I use the term "class," rather than socioeconomic status, education, or income, because "class" also denotes power differences in how people are able to control their work environment, which spills over to other areas as well, including activism. The fear of job loss and other forms of repression from political organizing, especially for African Americans, prevented working-class people from speaking out online. To overcome this fear, trusted institutions were critical for people to feel comfortable stepping forward. But the internet, as a more individual platform for people to get involved, was not as viable when supportive social movement groups or unions themselves did not have the resources or the capacity to be online.

For individual activists, this gap comes from differences in access to digital devices, skills, empowerment, and time—what I call "ASETs" for short. These essential resources create high costs of online participation for working-class groups and their members who lack them. This finding is at odds with scholars who contend that the internet produces broader participation in social movements by reducing the costs to participate.[30] This low-cost viewpoint upends a classic theory by Mancur Olson from the 1960s: the free-rider

dilemma.[31] His original theory was a bit different from how it is interpreted today, but the general way that people now talk about the free-rider dilemma is in relation to the high costs of participating in any "collective action," such as a social movement.[32] These high costs can include the time commitment, having to be physically present for a meeting or event, as well as any other expense. The result of these costs, the argument goes, is that many people do not participate but instead "free-ride" off the coattails of others by benefiting from their collective action. But many digital activist theorists argue that the efficiencies of online participation, especially with online-intense movements, have reduced the costs of participation, sometimes close to zero. The assumption is that everyone, and every movement, now has the ability to post and participate online instantaneously.

In reality, costs and resources for digital activism exist for *all* groups but are excessively high for groups with working-class members. Resourced groups and their members start out ahead by already having ASETs to offset the costs of using the internet. Digitally savvy internet users have digital devices available 24/7, as well as the know-how and confidence to post to Twitter or Facebook about an upcoming event or action, for instance. For them, the additional costs for digital activism sometimes are often much lower than for working-class groups, although never zero. But for people who have to go to a relative's house or library to use the internet because they can't afford their data plan that month or who don't even know how to use Twitter, their costs are quite high. The costs of travel to an internet spot or time and training to learn how to use social media platforms may be prohibitive. And they are less likely to already have these ASETs readily available. Simply put, efficiencies are not evenly distributed. Therefore, rather than reduced costs equalizing online participation, substantial costs actually contribute to digital activism inequality. The old-fashioned collective action theory of Olson has not disappeared in the digital era, as costs still matter very much.

Olson's theory depends on an individual making a decision to get involved in collective action. But someone participating online in their own home is not an individualized rational choice—it is shaped by what sociologists call "social structure." For some activists, going online is simple when they can choose from a variety of expensive gadgets at their disposal that they can use on a whim. White Tea Party activists, for example, did not have the same fear of retaliation that African American public workers faced. As a result,

social class inequalities constrain this so-called choice, so it is not really a choice at all. In this case, classism—and racism—were stronger forces than any revolutionary power of the internet to overcome inequality. The individualized internet cannot combat institutional marginalization.

WE OFTEN IMAGINE that bureaucracy serves to slow or hinder an organization. Yet the use of these digital activism tools by the groups at the very top of the digital activism index was more effective because it was part of a well-defined strategic playbook, written by a small group of leaders and then distributed throughout an organization to execute and manage. Like a marketing plan or sales target, these digital directives were created through classic top-down management structures, rather than some inclusive process that makes sure everyone has some input. That lack of internal democracy proved to be beneficial rather than a problem for high levels of online participation.

What's more, organizational structure enables—rather than inhibits—digital activism because it can draw on resources such as paid staff labor or a core of highly committed volunteer laborers. These two factors—hierarchy and labor—worked in sync. Groups that were hierarchical were more likely than horizontal groups to have designated "middlemen" to do specific digital communication tasks, a classic *division of labor.* Hierarchical groups could capitalize on this division of labor by using a vertical chain of command to do this digital work. And hierarchical groups were also likely to have *specialization of labor.* This simply means that they had people with the expertise to fully exploit digital tools and to maintain and encourage large numbers of people to participate online. I call this organizational capacity to do the work of online activism *digital bureaucracy,* which is the topic of Chapter 2.

The significance of organization and hierarchy is surprising because it seems to contradict not only the popular notion of the internet's impact, but also the scholarly one. My findings challenge the common view that organizations themselves are less relevant in the digital era, or what has been called "communication as organization."[33] Academics have not thrown the organizational baby out with the bathwater, yet the suggestion is that contemporary, digitally oriented social movements are different types of organizations, often less reliant on traditional infrastructure.[34]

A common argument is that digital citizens participate in activist politics not as *members* of a hierarchical or top-down organization but as individual *users.* This user-centric view suggests that digital activism does not begin from a collective and organizational starting point; instead, it demands that individuals go online and take action to participate on their own, free from bureaucratic staff or other intermediaries. This viewpoint rests on the digital era rendering a 100-year-old claim obsolete. At the dawn of the 20th century, the famous sociologist Max Weber saw bureaucracies as key to modernity, shepherding in an institutional reliance on "positions" over "persons." In contrast, the new 21st-century model implies that digital activism privileges networked "persons" over bureaucratic "positions."[35]

Numerous academic studies have also argued that the internet is smashing barriers, that its networked architecture and many-to-many communication platforms have transformed how social movements operate, form, and sustain themselves. For instance, Manuel Castells has written that "the more interactive and self-configurable communication is, the less hierarchical is the organization and the more participatory is the movement," which describes the "networked social movements of the digital age."[36] These movements, say many scholars, are less reliant on hierarchical organizations because digital technologies enable "connective" rather than "collective" action.[37] While this viewpoint is not universal, the general theoretical direction is that horizontalism and digital activism go hand in hand.[38] But I found the opposite.

The upshot is that digital activism takes work, and work takes organization. The social movement groups with the capacity to do digital work had more complex organizational infrastructure. It takes this infrastructure to develop, and especially maintain, digital use and participation. Horizontal groups, however, especially on the left, wanted to involve everyone in decision making, and the internet was not always the best tool for this. Even groups who had a leaderless philosophy were less inclined to harness digital technology at high rates, compared to those who were more centralized.

So digital bureaucracy was essential for high levels of online engagement. Organizations still matter. More, not less, organization fueled digital participation. As such, I found that very little has changed in organizational theory in the digital era, despite the excitement over digital networked individualism. In the battle between the individual versus institution, the

institution may not be as obvious when an individual clicks or comments, but it is embedded in many a key stroke.

THERE IS A FINAL, crucial link that is critical to understand the digital activism gap that I outline in Chapters 3 and 4: ideology. In this case, ideology is something beyond the simple left-right opposing viewpoints. It's obvious that there's not much political sympathy between the Moral Monday and Tea Party movements in North Carolina. But more profoundly, their differing political orientations drove them to define activism in fundamentally different ways. And those definitions have profound implications for how groups use (or don't use) the internet to pursue their missions. In fact, this broader view of ideology is the key to understanding how digital activism favors conservatives.

In Chapter 3, I consider groups on either the right or left of the political spectrum. "The British are coming!" is Paul Revere's often (and inaccurately) quoted warning to Boston-area colonial militia about an impending attack by British forces during the American Revolutionary War. Patriot group activists I interviewed in North Carolina often referred to 18th-century leaders like Revere, and one said that just like Paul Revere had a horse, they now have the internet.[39] Conservative groups used and valued the internet more than progressive groups because they saw the mission of their activism as communicating what they called the "Truth" in their pursuits of *freedom*. These digital evangelizers believed their values were not reflected in the mainstream media nor the government, especially during Obama's presidency, and they often said that the internet was aligned with their ability to get a conservative message out, though grassroots groups seemed less concerned with who actually received it. And despite their critiques of how journalism had changed, it turned out that the digitization of news, coupled with a growing conservative media ecosystem of right-wing news and resource-rich institutions, benefited these conservative activists.

In contrast, groups on the left believed in egalitarian participation or *fairness,* whether online or offline. They saw the internet as only one of many tools to get people involved in their struggles because to these left-leaning groups, the real-world audience was everything. To cite just one example, right-wing groups tweeted almost three times as much as left-wing groups. Whereas the internet was the perfect medium for dispatching messages, it

was a weaker tool for recruiting members to join a long-term organizing drive, especially among people who have multiple and diverse concerns. Simply, the internet was ideal for conservatives' *informationalizing* but not so much for progressives' *organizing.*

There is a secondary impact of ideology that is also important to note, and a final, interesting wrinkle that I take up in Chapter 4. Looking past left versus right, and broadcasting messages versus mobilizing actions, there was another difference in terms of fundamental strategies to achieve change. On one side, there were some groups whose strategies were *reformist;* that is, they were more likely to do things like seek legislation as their main strategy, primarily through lobbying tactics, often believing that social change happens incrementally within the political system.[40] On the other side were *radical* groups, who wanted to change broadly the political landscape, often using tactics of grassroots organizing and engaging in contested activities—such as protests and picketing.[41] Some radical groups were left and some were right, just as some reformist organizations were progressive and others were conservative. Contrary to common perceptions, not all unions or Tea Parties were radical in this political arena.[42]

Reformist groups used the internet, on average, at a higher frequency than radical groups. Those that had a reformist strategy saw the internet as a direct line to powerful individuals and institutions, whether journalists or policy makers. Radical groups tended to focus on other strategies, which sometimes involved the internet but often did not. And strategy dramatically amplified the left-right difference in digital engagement. Right-wing reformist groups used the internet to a much greater extent than left-wing radical groups. For instance, radical left groups posted to Facebook on average once every four days, but reformist conservative groups averaged once per day.

Many have hailed the internet as a technology disruptive to top-down political systems. If so, we might expect that an organization that wants to change the political system radically would be more likely to embrace the many-to-many networked aspects of the internet than reformist groups who want social change more incrementally. Many media and academic reports highlight the ways in which social movements have harnessed social media to draw people together during times of radical protest—and even revolution. Multiple studies have targeted the use of social media as integral to coordinating modern protests.[43] In fact, much of the research on digital

activism has focused on radical, emergent groups and protest events, rather than established organizations and their everyday practices. The result is a bias toward privileging the study of radical left-leaning movements. This emphasis may partially derive from how historians have pegged the internet's origins. The 1960s American counterculture movement spawned early internet enthusiasts who rejected traditional societal institutions and built their own online communities, called bulletin board services, where people could communicate with each other rather than through the "system."[44] And the most notable early movements that harnessed the public internet, Zapatistas in Mexico and World Trade Organization (WTO) anti-globalization protesters, were also on the far left of the political spectrum. Scholars have compared a handful of digitally active right and left groups, yet we have known little about comparisons between a broader segment of social movement organizations until now.[45]

Prevailing theories may have resulted from this emphasis and perhaps explain why my findings lead us in a different theoretical direction. A key argument around digital activism is that it is tethered to participatory and pluralist movements that are, in effect, radical left. Another theory is that whichever political party is out of power has more incentive to use the internet. Finally, some scholars have suggested that ideology is less relevant in the digital era. Some have contended that, unlike older organizations in which ideology was imposed from above by a hierarchically situated cadre of organizational leaders, individuals in networked activism operate differently because ideology is now derived from personal experiences. In this line of thinking, organizational attributes, including ideology, are less critical for digital activism because the internet and political experiences are simultaneously universal and based on a collective of individual experiences.[46]

In the end, I found that ideology does matter, but in an unexpected direction. I took a broad view of ideology—how ideas, practices, and institutions interact. Conservatives worked better on all these fronts to generate high levels of internet use. This is an approach that does not target one narrow political factor—like who is in power, one wealthy conservative donor, or even one digital platform. Instead, what I observed is what Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci described a century ago as a more holistic approach to ideology. This hegemony combined what conservatives thought, what they did, and which groups supported them in political work offline and online.

This prominence of right-wing digital organizing contrasts with the stereotype inspired by the online Obama campaign that was presumed to tether digital technology with community organizing. At the same time, the assumption is that Trump's supporters were not part of a community-based network but consisted of ignorant individuals. I found that neither characterization fit what I saw on the ground in North Carolina. The left's grassroots organizing motivated less online activism than the right's because conservative populism was not only genuine in its own right and with a motivation to spread digital information, but it also had the support of well-resourced institutions. Understanding evolving political climates and institutions, then, is critical to making sense of how ideology factors into digital activism. This context is *digital activist materialism.* Social media is not inherently left nor right. Instead, contextualizing ideology is key to seeing how digital activism is only as revolutionary as the strength of the hegemony of groups that are using it.

FAR FROM ITS PROMISE of revolutionary egalitarianism, digital activism leaned conservative, not only in its political orientation but also in how it was reformist, hierarchical, and elite. And rather than a network of individuals changing history, societal structures remained steadfast. In fact, none of the three factors—social class, organizational structure, or political ideology—shaped digital activism in isolation. They often went hand in hand.

But it's fair to wonder whether this digital activism gap is an artifact of one American state and this one political issue. The United States is far from homogenous, and North Carolina is a southern state at the bottom of many national statistics ranging from labor rights to poverty. On the surface then, a former slave-holding region seems to have little in common with what might happen with digital activism in Paris, Bangkok, Havana, or even New York City. Or, further afield, rural India, the Siberian mountains, or the far reaches of the Arctic Circle.

That diversity creates a massive hurdle for anyone seeking broad conclusions about the nature of digital activism. Yet that's as it should be. Our digital activism theories need to account for societal differences, rather than assume that technology simply drives revolutionary change in how social

movements work. Instead of mapping what were considered Facebook or Twitter revolutions onto every region in the world, the case of North Carolina shows that not everyone uses the internet in the same way.

In fact, there are some elements that may cause the results I found in North Carolina to vary in other settings. In part, that's because there are some variables that I simply couldn't or didn't explore in the context of this study. For instance, I didn't focus on gender, and so sexism within or across groups could play a hidden role. And while I looked at hierarchy and bureaucracy, I didn't look at the organizational structures of, say, an evangelical church versus a political party. Finally, though the book grapples with ideology, it is set in a relatively democratic nation, and so naturally people and groups living in more repressive regimes are likely to see perhaps even greater variation.[47]

With those caveats in mind, I'm confident that the thrust of this study and its focus on North Carolina offers lessons and insights that extend far beyond the borders of just one state. For one, a populist conservative wave has inundated countries all over the globe, so the implications of how the internet may have played a role is a pressing question worldwide. And while inequality rates obviously vary from region to region, marginalization exists everywhere and would impact whether and how activists are able to engage with the internet. Societal inequalities shape internet use (or the lack of it), and the failure of technology to overcome those inequalities in North Carolina shows us why we would expect that to be true generally. Likewise, the institutions involved in this study are specific to the state, but their shape and form are fairly common across the nation: well-funded conservative think tanks; unions; Tea Party groups; community organizations. And then, though my research ended well before Donald Trump began his campaign for president, the conservative wave that swept the nation at the local, state, and then national level in the years leading to the 2016 election shared many of the same digital markers that I saw turn the state politics of North Carolina upside down.

It's why, perhaps, the turn the nation took in 2016, which shocked so many, seemed entirely less surprising to me. While people staring at social media stumbled across viral posts that seemed to emerge organically from nowhere, my digging along the way made it clear how often there was a structure, an institution, a strategy, a team, behind the scenes, carefully generating such content. That it would be conservatives who seized the tools of

this revolution perhaps only seemed so unthinkable because so much of the focus, in the popular press and academia, has been on left-leaning groups in the digital activism space. Likely, that's because the rise of the internet's culture seemed so deeply rooted in that 1960s communal nonconformist lifestyle. Much of the utopianism around the internet has flowed from those impulses: a desire to level the playing field, make our lives more democratic, create a world where everyone is equal.

The mistake was believing that there was something about the structure and nature of the internet that would somehow make this utopian vision inevitable. The reality is that throughout history, communications tools that seemed to offer new voices are eventually owned or controlled by those with more resources. They eventually are used to consolidate power, rather than to smash it into pieces and redistribute it.

More recently, liberals and progressives awakened to their demoted digital status, and tried to place the blame on Russian bots, fake news, or gullible conservative voters who were easily manipulated. Whatever truth there may be to those accusations, they miss the far more profound reality of how the very nature of the internet and digital activism favors conservatives. It's only by truly understanding how these processes work that people who are not conservative—nor elite nor hierarchical nor reformist—may have a better chance at subverting them.

This book is a window into that process.

JAMES WAS 47 YEARS OLD when he spoke to me on a hot August day in 2012 from his home office in Caldwell County, a rural region in the foothills of North Carolina, 200 miles west of Raleigh. It is a county dominated by furniture factories, where James ran a small business as a lumber supplier. He was also a proud member of the Caldwell County Tea Party, an organization that ranked seventh among the 34 groups on the digital activism index. In sharp contrast to some of the most active groups in Moral Monday with minimal digital traces, the conservative Tea Party groups in this contested political terrain had a highly integrated social media presence. Indeed, the Caldwell County Tea Party checks each box on the list of the four factors that drive the digital activism gap.

First off, it had organization and structure, which while participatory, also had multiple layers of decision making. It also had a volunteer working 60

hours per week who dedicated her time to maintaining their group's online presence. Next, like a lot of Tea Party members I interviewed, James himself was white middle class with a college degree. This profile resonated with national data, rather than the common image of a Tea Party member as being lower on the socioeconomic ladder.[48] And this enabled many Tea Party members, even those who were a bit older, to have the resources and skills to be online. Third, their strategy was not radical but reformist. James himself had run for county commissioner as part of the Tea Party. Finally, and most obviously, they were opposed to collective bargaining.

Commenting on this conservative and reformist viewpoint on how to reach their goals for smaller government—free from public employee unions—James added, "It would have to be the ballot box—if you're talking insurrection, we're far from it—it has to be the ballot box—there's no other way [to prevent] sliding down the socialist slope into full-blown socialism."

For James, who had long been a social media holdout, his involvement with the Tea Party turned out to be his path toward joining Facebook, to which he now posted and commented with enthusiasm in support of the broader messages of the Tea Party.

"Two years ago, I wasn't on Facebook," James told me, "My sister told me I had to. I used to look at it as girl stuff. I remember this other [member] saying, 'You ought to be on Facebook.' I said, 'It's girl stuff. He said, 'There are men on there,' but I said, 'girly men.' So I got on Facebook. I didn't take Facebook seriously [at first], but it really kind of defines who the Tea Party is."

Chapter One

The Great Class Wedge and the Internet's Hidden Costs

IT TOOK ME ALMOST TWO HOURS to drive from Raleigh, the state capital, to Larsene's house in Goldsboro, a town of 36,000 people in eastern North Carolina known equally for its world-class barbecue and strong legacy of racial strife. Goldsboro is part of the Black Belt region, the area of the South where slavery was most common and which still has a higher percentage of African Americans than other areas. Larsene lived in one of the many mid-century small homes in this neighborhood with simple, yet well-trimmed, lawns.

I visited Larsene in 2011, early in my research, because a number of activists suggested that she was the most digitally savvy in their membership. Larsene was a member of Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), a community-based workers' center, and UE 150, a union local of public employees. Both groups were working class. At the time, she was a nursing assistant making poverty wages at a state hospital.

Larsene, 62 years old and African American, wore her satin union jacket with her local's logo. Her hair was just starting to gray and her smile was broad. The front door opened right into her living room, where she invited me to sit down. We chatted for about an hour, and then she asked if I wanted to see what she did online. She guided me into her kitchen where she had a five-year-old desktop PC set up on a table. Larsene turned it on, but her dial-up

connection was in no mood to cooperate. After a half hour of fruitless tinkering, she picked up the PC and moved it into another room, hoping the connection might be better if she used a different phone jack. Finally, the screech of the dial-up modem signaled victory, and Larsene was on the internet. From there, she moved awkwardly around to various websites, inadvertently clicking on ads, which further slowed down her computer, as well as her browsing.

She arrived after a time at the website for her hospital's union chapter, which in theory was her responsibility to maintain. In reality, the task was something she was not able to undertake. "I just don't have the knowledge, the skills to do it," said Larsene apologetically as she looked up from the screen. She tried to show me another site that an activist from her chapter had created five years before our interview, but she couldn't find it. "We haven't done a thing with it since 2007. And that reason being was, when we started, one of our members had the computer skills. . . . He set it up, he gave me the information," she said. "But since 2007, it's been dormant, it's just lying there."

UE 150 did not have a Twitter feed or a functioning website and only occasionally made use of its Facebook page. Larsene was not aware of Facebook features like group pages. Twitter was an even bigger mystery. "I don't know that much about that Twitter," she said. "But I think if we had it, it would be an asset for the local if we had somebody that was real good with that kind of stuff."

Even though she lived in the United States, Larsene was about as far geographically and spiritually as one could get from Silicon Valley and its utopian belief in the internet's magic to transform the balance of political power and create a new democratic dynamic. The tech community was in a self-congratulatory mood that year as their tools seemed to have given rise to Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and a variety of other seemingly spontaneous uprisings around the globe. Yet Larsene was a prime example that even if "The Protester" was to be *Time*'s Person of the Year, the narrative surrounding digital activism was far more complicated and nuanced than what was being popularly acknowledged.

Larsene's digital struggles were not unusual for the working-class people and organizations I interviewed and observed, both online and offline. The internet had not erased the stark inequalities between working-class and middle/upper-class groups, as I found a deep digital activism gap. Instead,

the internet was actually making those inequalities wider, threatening to throw a wet blanket on this digital triumphalism. And of the several factors that explain the digital activism gap, social class reigns above them as the foremost and strongest.

In this case, when I talk about social class, I'm using a definition that extends beyond the usual barometers of income and education. Social class, in my analysis, also takes into account how much power and control someone does—or does not—have at work. Using this definition allowed me to plunge deeper into the way class shaped internet use. Applying the filter of social class to the 34 groups in this study, both those who supported public sector collective bargaining rights in North Carolina and those who opposed them, I categorized five groups as working-class, 13 as mixed-class, and 16 as middle / upper-class.[1]

The story the data tell about these groups' relative internet use is unmistakably clear. The overall digital activism scores were often two to three times lower for working-class groups compared to the middle / upper-class groups. The working-class category included one organization that had no digital presence; not a single trace of any website, Facebook page, or Twitter account could be found online. Even for those working-class groups that managed to get a foothold on the internet, the engagement with their members or community was woefully small. Working-class groups had far fewer people liking, commenting, retweeting and following them online, as compared to middle / upper-class groups.[2]

The new era of digital activism being hailed around the world was somehow bypassing this little corner of the United States. I not only wanted to know why, but whether it even mattered.

Organizations That Can't Control the Means of Digital Production

Following my visit with Larsene, I traveled to Raleigh where I stopped at her UE 150 union headquarters to better understand the digital challenges at the broader organizational level. Because I was studying social movement groups, and not just individual activists, I first wanted to take a look at any organizational dynamics that could shed light on the digital activism gap.

The union's offices were located in the back of an old brick building just a few blocks from both the General Assembly and the Occupy Raleigh encampment. The union's one-room windowless office was packed with three old wooden desks, metal file cabinets, various bookshelves, and a meeting table a few feet from the door. The walls were plastered with union posters and clippings from newspaper articles about the union's activities. Next to the table was an easel with butcher block paper filled with meeting notes, including plans for "Occupy the Hood" events.

Inside, I met with Steve, a white union organizer in his late 40s. Dressed in blue jeans and a T-shirt, he had been a community and labor activist for over 25 years. He walked with me around the office, showing me the organization's communications equipment, which consisted of a number of broken computers and a fax machine that no longer worked. "You're gonna be writing UE 150 has shitty technology?" he said, laughing. "Are you gonna write that? Okay, our technology is so bad here . . ." doing an imitation of the comedian Rodney Dangerfield. "This is our main computer," he continued, looking at a decade-old dusty desktop. Then he pointed out an even older computer that had been donated to them in 2005 by a staff member's sister. He sighed.

I said to him that it looked like he had Wi-Fi. "Uh-huh, we did finally get [Wi-Fi]," he replied. "And so it will print off of that little printer, copier kind of thing—that took years. However, we almost never have toner for that, so it's just a museum piece." He then walked over to another piece of equipment, put his hand on it and said, "This, now this is called a business server. I really don't know what that means."

With the digital activism gap, class was not simply a question of which group had the latest digital equipment. All of the working-class groups lacked a dedicated person, either staff or volunteer, who knew how to maintain and update their online presence. They simply did not have the capacity—either organizationally or by an individual volunteer—to do it. Steve may have been the go-to person for the office's tech and communications questions. But even he was frustrated by the state of their online presence, particularly their website, which simply said "work-in-progress."[3]

"It's just such a weakness and frustration. . . . It's one of those learning curve things—it's like [*sighs*] what a big thing to learn how to do." He went on to talk about how people have repeatedly shown him and other leaders how to update their site, but they did not do it often enough to be able to

remember. Other websites, like that of their national union, sometimes posted information for them. UE 150 was one of the most active groups leading the statewide efforts for collective bargaining for public employees yet had one of the lowest digital activism scores.[4]

Lack of a working website was common among the five working-class groups I studied. Two of them did not even have a website registered. This shortage of resources and knowledge extended to social media. Steve confided to me that he was not on Facebook and said, "I don't know anybody who even knows how to do Twitter, or even kinda really what it is you do to get on somebody's Twitter list or something." Even with seemingly more "basic" social media tools, like Facebook, working-class activists often mirrored this sentiment of not being able to afford or find someone to create and sustain them. UE 150 had a Facebook page but posted less than once per week, receiving few comments. Many of their posts consisted of photos about an event that had already happened.

Working-class groups were far less likely than mixed and middle / upper-class groups to develop a Facebook presence. Only three of the five working-class groups were on Facebook, and they used it only sporadically. During one month, for example, none of the working-class organizations posted on Facebook, even though some had held public events, which would presumably be an ideal time to promote or share on social media. On average, mixed and middle / upper-class groups posted 17 times as much as working-class groups. Participation was also weaker, with working-class Facebook pages getting about .02 comments per day on Facebook, while middle / upper-class groups averaged 1.08. The number of "likes" per day had a similar gap with 0.16 versus 3.10, respectively. On average, middle / upper-class groups had ten times as many members or "likers" on Facebook, and these differences persisted, even when accounting for group size.[5]

As I walked around the office with Steve, I stopped at the bookshelves and picked up some of their printed newsletters that they had stacked in piles. The photos in the newsletters were mostly posed group shots from meetings or protests. This was also the case in any Facebook posts they happened to make. Still, Steve explained that at the time such photos were exceedingly difficult to arrange and obtain because not many people attending their events, meetings, pickets, or protests had a digital camera or smartphone.

"People taking pictures—that's huge in terms of a lot of people don't have a digital camera or don't know how to use one," Steve said as he showed me an older model that he said he'd had for three years. "I use this freaking thing which sucks because I lost the battery and then the cord. . . . When I had a little point-and-click, I was the picture person for the movement, you know what I mean? I would go to the pharmacy all the time and get them developed." He noted that it was more difficult to find places to develop photos, a disincentive for using analog technology. But making the leap to digital remained challenging. "A lot of times we're at rallies and stuff, and it's like, who's got a camera?" Steve said. "No one, so alright, we'll use these [old analog cameras], and then they end up so crappy you don't even wanna use them."

Texting was another underutilized part of the UE 150 arsenal. Steve said that sometimes they would text more than one person by manually entering multiple phone numbers. But he was not familiar with functions that would let members sign up for text blasts that would be potentially useful for constituents, including those who only had basic or feature phones.

These limitations with mobile technology were particularly surprising because there was and still is both a popular and scholarly view that smartphones and feature phones offer a new hope for marginalized groups. The belief is that mobile technology is cheaper and easier to master, and therefore populations that fell behind the initial PC and internet revolution could just "leapfrog" ahead and achieve near parity with more advanced and sophisticated users.

In fact, the reality I found was quite different. As with desktop computers and the internet, the differences in the use of mobile technologies were stratified along class lines for organizations. None of the working-class groups were using mobile technology as a replacement for more sophisticated and expensive gadgets. While adoption of new technology seems to move quickly, it is not the case for everyone. And, as I will show later in the chapter, many individual activists were not able to overcome these organizational limitations, either. That inequality limited the speed and effectiveness of their communication. The means to revolutionize their outreach existed, but because of a lack of resources, staff, and skills, those tools remained frustratingly beyond their capacity. As such, the digital era of democracy didn't seem all that different, from their vantage point, than the analog era. The mountain

of obstacles they needed to overcome in order to realize their goals seemed not to have been flattened one bit by the internet.

HOPE in North Carolina

In February 2011, two years before the Moral Monday movement for social and racial justice erupted, a broad coalition of labor groups came together for a rally. They dubbed the Raleigh event "Labor, Faith and Civil Rights Coalition in Defense of the Public Sector." Gathered in front of the state legislature, the crowd included activists from UE 150, the North Carolina State American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (NC-AFL-CIO), and a number of ministers, such as future Moral Monday leader Rev. William J. Barber. They marched over to the General Assembly to deliver a statement to legislators from the coalition.

The move was part of a strategic attempt to reframe the state's fight over public sector unionization and cast it as part of a national fight over cuts in public services. A golden opportunity to do this had presented itself to North Carolina's labor movement because 1,000 miles away, the new Republican governor of Wisconsin was trying to squash that state's public sector unions and end their right to collective bargaining. North Carolina labor leaders watched in amazement as the battle in Wisconsin had quickly spiraled into a national news story, the kind of attention they had never been able to bring to their own efforts in this Southern state.

Inspired by the outpouring of public support for the Wisconsin public employee occupation of their statehouse, North Carolina activists decided to try to leverage the crisis by drawing a clear line linking events in Wisconsin to their own movement. In their statement to legislators, the labor protestors wrote: "The public sector is the basic safety net for providing working-class and poor people the basic essential human needs. It must be protected. . . . In order to wage a powerful struggle in defense of public services, which is being exemplified by the protests in Wisconsin, there must be a struggle to defend the workers that provide these services. The right to collective bargaining, for workers to have input in shaping the decisions about working conditions, must be a basic right."[6]

The next week, even more activists in the North Carolina public employee labor movement, along with Moveon.org, organized a much larger protest rally also in the state capital, with a turnout of over 200 people.[7] Among the groups present in this latest protest was the HOPE Coalition, which consisted of the public sector unions and allied organizations fighting for collective bargaining rights for government employees.

When HOPE was formed in 2002, the Democrats controlled the state House, Senate, and governorship. Yet no one mistook this one-party rule as progressive. Many HOPE members described them as "business" Democrats. Still, HOPE came together because they thought they had a shot at repealing General Statute (GS) 95–98, the bill that prohibited public sector collective bargaining.

With Democrats in charge of the state government, HOPE slowly expanded and began to build chapters across the state. They knew that the lack of public awareness around unions would mean that the battle would be long, so they built relationships with sympathetic legislators, working gradually every year toward a repeal of the ban. Progress was slow but seemed positive. One year, a bill would be introduced. The next year, it would be put into committee. The following year, it would have a hearing, much like the progression of many legislative bills. They also tried other tactics, such as marches and mailings. And in an effort to win over the public's support for overturning the ban, some HOPE activists even petitioned the United Nations, which ruled that both North Carolina and the United States were in violation of international law for not allowing the basic human right to organize.[8]

By 2008, some members of HOPE began to push formally for repeal of GS 95–98 in the legislature. Other members were nervous about pursuing repeal before they had enough votes lined up. What neither side could know at the time was that any window of opportunity that had existed was about to slam shut. In November 2010, with the infusion of the populist Tea Party movement in North Carolina, conservatives elected enough Republicans to turn the previously Democrat-controlled state legislature to Republican majorities in both the North Carolina House and Senate for the first time since Reconstruction.

The HOPE Coalition was not alone in the obstacles they now faced at the state legislative level. In 2011, 21 states had turned Republican and had introduced bills that restricted collective bargaining for public employees,

with 18 eventually succeeding. These maneuvers to curb public sector unions were well funded and orchestrated. Public sector employees became the fiscal scapegoat of cities and states that had lost money with the Wall Street crash a few years earlier. The Koch brothers and other conservative institutions had already created a swell of opposition to government workers, so when the financial crisis hit, a tidal wave of resentment against public employees devastated the HOPE Coalition's ambitions.[9]

Chances for a repeal of GS 95–98 had gone from dim to grim.

Demoralized by what felt like a missed opportunity, the fight in Wisconsin provided some optimism and re-invigorated public sector activists in North Carolina.

And then, six months later in 2011, another digitally enabled movement emerged that further motivated HOPE to keep going in the wake of the Republican wins. The Occupy Wall Street movement was a populist reaction to the financial crisis, much like the conservative Tea Party's response to the recession and Obama's presidential win. The Occupy movement convinced some dispirited HOPE activists that a countermovement to the Tea Party's recent legislative success was possible.

So public sector unions began trying to integrate their struggles into the growing Occupy movement. UE 150 organized events like "Occupy the Hood" to incorporate their working-class, mostly African American, membership into the conversation about the 99 percent versus the 1 percent. It suddenly felt as if a groundswell of progressive populist movements were coming together, and the internet seemed to be a big part of it. The Wisconsin public workers' movement had swiftly integrated social media, and Occupy's diffusion was defined by it.[10] Larsene told me that she read a lot about these protests online, and she mused that perhaps digital technology could play a crucial role in their movements.

But it didn't. The HOPE Coalition was not able to ride the national protest wave nor its accompanying digital one.

HOPE had an ideal political window to fight back. But they had not overturned the ban. Nor were working-class labor organizations able to harness digital technology to propel their movement to worker organizing campaigns, state legislators, or the public at large. That is not to say that the Wisconsin and Wall Street campaigns failed to inspire them in the long run. They did, and I would argue that they also influenced the Moral Monday movement that was to come. And there are certainly a variety of reasons

why movements succeed or fail. I did not set out to analyze if digital technology would chart the course of overturning the collective bargaining ban, but what I did observe was that working-class groups were never able to harness digital technology, even in the digital protest groundswell that had hit the country—and the world.

Some Organizations Can't Afford Digital Democracy

But what about the internet's role in collective action? It is supposed to be a space for digital democracy, a space for pluralist activism, a space that overcomes inequalities. A common view is that digital technology enables more egalitarian democratic involvement than movements in the predigital era. A broader array of people can now participate than ever before because of the technology itself, or its affordances, according to many scholars.[11]

A central premise for this digital democracy argument is based on a new twist to a classic theory of collective action: the free-rider dilemma. I described this concept in the Introduction, but let's take a more in-depth look at Mancur Olson's original idea from the 1960s.[12] He argued that rational people won't act to further a collective interest, even if they believe the goal is good. The reason is not that they are selfish, but rather that, once you get to a certain group size, it's hard for any given individual to see how their contribution to the collective good will make a difference. Therefore, it is rational to free-ride because it looks like the collective good will be achieved with or without one's individual effort.

The interpretation of the free-rider dilemma has evolved over the years such that many now view it as simply that costs of participating in collective action, such as social movements, are so high that few people bother.[13] The costs of logistics, as in travel time, prevent people from getting involved. Wouldn't it be easier to let other people do the organizing work and just free-ride off the efforts of others?

Given this free-rider dilemma, the answer that traditional social movement scholars have given to explain successful social movements was to follow the money. Those groups who have resources can help participants overcome some of these costs by assisting with coordination problems, such as staff organizing time and meeting facilitation. This argument, commonly called

"resource mobilization," is one of several theories as to why some movements endure and are effective while others are not.[14]

Since not all groups possess resources equally, an activism divide is nothing new. Even before the advent of the internet, from women's suffrage to civil rights, inequality has been par for the course with social movements. For instance, a mimeograph machine was indispensable for protest activities in the 1960s, but access to tools like this was not always equitable.[15] At the same time, stark inequalities often drive social protests in the first place, so resource differences themselves can be an impetus for collective action.[16] But among poor and working-class groups, limited resources have tended to constrain social movement development and participation.[17] While cash is central to this argument, other in-kind assets, such as expertise with using a specific movement tactic, have also been found to propel movements.[18] A key factor that privileged groups tend to have is a set of well-defined interests and access to elite support and decision makers, all of which can lower coordination costs.[19]

The question is whether the resource mobilization theory holds up with new internet technologies if everyone has their own digital equivalent to a mimeograph machine. Online tools were supposedly leveling the activism playing field. Equality arises, many argue, because activism costs are withering in the digital era: digital technology lowers collective action costs, even making the free-rider dilemma irrelevant in some cases.[20] Movements—and movement groups—should be able to cut costs by using the internet to reduce meeting time or simply communicate efficiently online.

A few studies have tackled the role of costs and resources with digital engagement. For instance, one study found that groups with more resources have a stronger web presence; yet other research shows that some social media use shows parity, such as with online-petition signing. It would only make sense that social media platforms would be easier to use than setting up a website, since creating a Twitter account does not require knowledge of HTML code. Yet the implication of cost reduction is that social class differences should be less relevant. Digital democracy should be happening. But in reality, we have seen little cost-related research on social class differences with social media and social movements.[21]

No one would argue that digital technology can wave a magic wand to eliminate social class differences, yet the internet was supposed to have shifted

the balance at least a little. Yet I found stark differences between working-class and middle / upper-class groups in terms of organizational resources and digital use. The costs for working-class organizations were high, and I saw no evidence of the free-rider dilemma being overturned with the internet. Working-class groups in this labor movement were not part of the digital democracy trend. Still, I wanted to dig deeper to see if I was missing something. Since most of the digital activist attention—both in news media and scholarly discussions—was focused on public actions, could that be a way for these disadvantaged groups to integrate social media into their struggles? A public workers' strike arose and proved to be such a test case.

Striking Fear

Even as HOPE's efforts to connect to broader national issues got little traction, labor organizers in North Carolina were presented with what appeared to be another chance to turbo-charge efforts around organizing public sector workers. On November 9, 2011, sanitation employees in the eastern North Carolina town of Greenville went on strike. At the time, civil disobedience in large cities such as Raleigh was rare for working-class activists. In the rural Black Belt region, this type of protest was almost unimaginable. Greenville, with a population just shy of 100,000, is an island in a sea of tobacco and cotton fields surrounding former plantations. The region has the lowest wages in the state, one of the highest rates of child poverty, and such a stark racial history that many here remember the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) posting signs along roads into the city that said "Nigger City Limits."[22]

That a wildcat strike would break out here of all places seemed highly improbable. But what seemed like a bolt of out the blue was the result of a hard-fought, traditional organizing drive that had been happening for years. As part of UE 150, the sanitation workers had been quietly adding members and educating each other.

One worker later told me, "We ain't asking for a whole lot. . . . They say they don't have any money. . . . We ain't asking for them to break the bank. We just want some help. We just want to be treated like human beings instead of little kids or an animal or something, 'cause sometimes that's the way they . . . doing it."

When a group of African American drivers were passed over for raises, the sanitation workers collectively agreed to turn off their engines in what they were careful to call a "work stoppage" and not a "strike," which would have been illegal. One organizer described it as "the straw that broke the camel's back." It was a dramatic move for that small town—and for the workers whose jobs would be threatened by an act that could throw them into the depths of poverty if they were fired. On the heels of other digitally visible movements, I expected to see digital chatter of the strike, despite the organizational resource challenges, but the traces were barely visible.

Some state labor leaders were emboldened by this daring act and decided the time was right for an aggressive push to organize a wide array of public sector workers in the Greenville area. They believed that this might be another chance to shift the discussion around public workers, widen the lens, energize supporters, and enlarge the circle of support. UE 150 organized a membership recruiting "blitz," but the union also drew on the support and participation of other groups in HOPE.

I had heard about the blitz from a number of activists I had interviewed. Not seeing much online about it, I headed to Greenville to observe the organizing drive in person. I wanted to see what role digital activism might (or might not) play. A complementary digital blitz would seem logical since the internet could be a way to communicate with potential members, especially those who were spread out geographically in this rural area or who may feel safer communicating online, outside the workplace.

When I arrived in Greenville, the labor movement was clearly galvanized, thanks to inspiration from Wisconsin and Occupy and now the sanitation strike. UE 150 members thought they could build on this momentum to turn the tide in the least unionized region of the least unionized state in the country.

That hum of hopefulness filled the conference room in the budget hotel where about 20 union members, organizers, and students had gathered on the outskirts of Greenville. The group was a mix of newcomers from North Carolina and Virginia, as well as veterans of the local labor scene. Everyone introduced themselves, but many people already knew each other from their common political work. The atmosphere started out jovial, but as people made their introductions, lead organizers began to talk about the serious context of the blitz.

Jim, despite still having bullet fragments in his head from an attack at an anti-racist pro-union rally, continued to work as a volunteer labor organizer for UE 150. A white Duke University graduate, he was now in his early 60s. As Jim stood speaking, he made clear the stakes of this latest push, and the need to continue fighting despite the decades of heartbreak that came with being a union organizer in the Black Belt: "So as we struggle against this hard area, we know we have roots here, that every generation comes forward, and we're going to build those roots and come forward in this generation as other generations have done in the past."

No one in the conference room needed to be facing a gun to feel the fear that still lingers around the question of unionizing in North Carolina. Behind the intensive training and preparation for the blitz was an implicit message about how to avoid physical danger and violence.

Blitz organizers had planned on targeting public workers at ten different work sites around Greenville. As I looked at the schedule for the weekend and at the printed folder of information, I saw the agenda was packed with teams of organizers who would leaflet at entrances, meet with workers, and make follow-up phone calls. In the hotel conference room was a large whiteboard with numbers written along the top, indicating how many workers they were trying to recruit into the union that weekend. When Bob, a national UE leader, mentioned that people had been "primed" earlier that week with information about the blitz, he was referring to in-person visits.

There was not a single mention of a digital strategy.

After the introductions, the organizers moved on to their recruitment plan for the weekend. The first step was a training for volunteers in how to "leaflet." Leafleting, or handing someone a flyer, is about more than distributing pieces of paper. In giving a stranger a leaflet, an organizer could ask about working conditions, alert them to events, and assess interest among these potential recruits. It implies a conversation, which organizers emphasized was essential. Because they wanted to encourage a back-and-forth dialogue, activists engaged in role-play. Everyone took turns pretending to be both workers receiving a leaflet and activists handing it to them. They also rehearsed how to interact with reluctant workers, as well as with supervisors or any police they might encounter.

Dante, a young white UE 150 organizer, instructed the activists: "For the purposes of the blitz—in which less experienced organizers might be handing out flyers, if anyone says they're calling the cops, it's okay to stop because some-

thing 'crazy' might happen. But at the same time, we know our rights; we're allowed to be there." He handed everyone a piece of paper that outlined their rights to organize and told them to keep it in their pocket while they leafleted. Dante then recruited volunteers to take turns in a role-play in which they pretended to talk to a supervisor who might show up to tell them to leave. He coached them, "All you got to say is 'I have a civil right to organize.' . . . As long as you're within six feet of the road, of the main public road . . . they can't stop you from being there." Legally, they couldn't, but as I would soon see, they'd try.

It may seem like a simple act—to hand out a leaflet. Perhaps one of the greatest hurdles to even the most basic organizing for union activists is that communication in the physical world is fraught with risk. In a break during the blitz training, Charlie, an African American highway maintenance worker in his 60s, told me about threats he faced for speaking up and organizing. When he and other workers started to talk among themselves about their poor working conditions and what they were going to do about it, his supervisor got wind of these conversations. According to Charlie, his supervisor at the Department of Transportation told him, "'If you join a union . . . you may not have a job.' They were going to contract the jobs out." Such warnings of job loss or privatization were common when challenging those in authority. Among low-income workers, the word "union" elicited a mixed response of fear and hope—fear that unionization would trigger retaliation but hope that a union might ensure more fairness by improving working conditions and wages.

To combat the fear of political expression, unions endeavored to create a safe *space* to organize. At the blitz, Saladin, a longtime African American organizer with UE 150 and BWFJ, explained this context of organizing for that space: "Challenging these institutions for the right to organize is very, very important because many unions just don't even try to organize because it's a Right-to-Work state, and really challenging and creating some space for the identity of unions is very, very important because many of the workers don't feel that any space can be created at all."

A safe space not only meant a physical location where workers could overcome their fear of organizing, but it also conveyed being able to speak one's mind in any location. Finding and expanding that space was a critical part of the blitz. Steve, who was also at the blitz that weekend, added that despite the laws allowing them the right to organize, "That doesn't mean that the cops or management aren't going to try and hassle us."

After the training ended in the morning, I accompanied three Black union activists—Larsene, Angaza, and Eugene—on a 65-mile drive from Greenville to an even more rural area to hand out leaflets to state workers driving in for their shifts at a state-run mental health facility. We carefully parked the car in a nearby parking lot to avoid suspicion from on-site state administrators and security guards. We walked over to the main entrance on the one-lane rural highway. Standing outside the driveway on the side of the road, each activist had a handful of flyers and took turns offering one to each driver of the cars that pulled up to the facility. The flyers encouraged workers to come to a meeting to voice their concerns about working conditions. They also asked people to sign up for the meetings, but rather than asking for e-mail addresses, they only gave out and sought phone numbers. Nor did they hand out web or social media information.

Soon after, a security guard from the site approached us. "They're probably going to want you on the other side of the street," he said. The union activists were within their rights to be on the road. The guard was a state employee and seemed nervous as he used his phone to make calls. Soon thereafter, a white sheriff with a large brimmed hat drove up and told us to leave. A heated debate ensued between the white sheriff and Angaza, one of the organizers who was in his early 60s. He explained their rights to the sheriff, who did not appear to know what the exact law was. Afterward, the sheriff went back to his vehicle but kept observing the leafleting. After the sheriff had arrived, I noticed that fewer workers would accept the flyers handed to them. The sheriff finally drove away, but the security guard stood near the organizers with a watchful eye.

After a stop to leaflet at a second location, we drove the 65 miles back to the Greenville hotel where the various groups of leafleters reported to the larger group about their day. During the debrief, Eugene, a younger UE 150 member in his 20s, commented that despite the police presence making it difficult to hand out the flyers, it was still helpful for the workers to see that the union would not back down when the sheriff showed up. In this environment, they believed they were slowly creating space to organize.

THE NEXT DAY I ACCOMPANIED CHARLIE, the highway worker, and Dennis, an African American organizer with BWFJ and UE 150, to the workplace entrance for state transportation workers, who would be arriving

at 7:00 A.M. As we were waiting on this quiet rural road for the shift to start, I asked Charlie about his internet use. He said that he liked to use social media occasionally for sports. When I asked him if its use would replace, or at least supplement, the type of leafleting they were doing that morning, he seemed amused that I would pose such a question.

After a while, a worker walked up, and Dennis handed him a flyer and continued to chat with him as they walked together just inside the gate. Immediately, the manager came out and said, "I'm going to ask you to stand outside the gate."

"No, we're fine," Dennis replied as he turned and walked back toward the gate. "Ok, we want to deal with all issues and protocol. Mr. Price approved us being here, but I got you. We'll stay outside the gate."

"Yeah, Mr. Price told us to be sure ya'll stay outside the gate."

"No, we're cool. We're cool."

Even though Dennis had to retreat back a few steps, he considered it a victory that they were there at all, much like the assessment of the previous day's leafleting. As we were standing outside waiting for more workers to walk by, Dennis explained how this tactic over space was part of their broader strategy to overturn GS 95–98. A few years earlier, UE 150 participated in an effort to persuade the Democratic governor to sign Executive Order 45, which enabled them to use state property to hold meetings and conduct union activities. Dennis explained what was at stake: "We're stepping into that space in a big way, and the key thing is . . . to try to institutionalize again the right of workers to meet on those grounds and . . . to define those meetings as pro-union or actually meetings that the union is hosting, and in a sense, it becomes an expression of workers' rights to organize in the public sector." And in the process of using the gains made with this executive order by leafleting that morning, Dennis hoped he was paving the path toward repeal of the ban on collective bargaining.

Later that day, I went to see if this fight over physical space would be easier at a work site where employees had been more overt in their organizing—the site of the Greenville sanitation workers' strike. UE 150 had incorporated the sanitation workers into one of their target sites that weekend for the blitz. I also wanted to speak directly with these workers to learn about any internet involvement with their union organizing.

When I arrived, organizers were setting up a table to hand out pizza and soda as they waited for the trash trucks to return from their neighborhood

rounds. While we were waiting, I chatted with Ashaki, an African American UE 150 organizer in her 50s. In the lead-up to the blitz, she and other workers handed out "invite flyers" to sanitation employees, letting them know that they would be back with union applications during the blitz. But then the managers came out and threatened them.

"The word came back from management that they didn't want us anywhere near," Ashaki explained. "We can't be in the parking lot. We can be somewhere down the street on the grass outside, but all of a sudden, they didn't want us there today. So we had a meeting in the parking lot with our members and talked about it, and we decided we're going to take a stand."

In the end, they were able to negotiate with management and felt like it was a "major victory" to be able to set up tables at the entrances and, especially, in the parking lot. Yet, it was still a battle over a few yards of space.

The day of the blitz, Ashaki said to the volunteers, "Let's just review this. . . . So what we want to do this afternoon again is we . . . want to get these out to everybody [*holds up flyers*] so that everybody knows about [us], and then let's try to collect as many contacts. . . . try to get as many names and numbers."

Another organizer said, "Okay, here they come now. Here they come now. Listen, here they come now." The trucks rumbled into the parking lot.

Ashaki added, "And then we want to try to sign people up."

Signing up for the union, though, still did not include asking for e-mail addresses, only phone numbers. Nor did they hand out web or social media information for UE 150. As I talked with workers walking out, I asked how they heard about what was happening with the union and how they communicated with each other or with union organizers. Everyone I spoke with said it was, as one worker explained, "Mostly phone calls. We get on the phone, and all of us talk together on the phone, communicate with each other and find out what's going on," even though, as I learned, this was not a conference call system. I asked him if he ever communicated through e-mail or online. "No," he answered. "I haven't used e-mail to communicate yet."

This was a much faster shift change than the others I observed, so the organizers had to work quickly to reach each worker as he came out. The sanitation workers were all African American men, ranging in age from what appeared to be in their late 20s to late 60s. As organizers encouraged them to sign up for the union, they also asked the union leaders in the sanitation

department if there had been any additional threats that day. One worker smiled and said, "No, I ain't seen no more threats." But he did say that some people were not stopping to talk to organizers because they were scared of losing their jobs. In the past, he explained, "They've been threatened. Some tell them they going to lose their jobs if we communicate with different people and talk to them, that you're going to go out the door. So it becomes a threat."

Disappointed that more workers had not signed up that day, Ashaki explained what she thought their next step needed to be to overcome the workers' fear of taking a leaflet: "What we're going to need to do is maybe go, a couple of us, get together on a Saturday or one evening and just go to a couple people's houses that we think might be positive but they don't want to talk here. . . . I think we'll get more members that way . . .'cause for us to be able to beat this back today and establish that we're here, and that we have the right to be here."

Despite being the site of a successful strike in a town like Greenville, it was still a challenge to hand out a leaflet.

BACK AT THE HOTEL, some volunteers sat at tables with sheets of paper containing handwritten lists of workers and their phone numbers. They went down the list and made calls to encourage people to come to a meeting, as well as chatted with the workers about any problems they experienced on the job.

The blitz concluded with another debriefing to wrap up the weekend. Everyone reported the quality of the exchanges and any intimidation tactics, as well as the numbers of people they had reached. On a large whiteboard, Steve tallied up the numbers of flyers handed out, people contacted, and new members signed up.

At this sum-up, the weekend's organizers pointed out the limitations of one leaflet exchange or phone call. "The leafleting is just what it says, it's leafleting," remarked Bob, the national union leader. "It's to alert the workers to what we want to do. The contact that's made, the foundation's laid at that meeting. . . . When we come back, that's when we're able to meet with the workers, have time for them to . . . talk. That's when I identify who the potential leaders are going to be. That's when it's crucial. Gate leafleting. . . . You only got so many seconds. People are on their way to work."

This idea of slow victories "brick by brick" seemed to fly in the face of the rapidity of digital organizing. In fact, none of this discussion, none of it, included any digital strategy. Internet technology was not at all a part of the blitz; only printed flyers and telephones were used to recruit and organize members. It was not surprising, then, that the digital footprint of the blitz, or of the previous sanitation strike, was practically invisible.

It was also unclear whether the blitz had succeeded in its larger goal of recruiting any new members. I still heard phrases describing the wins over space as "a major victory" for staying "stalwart" and "strong." All that effort across the Greenville area by activists to gain such a small amount of ground still carried important symbolic and strategic weight. Upon hearing of the victories over space with the sanitation workplace leafleting, the group of organizers in the hotel conference room erupted in applause.

Safe Physical Spaces

After the blitz, many of the activists from UE 150 went to an evening meeting of the Greenville-based Coalition Against Racism (CAR) at a local church.[23] CAR activists had participated in the blitz, and this community-union-church connection sheds light on how a community-based approach to organizing could do what the internet could not: provide a safe physical space.

It was another long drive in a very rural area, yet the church was new, big, and modern. At the church, like at the UE 150 training, everyone introduced themselves, including the minister. "This was a *liberator zone* for us here," Saladin said after the introductions. "We organized from here. We had our meetings. . . . We're safe here. We're protected here." For many activists I spoke with, institutions like local progressive churches or community groups such as CAR were safe spaces, but the internet was not. "Speaking out" required collective support, which these organizations could provide offline but not as much online.

Susan, whom I'd met on another trip out east to learn more about this disconnect between the physical and virtual world, explained why this was so difficult. A CAR member and an African American woman in her 40s, she was a bus driver, as well as an office worker, at a local school in Green-

ville. After facing racial discrimination at work, she told me, she approached CAR. At first, Susan was nervous talking to me because she was worried about losing her job.

She relaxed after a while and confided in me that this fear is the same reason why she never posted anything about politics or about her case on social media. "It's not safe," she told me. Susan said her Facebook use was "strictly personal" and even then, she just looked "at what my friends are saying. I don't really offer anything." Susan was worried about someone in school management seeing her posts somehow. She added, "Most of the time I have to change my password when I get up there, because I get up there so seldom, my daughter most of the time manages it for me."

Many people I interviewed did not feel that virtual spaces provided them a sense of security in the same way a physical space did. But it was not just any offline space, it was one that was embedded in a broader part of their community—more than just their union. This broad-based community and labor safety net did not emerge overnight. Like the other working-class groups in this political arena, CAR had built up trust in the community by working in coalition with other groups, whether community, union, or church-based. Both Susan and the sanitation workers felt this trust with CAR.

To support the UE 150 sanitation workers, CAR had organized a coalition from the Greenville community to attend a city council meeting with the hopes of promoting the striking workers' grievances and preventing them from getting fired. In attendance that night was Don, a retired Greenville public employee himself. He explained that in addition to CAR, local ministers and a number of different groups showed up. "Some of the people who were involved in Occupy Greenville were there," Don recalled. "They had actually made up the signs for us, and so we had created this coalition of workers and Occupy people, many who had ties to the university. Our success, to a great extent, has been being able to forge alliances."

Worker after worker I interviewed, from those who drove garbage trucks to those who cleaned bedpans, said they were emboldened to speak up because an array of groups supported them, not just a union in isolation. Having trusted institutions in addition to their own group was key to overcoming fear and marginalization. In many ways, CAR was the epitome of this type of alliance that was deeply embedded in the broader community.

Don explained how they first started: "We called ourselves the Pitt County School Bus Drivers Safety Club. Imagine that. Pretty safe. No word of union in that, right?"

Don grew up in New York with his Italian American family and was a union organizer for many years before moving down South with his African American wife, who had family in eastern North Carolina. By the time I talked with him, he had lived in Greenville for 27 years and had been involved with public sector organizing for over two decades. He recalled, "Without the collaboration of community and faith-based organizations in this state . . . there would never be a UE 150. . . . Before there was any talk of any union out east here—and out east is a whole different world, okay? . . . There would be very little hope because of how backward and how little legacy our union work has been in the South, let alone eastern North Carolina. Race is raw here, okay? People ask, why do you call yourselves Coalition Against Racism? Well, race is raw." In other words, racism is not something that people assume has disappeared. People talk about it openly.

Just like UE 150, CAR was among the most active groups leading the efforts for collective bargaining rights, but they lacked a web presence. Nor did they use Facebook or any other form of social media. None. No one from their group knew what Twitter was.[24]

Don told me that they have a "website that we don't use. . . . If you were to see our web address, it is so long and convoluted—it was made up by somebody who is more tech-savvy than the average person in CAR. And I couldn't even tell you—I mean I have the stuff on a thumb drive, and . . . it exists, but I would have to go back to the drawing board and put the thumb drive in my computer and . . . the guy that did it is now not active anymore." Don could not even tell me how long it had been since he had looked at it. I asked other members if they knew the address, but they didn't. I followed up with him and other members without ever finding it. Don said he could not find the web address anywhere. He finally told me it was "dormant." But that did not mean their activity was—it just meant that many of their members felt more secure outside of the digital space.

CAR started in the mid-1990s, as their name described, to fight against racism. Don explained, "Too many organizations are not upfront about what they stand for. . . . We're in this because we're against racism. And if you don't use the word, you just dilute your effectiveness."

People would go to CAR when they experienced racism at work or in the community. Don gave the example of people going to them because they were followed, harassed, and then arrested for "simply walking in a store. . . . and so they come to the Coalition Against Racism because we have a reputation of fighting for justice. And they may have heard about it through the church, or some other way on the radio or something—word of mouth mostly." Most often, though, he said people would go to them because of work-related racism, especially among public sector workers.

As Don explained, "People come to us because of our visibility and because of what we do—not so much what we say, and whether we plop ourselves in front of a microphone and TV camera. We've gotten our share of coverage, and sometimes we even play to the media." But Don added that they have developed a reputation in the community of being trusted. People needed to feel *supported,* and having institutions helped them feel that way. The internet did not offer that level of support for people who were speaking up, especially for the first time.

Digital Organizing in Context: The Roots of a Hostile Organizing Terrain

From these stories of how fear constrained digital organizing, a picture emerges of how space and place make a difference in online activism. North Carolina was hostile terrain for unionizing, making it difficult for working-class groups to use digital technology in these campaigns. It was not that labor organizing, or digital use for that matter, was impossible. But when working-class people, particularly African Americans, have tried to collectively speak up about conditions and demand change—they have had to overcome a legacy of oppression to do so. History helps us to contextualize this fear. To situate the uphill organizing battle both offline and online, I'm going to take a step back and trace why the word "union" is a dirty word in the South, to help unravel the historical context of this North Carolina case. In so doing, we can begin to understand how every time we read about a successful example of digital activism, there may be other stories of organizing that are not being told.

Unionizing is speaking up about one's working conditions collectively—the idea is that strength is in numbers. Online activism is also speaking up

about one's conditions. So what has happened when workers have tried to speak up outside of digital spaces? The job threats that Charlie faced were not unique. Workers in Greenville, and throughout the South, have also faced a long history of anti-union and racist violence. By the time I started my research, it had been years since gunfire erupted over a labor dispute in North Carolina, but labor unions remained on the fringes of power here. The union history of the South has seen waves of optimistic organizing followed by brutal retaliation and then backlash.[25] Sometimes, this violence was less overt but just as potent. For instance, Black workers and UE 150 members at public universities across North Carolina—from Greenville to Charlotte—have reported finding nooses at their work sites, often after they voiced their concerns about their working conditions to management. One was dipped in red paint to symbolize a bloody lynching reminiscent of the KKK's repression against Blacks speaking up.

Historically, intimidation was fraught with physical violence, such that anti-union intimidation has generated a general fear of unionizing. One of the first times laborers faced this violence was with southern plantation slavery. When slaves tried to speak up, they were met with harsh punishment, including death. At the same time, poor white Americans were often tenant farmers or indentured servants, who had few rights themselves. The passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865 gave African Americans the same labor rights, in theory, to whites, but up to that point there was little formal labor organizing.

The direct result of this racist foundation of labor was the challenge of organizing both Black and white workers together. White plantation owners, and then factory owners, were able to preserve their power by exploiting racial divisions. Over the years, though, a few union campaigns involving both Black and white workers were successful, even in Greenville. After these pockets of victories during the Reconstruction era of the late 19th century, a backlash emerged against African Americans who had begun to participate in public affairs.[26] Southern Jim Crow governments unleashed repressive laws, enforced segregation, and turned a blind eye toward white supremacist violence against African Americans, including for unionizing. But a few decades later, in the wake of the Great Depression and with little to lose, workers began another wave of unionizing under the banner of "Operation Dixie" in the South, including Greenville and other areas of North Carolina's Black Belt. This campaign was led by a radical labor federation, the Con-

gress of Industrial Organizations, which included unions with African Americans, rare at the time.[27]

During these upswing phases of labor organizing, unions were able to press for labor laws to protect their rights. For instance, the National Labor Relations Act, which was passed in 1935, is still a cornerstone for legalized union activity, including collective bargaining. This law, though, only applies to most workers in the private sector and excludes government employees. The pattern then repeated once again with the 1940s ushering in a growth in anti-labor sentiment, eventually resulting in the anti-communist Red Scare in which unions faced severe repression and violence once again, including against organizations of Black workers in North Carolina.[28]

With this most recent downturn in labor organizing, the federal government began to allow individual states to limit strikes and outlaw "closed shops," which meant that individual workers did not have to join a union, even when a majority of workers had voted for it. In 1947, North Carolina was one of the first states to pass this "Right-to-Work" law, which restricted the power of a union.

In 1959, following several ferocious efforts by northern unions to organize public sector workers in the state, the North Carolina House and Senate passed GS 95–98 outlawing public employee collective bargaining. Originally, the bill included a complete ban on public worker union membership, but this was eventually overturned as unconstitutional. Still, the key provision of banning collective bargaining remained.[29]

That same year, Wisconsin passed a law enabling public sector collective bargaining, reflecting a trend in states outside the South. By 1975, 36 states had passed legislation in support of collective bargaining for the public sector. But a year later, North Carolina public employee organizing was dealt a particularly harsh blow when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that North Carolina firefighters could not withhold union dues from members' paychecks. Neither this court ruling, or even GS 95–98, could stop public employee unions from forming, but the pace of union growth slowed dramatically over the next few decades across the country in every sector.[30] After President Reagan was elected in 1980, he threatened to fire striking air traffic controllers, effectively dismantling the federal employee union. This was a turning point for the decline in labor organizing in general, and public sector organizing in particular. Union density rates continued to drop nationwide during his presidency.[31]

In North Carolina, the dawn of the Reagan era coincided with the "Greensboro Massacre" and its aftermath, which put a lengthy chill on labor organizing. The KKK had opened fire against labor activists. Five organizers were dead and others injured, including Jim, who had opened up the training at the Greenville organizing blitz. It may seem simple now to see who the victims were in this massacre, but at the time the KKK were perceived as locals who were maintaining the status quo while those who were killed and injured were called communist outsiders.[32]

The combination of violence, racism, and laws together made it difficult to organize for better conditions and wages. This history of racialized violence without legal protections was a key factor that made it difficult to speak up and speak out in any forum. While this history may seem unique to North Carolina and its public employees, it reveals how critical it is to learn about any historical context of digital activism invisibility in other parts of the country—and the world. I cannot, as a social scientist, say that this case applies to every other instance of social movement activity, but it does point to how important it is to analyze digital activism more thoroughly. Rather than assume that all developed industrialized countries have the conditions, infrastructure, and support to use digital technology, it is essential to unpack differences within the same country and certainly in other countries, as well. Context matters. Whether organizing in Ghana or Greenville, the local conditions may shape how and how much people organize offline, and in turn, online.

Justice Speaks

Despite all these barriers to digital organizing, one working-class group had developed some savvy over the years with communication tools: Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ). Given that they had helped launch the struggle against the collective bargaining ban, I expected that BWFJ would have taken advantage of internet technology.

In the face of union decline after Reagan, they advocated a campaign called "Organize the South!" BWFJ was publicly critical of unions for not putting more effort into southern organizing. In the 1980s, manufacturing plants from the northern and midwestern United States had begun to move to the South in pursuit of cheaper, nonunion workers. Even though segre-

gation began to be peeled away as a result of the civil rights movement, fewer jobs were available for Black tenant farmers and tobacco workers, so a surplus in labor supply only increased racial tensions in a largely segregated workforce. In this environment, BWFJ believed it was essential to organize the most marginalized and to confront class and race oppression together by uniting both Black and white workers. As a workers' center, BWFJ's focus was on organizing communities, churches, workplaces, and local political groups to mobilize a broad coalition to fight for social justice.[33]

One of the three main sectors BWFJ set out to organize was low-wage public employees, such as school bus drivers in Greenville and housekeepers at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. Working with legal activists and groups like CAR, they all came together in 1996 to launch the North Carolina Public Service Workers Organization to lay the groundwork for a statewide public employees' union. This group eventually affiliated with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) and became UE 150.[34]

BWFJ remained a key part of the UE 150 organizing. While CAR was also critical, especially for local organizing in Greenville, BWFJ was a statewide organization with southern and national outposts. It had a history of linking other groups, as well as expertise using communication tools. If UE 150 or CAR had lower levels of digital use due to the resource and fear constraints, is it possible that BWFJ could be the internet link for these groups? Given the alliances that CAR, UE 150, and other working-class groups said were essential for their constituencies to overcome the fear of organizing in the South, could it be possible that *another* organization could be a digital voice for marginalized groups? This is a common objection to digital inequality findings—that other groups or people can be the substitute digital voice.[35] If working-class people needed a trusted institution to speak publicly, could an allied group speak for them? BWFJ seemed like the perfect intermediary to play this role.

Among the five working-class groups in this arena, BWFJ did have the highest digital activism score. They had registered a presence on all three platforms—a website, Facebook, and Twitter. Given that it also had the longest history of all the working-class groups and had spearheaded much of the labor coalition work, one might expect it also to have high levels of internet use, especially since it also had experience creating a variety of DIY media tools.

During these initial campaigns, BWFJ was not a stranger to using self-produced media for their organizing, often with volunteer labor. So it was no surprise that after spending time searching among the five working-class groups for a strong advocate for social media that I would find someone at BWFJ. Ajamu fit the bill.

A BWFJ activist and former postal worker, Ajamu was in his late 60s and an early adopter of technology. He was often at the forefront of the organization's media strategies. Twenty years earlier, he had helped start *Justice Speaks Radio,* a program for African American worker and community struggles against injustice and racism. He was one of the on-air hosts and producers of the weekly program, based in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, which was also home to BWFJ headquarters. For many years BWFJ had also produced a monthly newspaper called *Justice Speaks,* which Ajamu had edited along with an editorial team. Starting in the early 1990s, the group had produced videos about labor conditions and organizing in the South. Before the advent of YouTube, they had videotaped interviews, such as those with African American textile workers facing the KKK when they started to unionize with white workers. They self-distributed these videos and showed them not just to people in North Carolina but also to northern areas to generate solidarity for their struggle.

In 2010, Ajamu attempted to livestream a memorial service in honor of Crystal Lee Sutton, who was made famous by an Oscar-winning performance by Sally Field in a movie about her life. The 1979 film, *Norma Rae,* tells the story of Sutton's role as a textile worker turned union activist because of unjust working conditions. During the memorial, Ajamu had technical issues with his equipment, so he was not able to livestream the service. But he was still proud of this attempt, which was more than five years before livestreaming became commonplace on mobile devices.

Norma Rae's most famous scene is when Field stands on a table in the factory holding a handmade sign that simply says "UNION." Organizing has always involved using whatever available tools one has at the time—whether a piece of cardboard, the radio, or the internet. "By any means necessary," was what Ajamu later told me about his use of communication tools. He was optimistic about what digital technology could potentially do for his group to organize efficiently.

Even though BWFJ had the highest digital activism score of all of the working-class groups, it was still well below the average, landing at the

bottom quartile of all of the organizations I studied. Unlike many of the other working-class groups, they did have a website with some interactive features, including video clips. But Ajamu acknowledged that "the website is outdated, or at least hadn't been updated in a while. We're trying to figure that out, how to get that better."

BWFJ also had a Facebook page that he and others occasionally updated. It included petitions, event announcements and other calls to action. Ajamu said, "We do probably better with the Facebook page than anything else." He was one of the few people across all of the working-class groups that I talked to who tried to maintain their Facebook page, but they still only posted to Facebook about once per week and comments on posts appeared half as often. One of the reasons, he said, was that they did not have someone dedicated to updating the site, like Steve had pointed out about UE 150. Compared to websites, Facebook has a low bar for entry and updating is vastly easier, but it was still a challenge.

BWFJ did have a Twitter account. It was the only working-class group among the 34 that did. But since they opened their account in early 2011 up to the time of my analysis, they had only tweeted once. Of the approximately 64,000 tweets sent by all classes of groups, this was the only one that came from a working-class organization. In statistical terms, that one tweet rounds to zero. In effect, then, no working-class groups used Twitter. It was the platform that showed the widest class gap because Twitter use was virtually nonexistent for BWFJ—and was completely so for all of the other working-class groups.

Ajamu sighed before he told me, "We set up a BWFJ Twitter account, but just kind of let it go, so it's there, and we've got to hook that up and whatnot." He also said that he wished they had a more complete digital strategy, and that there was "coordination between the Twitter account, the Facebook account, the website—get all that aligned up and whatnot."

BUT WHY DID BWFJ not have more of a digital strategy if they were experienced with other forms of communication? It turns out that their reasons mirrored the other working-class groups' concerns. First, it was a question of resources. The organization as a whole lacked the digital devices to maintain high levels of online activity. And even though a printed newsletter or paper seems cumbersome and costly, this technology has not significantly

changed, whereas many working-class leaders, even Ajamu, talked about having a hard time "keeping up" with the constant upgrades in software. It was simply expensive in terms of capacity, BWFJ leaders said, in finding consistent volunteers to do it. In fact, looking at their communication use over the previous few decades, it would come in waves, with BWFJ not always having a newspaper, videos, or radio program.

The fear of digital use was also present but went even deeper. BWFJ activists, especially those who were older, told me they had been targeted themselves years earlier by COINTELPRO (short for "Counterintelligence Program"), the American FBI program that monitored and prosecuted civil rights activists. While current workers, public and otherwise, were heavily involved in directing BWFJ, many of its leaders were seasoned organizers who had been involved for decades in organizations, such as the Black Liberation Army and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Government spying was nothing new to them, as they were careful with phone calls, as well. Digital technology only exacerbated their security concerns over the government using their online information against them, either through informants or similar tactics, to limit their organizing. Even Ajamu, who was the group's biggest internet advocate, quipped, "So there's always the thing: 'Never discuss online what you don't want the authorities to know.'"

The Fear Factor

How fear fed into low digital use among these working-class organizations upends four assumptions of digital activism.

First is the question of political repression and digital engagement. Some scholars have pointed out that the benefits of digital technology are greater, though riskier, in repressive regimes than in open and democratic societies.[36] The idea is that in countries like the United States, there is already a so-called independent press and legal freedom of speech, but in other countries, such as in Iran or Egypt, the news media—and individuals—face greater restrictions in political expression. As a result, the internet is supposed to have more of an impact in political movements that challenge authoritarian governments. Thus, in Iran, the media used terms like "Twitter Revolution" or, in Egypt, "Facebook Revolution." But in the case of BWFJ, people were worried about repression in what is usually considered an open society. And this

repression did *not* lead to high levels of digital engagement. Instead, the class limitation was not simply economic but also political. My interviews predated the Snowden revelations about government spying, so these activists did not simply respond to an increase in the public's awareness of online risks. Instead, it reveals the complexity of simplistic categories of "open" or "repressive" societies, as well as what activists in all types of repression may face—in the United States or elsewhere.[37]

Another assumption is that unions simply don't fit the digital activist prototype. One might assume that it's not simply fear, or even resources, that limits online activism but union status. Few scholars have studied the interaction of the internet and labor unions. Those that have focused on this topic have tended to disagree about the role of digital technology. A few are optimistic about internet use for expanding worker participation, but many have pointed to old-fashioned unions as not being up to date nor tech savvy.[38] A common stereotype is that unions are old and stodgy, often run by a bunch of old guys with cigars, so why would they want to use the new-fangled participatory internet? This argument stems from much of the analysis of digital activism that has focused on young, anarchist-oriented digital protesters who presumably shunned organization, including unions.[39]

This perception may be found in northern American cities or even in other regions, such as Europe, where unions are more prevalent. It may be difficult to comprehend how labor organizing can be compared to social movements. The assumption is that unions are closed shops without an open participation model, but with the Right-to-Work status in North Carolina and other southern states, that is not the case. Labor unions in the South operate more like social movement organizations, rather than closed-shop traditional labor unions. In fact, I interviewed many activists who talked about how they were engaging in "social movement unionizing" to combat the historical legacy of racialized fear and to build a movement that is broader than one workplace.[40] Southern labor unions, like UE 150, often involve community groups, churches, and other civic institutions. It is simply harder to organize in the South than in other regions.

But what about contexts other than this sector of unionizing in North Carolina? Is this case just an anomaly? Not really. The challenges of labor organizing in the South may be similar to those that working-class groups around the country, and world, might face when trying to bring people together to voice their concerns, whether around labor or other issues. Race

and class constraints could play a role anywhere. While anyone can lose their job for organizing, or speaking up online, working-class people usually do not have a safety net to fall back on, so it's critical to look beyond elite internet adopters, in any state or country, as the norm for online activism.[41]

The view of unions as old while digital activism as new and young did not hold up in this case, either. In Chapter 2, I show how the age of an organization—or its members—was seldom a dominating factor in how and how much groups used the internet. And not all of the working-class groups in this political arena are even unions—only three of the five. In addition, public sector unions of teachers or social workers, had higher digital activism scores than unions of highway or sanitation workers.[42] The upshot is that while organizing working-class people in the anti-union South made it difficult for groups to use the internet, the challenges were not because of stereotypes about unions.

The next assumption of digital activism is that virtual spaces can often replace—or are merged—with physical ones. Some have argued that there is no real difference between the online and the offline world, and to say so is a "digital dualist" delusion.[43] This view derives from a belief that digital technology, especially smartphones and wearables, has permeated every facet of life. It is simply not possible to distinguish between the real and virtual—they are one and the same, or so the argument goes. While there is some truth to this, it does not account for digital inequality. Some people may have a digital device within reach at all moments but for many poor and working-class activists that is not always the case. Moreover, fear may distance some even further from gadgets. There is a wide gap between the physical and virtual when no working-class groups in this case tweeted about their struggles.

Moreover, scholars have been saying for years that the costs of being physically present are so high that it makes rational sense to do a lot more organizing online.[44] This is another part of the argument about how the costs of online activism have been slashed in the digital era—what Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport call the "reduced need for co-presence for collective action."[45] Certainly, the costs are high to gather in one place, like the blitz, which brought in organizers from all over the region. It is expensive, so to speak, to create safe physical spaces for workers to organize. Why not at least augment these physical spaces with virtual ones, such as follow-up e-mails instead of phone calls or a Facebook page instead of a flyer? Yet in addition

to resources, fear factored into the high costs of digital activism because the risks of virtual organizing seemed too high for many.

The rationale behind the fear of digital, over physical, spaces was not just a question of employers tracking what was said online. It was also that the use of digital technology was often associated with *individual,* rather than *collective,* action. This distinction may seem like semantics. A lot of individual people organizing online can be collective action, just as a lot of people organizing offline is collective action. But for many working-class activists, it was too risky to go solo on the internet.

They viewed social media as an individualistic mode of engagement that was less trustworthy than institutional collective modes of engagement. But because the institutions they trusted, like UE 150, did not have the capacity to have a big digital footprint, workers did not feel supported to venture out online alone. The working-class groups that people turned to—and could provide a safe space for people to organize offline—could not provide an online safe space. Potential job loss from an online post was frightening for people living in a high poverty area with few jobs. The networked individualism of the internet did not work well in this context because speaking up politically often felt safer when it was embedded in an organization. As Don told me about why the Greenville sanitation workers were willing to come forward—they knew that local groups "have each other's back."

Just like the Greenville sanitation workers who were meeting at local churches with community groups in 2011, Memphis sanitation workers had met at a church in 1968 when they planned their strike. This was the same safe space where Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to support the workers the night before he was assassinated. Workers then and now knew that what they were doing was risky, so they needed the safest place they had in their communities to organize. Scholars have suggested that autonomous spaces have always been essential for political mobilization, so it seems as if the internet could be a virtual alternative.[46] But one caveat that sociologist Francesca Polletta suggested is that safe spaces for political mobilization are less about the physical location and more about the networks that develop them.[47] In turn, digital spaces, in this case for working-class groups, failed to have the institutional support to make them viable.

These findings may seem surprising, given the claims made about the internet's ability to empower individuals. Even with privacy and surveillance

concerns, digital activism may seem like a safer space to organize than handing out flyers, or at the very least a way to get around the miles and miles organizers and workers drive in rural North Carolina. In light of the challenges—and costs—of organizing in a physical space, I expected the internet to overcome at least some collective action problems. But that was rarely the case.

Digital advocates find this individual-oriented capacity a defining characteristic of the technology, the fourth assumption of digital activism. Lee Raine and Barry Wellman even coined the phrase "networked individualism" with their book of the same title. Their idea is not that people are selfish but that they can now organize their lives by connecting with people directly through the technology.[48] Political scientists Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg took this argument one step further with digital activism. They contended that "connective," rather than "collective," action describes movements with high levels of digital technology, especially for those who are more "individualized in their social orientation."[49] On the one hand, this case proves that they are right. Networked individualism did not work well for working-class activists, so they are not engaged as much online. On the other hand, this theory does not capture the challenges of fear and inequality. In fact, I noticed that most of the Facebook postings from working-class organizations—and individuals—were photos of themselves together at events, often posed group photos, rather than more individualized, personal ones.

Clearly, then, working-class organizations have constraints in using the internet based on resources, region, and race. The racialized fear of speaking up online about labor conditions in the Black Belt South was only exacerbated by a lack of resources. So far, I have traced measures and mechanisms of *organizational* digital use. But what about working-class *individuals?*

Individual Digital Constraints

During the 20th century, union organizing was often done by leafleting at factory gates. But in the early stages of a union campaign, workers and organizers wanted a place to speak safely without the factory owner knowing about it, so they would often go to workers' homes to talk. House calls were the bread and butter of union organizers, who would spend most of

their time in a car driving to workers' homes. Given the costs in terms of gas and time it takes to drive around town, or in the case of rural North Carolina, around a few counties, it would make sense to use the few resources a group had to leverage the internet to communicate, despite the justifiable fear. If working-class groups *could* develop an internet infrastructure and figure out a way to help people feel safe online, could organizers' leaflets and cars be replaced with Facebook and computers?

Not quite. Organizational resources and fear were not the only costs to digital activism for working-class groups; individual members and supporters also faced high costs to digital participation. Individuals were limited in being able to use these tools, which turned out to be a barrier at the organizational level, as well. Often, the "inner circle" of organizers in these groups used the internet, but not so much those in the "outer circle," at least not as reliably. I found four constraints that shaped digital activism inequality among working-class individuals: *Access, Skills, Empowerment,* and *Time.* (ASETs) I outlined these ASETs in the Introduction and further contextualize them here.

"A" Is for Access: "We Can't Take for Granted Everybody's Basically Got the Same Tools"

Many workers were not online enough even to receive the equivalent of a digital flyer. Simply put, the members of these working-class groups often lacked gadgets and connectivity. This basic access included everything from a functioning computer or up-to-date cell phone to a broadband connection or mobile plan with sufficient data.

Access was a function of cost. Paying for even the most basic mobile and internet services is a challenge for people who could barely make ends meet. If someone became low on funds, paying for a phone or internet connection was a lower priority than housing, food, or transportation. Most working-class people with whom I talked had some sort of computer at home, but it was often old, broken, or slow like Larsene's. Even when people had a desktop, laptop, or mobile phone, keeping it updated, repaired, or possibly replaced was costly. Others could only use a computer by going to a relative's house or to a library if it happened to be open on their day off. Those with mobile phones were much more likely to have basic or feature phones

than smartphones. Texting was possible but without a keyboard it was more laborious than for someone with the latest iPhone.

These activists were also placed at a disadvantage by an infrastructure that left them with lower-quality access to the internet and cellular networks. In 2013, the Federal Communications Commission found that less than one in five North Carolinians had internet speeds that were at the "minimum required to engage in modern life," and rural households had much lower rates.[50] Larsene lived "out east" in the Black Belt, where internet access was spotty, as was mobile phone coverage. Many organizers said they were more likely to have e-mail addresses for members who lived in cities, such as Charlotte or Raleigh, than in rural areas.

But there was another hidden aspect to the question of access. Even if a group wanted to be more digitally active, they faced a tattered patchwork of constantly changing contact information. When their members lost their jobs, efforts to communicate with them over e-mail or by phone were thwarted. Working-class groups had to keep up with a relentless changing of e-mail address and phone numbers because people could not afford to keep the same phone or internet service. Often their e-mail address was tied to their internet service provider, rather than a free web-based account like Gmail. If they cut their account, their e-mail address went dead.

When I asked organizers about the internet access of members, a common response involved the rattling off of a few names of people who were online frequently and then of those who were rarely online. They would finally mention a group of people who were not online at all.

Interview after interview of working-class respondents and organizers echoed what Ashaki from BWFJ said as to why digital communications aren't a primary focus: "Working and oppressed people don't always have the same access to the internet and technology that a lot of middle-class people do, so you got to always keep that in mind as well. You might not be able to reach people if . . . that's your main method of communication and contact."

"S" Is for Skills: "What Am I Trying to Do Here?"

"I'm not computer-ready," one active BWFJ member in her 40s explained to me. "It took me two hours just to set up one bill, so I'm not computer-

ready." Digital savviness proved to be crucial to online activism. Working-class members who did have the internet often didn't know how to use it efficiently or effectively. Some of these skills were specific to digital technology, but in other cases it was a lack of basic reading and writing abilities. Most of the working-class groups' membership had no more than a high school education. When Larsene was trying to access a website, she said more to herself than to me, "What am I trying to do here? I'm trying to get on this thing right? What didn't I do right?"

Overall literacy was also paramount. Writing a Facebook post, composing an e-mail, or joining a discussion forum may seem quick and easy, but these so-called simple acts can be intimidating for some people. One in five eastern North Carolina residents are illiterate, while the statewide rate is one in seven.[51] Steve, the UE 150 organizer, lamented: "A limitation . . . is such different levels of writing skills and just keyboarding. So there's a lot of really important input [online] that I think doesn't get made." He added that it is "just a huge thing. . . . It really slows people down."

Even for those who dive into social media, they must grapple with platforms that are continually evolving and changing features. Steve said he feels like he's often falling behind if he's not consistently using these tools: "I think of it as this learning thing that you can learn how to do it. But then unless you're using it, you lose it, as they say. And that I know that's the case with me."

Members with advanced digital skills in these groups were not common. Both Don from CAR and Larsene from UE 150 talked about having member volunteers about five years earlier putting together websites for their groups, but this individual digital participation was just a brief spike, as their sites went dormant soon after. It is one thing not to update a website for a week, month, or year, but to go for a period of five years without an update showed the limited extent of skills among the membership.

This lack of skills can become a self-reinforcing factor. Folks in this group were less likely to be surrounded by a network of friends, family, or other activists who could regularly show them how to use the latest digital technology. While middle / upper-class people—and working-class people with skills—did pitch in to build and maintain online platforms, these individual volunteers were not as prevalent, nor available, as with groups from more privileged classes. Not having this digital milieu, then, shaped a much

different disposition toward the internet, or what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*.[52]

"E" Is for Empowerment: "I'm Not a Tech Person"

Perhaps one of the most complex and profound barriers working-class people faced was their sense of powerlessness in the face of this technological promise around them. Even if they acquired access, or some measure of skill, they often viewed digital technology as too intimidating to approach.

When I was at Larsene's house, she told me how some union organizers helped her with computer skills so that she could use "word processing software" to write her speeches and "cut and paste." Initially, though, she said, "I was really scared of the computer. It was like I was gonna break it, I was gonna do something, I was gonna hit something wrong." Others had reassured her by saying, "'No, you ain't gonna,'" she told me.

This sense of powerlessness was another mechanism deterring people from using social media in their activism. Activists from working-class groups often viewed digital activism as something "other people" do. About a dozen people I interviewed said, "I'm not a tech person," including a volunteer who had written some HTML code years earlier to build a group's website. Another common phrase I heard was how the internet was "up there," or as one activist said, "I don't get up there." For them, the internet was only attainable for people higher up on the social ladder.

This *othering* of digital technology was common, as if people felt they were not entitled to use it, while others were. Don, in response to a meeting being videotaped, quipped, "Of course, this won't be on YouTube." As he later explained, posting a video to YouTube was not something that their organization could imagine doing.

This was especially pronounced with Twitter. Respondents often laughed uncomfortably when I asked about it and said that it was not something they could do. One UE 150 member responded to a question about Twitter by saying, "That's too fast for me. I can't keep up. No, I ain't never did that. I just can't keep up with Twitter. I've seen them on there and they be talking to too many people at a time." Most of these people expressed a vague desire to use Twitter, but it seemed out of reach, and they often knew nothing about

it. Steve said, "I don't know anybody who even knows how to do Twitter, or even what it is . . . to get on somebody's Twitter list or something."

"T" Is for Time: "They Don't Want You to Have the Cell Phone on You."

The final constraint working-class individuals had to overcome for digital activism was time. They neither had enough of it nor could control the time they did have. For many, their lives and work schedules were such that they did not have the power to decide when and where to go online.

Many people are busy, regardless of social class. On the one hand are people who may be tethered to their gadgets all day if they choose—and even into the night; for them, time may feel like it is disappearing because *too* much time is spent online. On the other hand are people who have the opposite problem. The costs of spending personal time online were out of reach for many working-class public employees. Moreover, workers were often not allowed to use their mobile phone or the internet for personal use during the day, which was less of an issue for white-collar public employees. Even if computers were part of one's job, using it for personal use—specifically activism—was off limits.

"We can't do everything online, because a lot of workers . . . don't sit on the computer all day, like I do. They're out, they're working . . . public service work like sanitation or housekeeping," said Erin, a BWFJ organizer. The social class of individuals impacted digital engagement not only in terms of access, skills, and empowerment, but also simply by having the time. Many lacked control over when they could go online. Rather than operating on a 24/7 social media clock, many activists did not have flexible and continuous device time.

Eugene, an African American nurses' aide, told me he had to hand over his mobile phone before clocking into work. "They don't want you to have it. They don't want you to have the cell phone on you in patient care areas . . . but if we have a phone call, if we have a family emergency, there's nobody [to tell you]. . . . We're short staffed already."

Eugene was the person Larsene was trying to recruit to update their ancient website. "Now that I got Eugene, who is our young activist, he has some

computer skills, so he's gonna take a look at it for me," she told me hopefully. "So, I think, getting him plugged into that, that'll help us move that along. Somebody got to take *time* to put that together." Eugene may have had the computer access and perhaps the skills, but he was also going to school part time and working full time. He didn't have the time that people from other social classes often have to go online whenever they want.

And he never was able to finish updating their site.

Organizational and Individual Constraints Collide

Because of this problem with ASETs, organizers knew that it was unlikely that the internet could replace house calls and leafleting. Even Ajamu, one of the most optimistic, admitted, "There's still another basic level of communication where you still gotta go to somebody's house. They don't have the internet, they don't have a smartphone, or they don't have texting on their phone, or whatever. So you still gotta . . . figure that out."

Despite the efficiency that digital technology enables—with the multiple ways now to get in touch with workers—many organizers found that it has actually fueled the challenge "to keep up" with everyone. They talked about the difficulty of keeping up with which worker could access which technology, as well as unstable e-mail addresses and phone numbers. It required *more* work to communicate. "I think that's an important thing for us to figure out—not just to do organizing with people it's easy to do organizing with, because that really misses a lot of people," said one organizer.

For groups seeking mass participation, *additional* organizer effort was required to ensure that all members could join in the flow of digital communication. Chelsea, the staff member of the mixed-class HOPE Coalition, described the elaborate strategy she used to make her organizing inclusive, above and beyond those who could afford to use social media and other internet tools: "I started listing people under the e-mail list that I would use. I would make a Word document—this just tells you how low-tech I was [*laughs*]. . . . And at the bottom, I would write the names of the people who didn't have e-mail, and people who had come to meetings, but didn't have e-mail, and put their phone number on there, who I didn't always get around to calling, but tried to. And they really appreciated it."

Other organizers mentioned another type of list they maintained to keep track of the multiple ways to contact people. Sometimes this was individuals' preferred method of communication, or as was often the case, dependent on whether or not their phone or internet bill had been paid. These communication tools included home or work visits, phone calls, Facebook messages, text messages, e-mails, and even snail mail.

It may seem easy and low-cost to advertise a meeting or event online, but if some of your members do not have internet access or don't know how to use a certain app, it takes extra work—and time—to make sure that everyone is included.

The upshot was that to have broad participation among working-class members who lacked ASETs, additional effort was required by the organizations in this digital era. Ashaki explained: "We do use the internet but . . . there are a lot of people, a lot of workers that just aren't on it, or they have very limited understanding of it or very limited access. . . . We still have to do the legwork, so it means we have to get out and get around the state and meet with people. That's just basic and fundamental."

ASETs Analyzed

These ASETs fly in the face of the Silicon Valley story of the technology revolution: we are told that everyone has access to mobile technology now. The digital divide is closing, so it should be just a matter of time before everyone is plugged in.[53] Anyone should be able to post a Facebook live video. We're all empowered, and we all have time to do it because it only takes a second.

The reality is that all this is mythical hyperbole. A large body of digital divide research shows the persistence of inequality.[54] For people who have consistent connectivity, it may be difficult to understand the costs of this digital divide. The access gap is closing, but only to a point. Often, measurement is based on surveys asking if someone had internet access in the previous week, month, or ever. Reports abound about the increasing rate of individuals who have internet access.[55] And certainly since the term "digital divide" was first coined in the 1990s, more people have been gaining access. But the rate has now slowed, with a consistent gap of about 12 percent of Americans still not having internet access, and most of the people not online have lower levels of income and education. For instance, 98 percent of

college-educated Americans use the internet while only 68 percent of those without a high school education do.[56] But having internet access doesn't mean that connection is either reliable or speedy, as I often saw that many in these working-class groups were still stuck in the internet's slow lane.[57]

Using a cheaper mobile device, such as a smartphone, as opposed to more expensive laptops or desktops, may seem like an ideal low-cost option for activists, but that requires that someone can purchase it, pay for a data plan, knows how to use it, and has the time and confidence to do so. But groups in this study with high levels of internet engagement did so with laptops or desktops as their foundation. They may have had mobile phones, but they were not designing web pages or Facebook group pages with them. Relying on a smartphone for posting tweets or videos may work for a protest but not for developing a database to follow-up on a viral post. Like we saw at the organizational level, this idea of "leapfrogging" over desktops misses how the building and developing of online platforms for activism happens—and the costs that are involved.[58]

Digital activism, then, is more than internet access, or a passive *consumption* of online political content because someone happens to have internet access and can read tweets or Facebook posts. Nationally, data also show a consistent class gap in digital *production,* such as social media postings of comments, opinions, articles, or videos.[59] This class divide in content creation carries over to political uses. People with higher incomes and education levels are more likely to participate in online civic engagement activities.[60]

Digital divide scholars initially focused on the resource differences driving all these gaps, given the costs of computers or connectivity.[61] Since then, research has expanded with an array of factors that shape individual digital use, similar to what I found for online activism, such as skills and literacy; time and labor; and empowerment and entitlement.[62]

Still, digital activism scholars suggest that technology goes in the direction of helping, not hurting, economically disadvantaged activists.[63] The general idea is that as the internet diffused from just early adopters to the general population, class inequality became less relevant for activism. For instance, one study suggests that once people are online, petition signing shows socioeconomic parity.[64] Other research shows that the internet can foster more participation among working families, who otherwise would not have the time to get involved.[65] Even when the digital divide is wide, a common argument is that the people who *are* online can communicate for and with those who are *not.*[66]

While foundational communication research shows that opinion leaders have always existed, the internet was supposed to have eliminated the need for this type of intermediary by projecting people's voices directly.[67] With the North Carolina groups I studied, neither scenario was happening—working-class organizations were rarely posting their stories online nor did they have consistent intermediaries online. We do not need to look very far to see that digital influencers online—those who get the most hits and clicks—are more likely to have the ASETs to do so. Having a strong online presence means posting online and creating political content in a myriad of ways, not just making an occasional click. While some middle-class activists may benefit from the convenience of online activism, those without classed resources may not be able to access these benefits.[68]

These individual barriers also prevented me from finding an internet underworld. I did not observe working-class rogue digital activists going outside of their organizations to counteract the lack of organizational resources. Sure, individual activists posted to social media, but I found minimal traces of individual internet use around politics disconnected to organizations, even among those considered more digitally savvy. And even if the organizational and political constraints were overcome, individual limitations remained.

Still, as a counterexample, what of the widely publicized online viral post from a person like Diamond Reynolds? A housekeeper at a hotel chain, she witnessed a police officer shoot her African American boyfriend, Philando Castile, in 2016. Immediately after the murder, she had the digital savvy to pull out her phone and start livestreaming the aftermath on Facebook live. This digital act was quickly tied into the movement against police brutality that is often known by the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.[69]

This raises the central question of why one movement of the oppressed, Black Lives Matter, was successful in mobilizing with digital tools, while the one I was studying wasn't? Three of the five working-class groups I studied—BWFJ, CAR, and UE 150—were majority Black, so we might expect that African Americans in this North Carolina labor movement would see the internet as an ideal space to organize, despite the constraints. A common view is that the internet is a space where Black activists, in particular, can communicate. In fact, the term "Black Twitter" was coined to describe how African Americans use the platform for support, community, and other solidarity purposes.[70] It's not that Black media are new, given that African Americans

have always been marginalized from the mainstream media, as well as from politics more broadly. Black newspapers and radio stations, particularly in the South, have been around for a long time to fill that gap, as we saw with BWFJ.

Perhaps it was the timing. The Black Lives Matter movement started at the tail end of my data collection in North Carolina, so it's possible that the incremental increase in digital adoption made somewhat of a difference. Nonetheless, in addition to an unequivocal digital divide that persists over the years, when people *are* able to figure out one platform, tech companies are constantly launching new gadgets and features, making it difficult for people without ASETs to keep up. Meanwhile, people with more privilege are starting out ahead with every digital innovation.[71]

One answer to this puzzle lies in what scholars like to call "intersectionality"—how one form of oppression intersects with another, in this case, class and race.[72] These two factors work together to drive this digital activist gap. On the one hand, yes, nationally, once online, African Americans are often twice as likely to post to social media than whites.[73] On the other hand, this higher rate is only among African Americans who have the ASETs to do so. Seventy-eight percent of white Americans have high-speed broadband at home while only 58 percent of African Americans do, and 9 percent of whites rely on their smartphone for internet access while 15 percent of Blacks do, as opposed to also having home access.[74] Imagine posting that video on dial-up or editing that blog on a phone. Since the poor and working-class groups in this study were majority African American, social class constraints of resources simply outweighed the opportunities of #BlackTwitter. Nonetheless, the Black Lives Matter movement is not a movement of elites. It is a truly cross-class movement with this commitment from organizers, as well. And that may be the clue—mixed-class organizations in my analysis tended to have higher rates of digital activity than working-class groups did. For every Diamond Reynolds posting, there are many more digital activists dominating the online airwaves who are from the middle and professional classes. An outlier is not the norm.

What's at Stake: "Making Do but Wanting More"

Even though these labor groups were not online much, they were still visible in their communities and getting things done. If they didn't have the

digital capacity, perhaps it was simply not rational for them to bother since they would have to expend resources, overcome fear, and attain ASETs. In Chapter 4, I will discuss how an organization's political strategy can shape their internet use, but this is a slightly different question. In this case, it's worth asking: What is at stake by not having a deep digital footprint? As much as these groups have been able to accomplish in the face of few resources in North Carolina's Black Belt, they still voiced concerns about not being digitally plugged in.

"We make do with what we have," I often heard. Many were simultaneously embarrassed at their low level of digital activity but also wanted to do more. Some activists brainstormed a few ways they would use digital technology if they could. Some thought that online video could be used to reach out to their members because of the literacy constraints. Others believed internet use could connect with and organize more youth. Yet most people could not articulate detailed ways the internet would be useful. But they still seemed to feel pressure to adopt technology because they were seeing other groups around them using it.

Steve admitted, "We feel like our website is just so pitiful. It's such a clear thing that we really should have. . . . Frankly, just at a basic level, it makes us seem sort of like we don't have our stuff together to a lot of people." People often used the language of what they "should" have in the digital realm.

Indeed, they were losing out in three areas: efficiency, impact, and solidarity. First is efficiency. While face-to-face contact was still imperative for some types of organizing, others could be handled—or at least reinforced—with digital tools, whether automatic text messaging, e-mail systems like Constant Contact, or social media posts. Even though not everyone would be able to access these digital messages, the upshot is that internet technologies make social movements more efficient.[75]

Next, while CAR, UE 150, and BWFJ had news generated media coverage, without the dynamic of social media, spreading their message to a broader community was difficult outside of a big, newsworthy event. They could miss an opportunity to bring their struggle to a larger, sympathetic audience and spread their information to a wider community.

Finally, digital technology could connect them with other movements around the state, country, and the world. In fact, they risked losing opportunities for coalition-building. One organizer had recruited some public

workers to connect with Occupy Charlotte for a broader campaign and described what happened when they tried to do so:

> There were some folks who came to the initial meetings that were older, low-income, African American folks. [The Occupy activists] were like, "Okay, well we're gonna make a listserv now so we can continue communicating." And [the public workers] were just like, "I don't know how to do that, I don't wanna communicate that way, I don't really understand why we would do that." They're willing to learn it or whatever, but . . . why should the learning curve be on them to figure it out to enable them to participate, is sort of a frustration. And everyone else is used to working that way, so we kinda just moved forward in that process, and so I think we lost a couple of those people along the way because that's not how they engage. And they don't have regular and consistent access to broadband or e-mail. They don't know what happens when they get an invite from a Google list. [One organizer] was actually on the phone with this guy for two hours trying to figure out how to walk him through joining a Google group.

People fall through the cracks if coalitions rely on digital technology to communicate with them, and the movement suffers as a result.

In some ways, then, this is kind of a chicken-and-egg scenario. Individuals are less likely to be digitally savvy, so it is not worth it for working-class groups to use digital technology to reach them, so groups don't invest as many limited resources into internet organizing tools. Consequently, individual members are not able to see as much digital activism in action, so they are not as comfortable with it. Their inability to articulate ways that the internet could help is one of the most fundamental parts of the digital divide. You can teach people about using the internet, but if it's not integrated into their everyday habits, it's hard to see how it can help. The result is that it was difficult for both organizations and their members to break the cycle, so it just reinforced itself. The solution is not just handing someone a computer or a smartphone. It's not enough.

For decades, progressive working-class groups have labored desperately to further their causes, most often just to avoid losing even more ground and sometimes to gain those few precious inches. In general, their stories, their issues, their influence remained marginalized in the broader spectrum of North Carolina and American politics.

But for those who knew how to seize the new digital tools, who had the means and the opportunity, this new age did offer an opportunity to burst onto the political playing field with blitzkrieg-like power and efficiency. For some, it was possible to conjure a political force from almost nothing and dramatically shift the balance of power. Nowhere was this more evident in North Carolina politics than on the other side of the collective bargaining issue, where a conservative movement was rising on the back of the internet. This resource-rich populism was still under the radar of many, but it signaled the larger tide that would upend national politics a few years later with the surprising victory of one of the nation's most improbable presidential candidates.

Patriots of a Different Class

Outside of North Carolina's Black Belt is Pinehurst, a town in the central Sandhills of North Carolina, 70 miles southwest from Raleigh. As the golf capital of the South, it has regularly hosted the U.S. Open Golf championship. Pinehurst is in Moore County, home to Moore TEA (Taxed Enough Already), an active Tea Party group since 2009.

One chilly evening, I drove to one of Moore TEA's meetings right outside of Pinehurst along a road bordered by forests of pine trees. Seeing the sign for a locally owned fish house, I pulled into the big parking lot. As soon as I got out of the car, Dee, the chair of the group, along with her husband, greeted me with a cheery welcome. Dee, a white woman in her 60s, wore a pink turtleneck under a blue T-shirt adorned with the Moore TEA flag logo.

We entered the restaurant through a long hallway. At the end sat a welcome table adorned with a patriotic puppet that looked like Uncle Sam and a sign-in sheet overflowing with names. The table also had information about voting and an upcoming lobbying trip to Washington, DC. As I walked into the spacious eating area, another line of tables was filled with an even larger array of leaflets, flyers, and organizational materials, as well as a donation jar. Dee said hello to the Moore TEA volunteers, who were already getting the tables set up, as well as the restaurant staff, who were preparing the evening meal for the group. Moore TEA had reserved the entire restaurant for the night's meeting, as they did every month. Dee led me to the back of the restaurant to a quiet table where we could talk.

I came to the meeting that evening because Moore TEA had one of the highest levels of digital engagement among the organizations I was studying. When I first ran the data, this seemed like a bit of a curveball because of my preconception of who was involved with the various Tea Party groups. But rather than the white, working-class populists I expected to find, I met people like Dee, a retired college professor who had trained teachers of children with special needs and had a master's degree in education and psychology. As it turns out, having at least a college education was the norm for their membership.

Moore TEA was not unusual for Tea Parties nationally. Rather than the stereotype of Tea Partiers being poor and uneducated, polls and interview-based studies show that supporters tend to have higher incomes and education levels than the average American.[76] This did not mean that they all wielded graduate degrees or could afford to play golf at Pinehurst, but small business owners, managers, and white-collar workers were common.[77] Among the groups opposing collective bargaining, none were majority working-class. They were usually middle / upper-class or mixed-class.

Moore TEA was similar to the other middle / upper-class groups who also had high digital activism scores. These groups ranged from associations of public officials to conservative think tanks. Unlike the working-class groups, they tended to have resources or connections to resources; their members did not usually face the same fears of job loss or violence for political participation; and their individual members often had ASETs. This strong foundation translated into a massive online advantage for Moore TEA. While digital strength doesn't tell the whole story of the Tea Party revolution, it does help us to understand how it so swiftly became a force.

A few years earlier, in 2008, President Obama carried North Carolina in the general election. The margin was thin, but many read it as a sign that the state's politics had decidedly shifted toward the left, after years of white-collar immigration driven by Charlotte's financial sector and Raleigh-Durham's burgeoning high-tech economy. But while labor groups like HOPE were debating whether to press a possible lobbying advantage regarding the public sector worker laws, a counterrevolution was beginning to boil.

In early 2009, Dee got together with two other women in their local Republican Party to respond to a national call for Tea Parties to defend the

perceived attack on the constitution by Obama.[78] "That resonated with this small group of women," she said. "Three of us formed a group and had no name for it. We simply said enough, this cannot happen, and we'll do everything we can in our little corner of the world in America to get America back on track."

Dee thought to herself: "What lies ahead for the United States? Where can we possibly be going? And how will it impact us, our children, and our grandchildren? And I had always believed in the importance of the Constitution. And what it says to me is that I have the right to be a free citizen in this country. And that the rights that are given to us are given by God. And they must not, as the marriage ceremony says, be put asunder. And I sensed that what was being proposed would have the effect of putting asunder our rights." Tea Party activists like Dee equated Obama's very existence with a violation of their constitutional rights.

Dee put it this way, "The Tea Party is for small government. We [want] a balanced budget. . . . Let people do things themselves, government doesn't have to solve all problems. . . . Like the colonies banded together to form a more powerful group while trying to maintain their independence." She described public sector unions in the same vein—that they were part of "big government" and needed to be broken up.

On Tax Day, April 15, 2009, they organized an inaugural Moore TEA "rally." Patriot groups told me they associated the word "protest" with left-wing events. Homemade signs abounded at the rally, held by elderly marchers, middle-aged adults, and some families. One young boy held a sign that read: "The answer to 2009 is 1776." Other signs said "I'll keep my money and guns. You keep the change" and "I'd rather be unemployed and free than over-taxed and socialist." People waved their signs on either side of the main road through town, and it got so crowded that some people had to step from the curb into the street.

Dee said she was amazed they got over 1,000 people to come out that day in a neighboring town called Southern Pines, a memory that gave her the shivers as she recounted it. Up to that point, she added, their only formal communication about the rally came through the local newspaper, word of mouth, and some local churches.

But a nod toward digital communication emerged at the rally, as Dee told people there: "When you go home, write to your friends and family and tell them on e-mail or snail mail and bring them with you on July 4th. We'll be

in touch with you about where." An announcement was also made that people could get more information at their county women's Republican website.

At the rally, Dee "saw this guy skulking around behind a tree. And it turns out that was Simon. . . . I thought maybe he was spying on us to see what we were really doing." Simon became one of the leading technology volunteers for the group, designing their website and videotaping their events. Dee had asked Simon to participate in our interview, but he didn't want to be formally interviewed because he feared I would distort what he said, having done media work himself for years. He did, though, pipe in throughout the interview and provide useful contextual answers.

Simon, a white middle-aged activist, and other volunteers helped to develop multiple online platforms as their numbers grew steadily. They quickly expanded their Facebook presence, which became a main way to communicate for their organizing. Like BWFJ or UE 150, they posted events and ways to get involved, but they also posted much more. Their social media feed featured troves of news articles from conservative websites such as *Breitbart News.* To improve their communication strategies, Dee used Constant Contact, software they had purchased to integrate messages with her social media posts. When she sent out a group e-mail, Dee explained, "It says 'Do you wanna post this on Facebook?' . . . And so the supper announcement would go up there automatically, anything I send out to people about a trip we're taking to Raleigh or to DC would go automatically"; it also went onto their website, she added.

Moore TEA averaged one to two Facebook posts per day, a rate that was more than ten times higher than the working-class groups'. Moore TEA also had far more participation from their members in terms of likes, comments, and retweets. The group used Twitter consistently, averaging over one tweet per day. Their website also included a blog "so people can back-and-forth us on that," said Dee, in reference to people being able to comment.

Moore TEA's high levels of digital engagement put them in the top quartile of the groups studied, and their high scores aligned with other groups in their class category.[79] On average, more than twice as many middle / upper-class groups updated their websites than working-class groups. On Facebook, middle / upper-class groups averaged 54 times as many comments, and the number of likes per day had a similar gap. With Twitter, over 80 percent of the mixed and upper-class groups had accounts and averaged up to two

tweets per day, and they were on the platform five times as long as the one working-class group with a Twitter account.

At the Moore TEA party meeting, the U.S. Constitution appeared to be the unquestioned star of the show. About 80 people, mostly couples and all white, had filed into the restaurant. They chatted and laughed with each other before sitting down at the round tables scattered around the room. Dee asked: "Everyone have a copy of the Constitution? I'm not going to speak for all of us. I want to hear some voices. Who's going to raise their hand and say, 'I'm going to join you?'" Everyone then said the preamble to the Constitution in unison: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

After this reading, Dee discussed the organization's goals for the coming year. Members then went to get their food from the $14 buffet before sitting down to watch a movie about a small town's Christian leaders who defeat the local civil rights legal group to ensure that they can put a nativity scene in the town square. The script noted that it was their constitutional right to do so.

Following the meeting, people chatted, and many put dollars and coins into a big glass donation jar for the group's funds. Dee was emphatic, as were many Tea Party activists, that they did not get unlimited outside funding, although they did say they had received some small grants. The Tea Party groups I observed were, indeed, organic, grassroots, and operated with volunteer labor, often on a shoestring budget. In that respect, they would seem to be on par with many of the working-class groups.[80]

However, Moore TEA derived its true resource advantage through in-kind donations, both from individual activists and outside organizations. For instance, Simon had his own sophisticated video and computer equipment that he could use to manage the website. Dee, though retired, had enthusiastically embraced the latest technologies. She explained: "If somebody had told me when I was a little girl, or when I was first starting to teach, or when I started teaching on the college level, that someday this little box they made me put on my desk when I was teaching, would be an important part of every day's activities, and that I would be watching what happened almost simultaneously, I would've said, 'Not in my lifetime.' But here it is,

and I can't now imagine not having a computer, not having a television that's on pretty much all the time that we're awake. And the computer isn't a once-a-day thing for me—it's once every five to ten minutes for the most part." Her education, position, and now her retirement enabled her to provide in-kind resources her organization could harness. Moore TEA also included a wide pool of active internet users who made digital communication an effective way to communicate. Many of those who volunteered for the group had advanced technical skills.

Allied organizations provided Tea Parties with other in-kind resources, such as political and digital trainings. The day after their meeting, Dee was originally supposed to meet with her steering committee, but the president of Americans for Prosperity (AFP) was going to be in Raleigh. The AFP is a Koch brothers–funded organization that was mobilizing conservatives around the country and had state chapters, including in North Carolina. The president of the AFP was speaking at a luncheon and then accompanying right-leaning activists to lobby at the state legislature.

Dee offered to bring me along, so the next day I met her in Raleigh. Together we headed into the downtown headquarters of the NC-AFP, where we had a catered southern lunch while we heard conservative leaders speak about their political agenda, which included dismantling public sector unions.[81]

One woman sitting across from me during lunch told me how suspicious she was of me as an academic from Berkeley, and she thought I might be hiding a video recorder in my hat, echoing Simon's concerns about being interviewed. However, unlike the working-class groups' fears, their suspicions didn't impact how much they posted online, and it was not a fear of repression. These middle / upper-class groups, especially the conservative ones, were prolific online.

Moore TEA often took advantage of other in-kind resources on offer, such as those from other well-funded conservative groups in North Carolina, like Civitas or the John Locke Foundation, which are funded by Art Pope, a local North Carolina version of the Koch brothers. From trainings in how to use digital technology and other leadership techniques to bus rides up to Washington, DC, for lobbying and marches, Tea Parties had a ready supply of assistance. These connections to well-financed groups were common for the Tea Party movement across the country.[82] The NC-AFP also had by far the highest digital activism levels of any group in this political arena.

Activists from these middle / upper-class groups simply had more ASETs. They not only tended to have the access, skills, and tools, but they expressed more entitlement and confidence in their ability to use social media to formulate and share their political opinions. They often fully integrated and normalized digital engagement into their existing activist practices.[83] And if organizational resources were lacking in some instances, individual members could find a way to compensate. Not every middle / upper-class group's members had all of the ASETs, but if they lacked any, it was usually only one or two. For instance, some of the elderly Tea Party group members did not have the skills or perhaps empowerment—in terms of confidence—but they were much more likely to know people who did and to have the network of people to support them to get over the hump. They had enough ASETs to piece digital engagement together. What many of the Tea Party groups had, in particular, was time. Most of the leadership and many members were retired and could contribute online full time.

Older Tea Party members had classed resources to dominate the digital airwaves. Senior citizens were not a stereotype of the digitally illiterate. The notion of all senior citizens being behind the digital curve is inaccurate. Instead, class matters with senior citizens' use of the internet, which national studies have found, as well.[84] Teasing out the sources of the digital activism gap entails going deeper into the mechanisms of difference. Class and age intersect with digital use. It is not just a question of the old catching up with the young, but of the poor never being able to catch up with the rich.

The Digital Costs of Pluralism and Power

While every organization has costs involved in going online, groups like Moore TEA can absorb these costs with existing resources—both individual and organizational. For instance, their skilled volunteers who could dedicate themselves full time to digital work were in stark contrast to working-class groups' sporadic digital volunteers. Groups like UE 150 would have to expend additional resources, which they often did not have, to realize higher digital engagement levels.

What about the argument of lowered costs in the digital era allowing broader participation? Digital organizing was supposed to have reduced organizational costs so that resources matter less. But we have seen that both

resources and costs still count. We also saw that the need for physical presence was still strong for all groups, but especially the working-class groups because of fear. And finally, we saw that individual ASETs make a big difference.

Costs were simply too high for working-class social movement groups to have a vibrant online presence. As a result, the costs of digital participation are not only still relevant but in fact relatively higher for working-class groups. The costs of risk or time that add on top of the costs of computers or connectivity can all be prohibitive for high levels of digital activism.

Rather than the importance of resources diminishing because of the supposed low costs for online activism, the costs are still there. They just take different forms than they used to. As in the pre-digital age, some groups have the resources to pay them, and others do not. Working-class groups face an uphill battle compared to more privileged groups, who have ASETs at their disposal. Any efficiencies or lowered costs of digital activism, then, ended up benefiting conservative groups, who were more likely to be middle / upper-class.

Therefore, we still need to make sense of the classic theories we started out with that wrestled with this question of cost. First, consider Olson's free-rider dilemma. Earl and Kimport are scholars who are strong proponents of the argument that in some cases of digital activism, collective action costs are often reduced or even eliminated, in what they call collective action "Theory 2.0." Therefore, they have argued that the free-rider dilemma is now less of a dilemma.[85] While I found that costs are critical, I do agree with them in finding the free-rider framework less useful. This argument rests on how costly participation is at an individual level. Of course, people who are already online and have the ASETs to be digitally engaged may fit the prototypical digital activist model of costs being lowered, and I argue that, yes, individual constraints matter, but only in a broader societal context. While Olson's free-rider dilemma has not been overturned in the digital era, it is nevertheless an imprecise theory. A solely individual approach fails to capture fully the structural constraints that shape inequality in the digital realm. It privileges the individual having a rational choice as to whether or not to get involved. But the costs for digital activism are more than individual ones. They are also societally structured and embedded in power differences. Indeed, seeing inequality as class-based is very different from seeing inequality as a bunch of individuals who are poor. My analysis of an entire political arena of groups was able to harness class power differ-

ences that are difficult to observe by only looking at Twitter hashtags or an online survey of individuals. We simply cannot see online that which is not there. Offline inequality is transferred online.

Earl and Kimport were also on to something else. They pointed out that in some cases when organizing costs are high, their Theory 2.0 framework was not as appropriate. While this nuanced argument is not necessarily a nod to inequality costs, it does raise the point of how some types of organizing do not simply map onto the internet.[86]

And what of the social movement theory of how resources are necessary for successful activism—called the resource mobilization model?[87] On the one hand, this is still a useful framework, considering the classed resources needed for digital activism. On the other hand, it does not exactly fit this mold either. We've seen that the labor union groups had few resources and low digital engagement while the Tea Parties with lots of resources had high digital engagement. The resource mobilization model was designed to explain what types of social movements emerged and/or which were successful. We can stretch this model to look at online engagement as a form of success, though certainly not complete success. One does not win political power with lots of tweets or an interactive web page. The first way this theoretical model does not apply exactly is that resources do not simply equal class power. Having resources cannot necessarily overcome the fear factor in organizing workers or enable someone to feel empowered—and entitled—to use the internet. And as scholars Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal argued with their "Two Logics of Collective Action," elites tend to already have well-defined interests, which can lower coordination costs.[88] By contrast, less powerful groups face higher coordination costs in the very process of trying to define their interests. As we will see in Chapter 4, working-class groups, which were all left-leaning in this analysis, were more fragmented in their political ideas. Defining collective interests is also harder to do online and often requires the face-to-face interactions that are the core of grassroots organizing. So the very process of online activism makes it better suited to further the aims of resourced conservative goals than radical working-class ones. As a result, digital resources would not solve this particular collective action problem.

In addition, some scholars, such as sociologist Rory McVeigh, have pointed out that the resource mobilization model does not quite work for right-wing groups.[89] This theory was developed by focusing on left-wing activists, who

are often marginalized and strive to improve their livelihood, rather than at right-wing activists, who want to maintain theirs. If all right-wing groups already have a baseline of resources to begin with, it's difficult to use assets as a measure of which groups will succeed. McVeigh argued that it is not that resources are irrelevant but that they simply matter less in evaluating conservative movement success. Other scholars have focused on the Tea Party case as an example of movement emergence happening *faster* because of resources.[90] Although I am focusing on digital engagement, not movement emergence or political outcomes, this resource mobilization model still has some clout in this case. As a result, with these caveats, this old-fashioned theory still holds up in the digital era.

Technology, then, does not solve class inequality and power differences. Pluralism is still a dream. The advent of digital activism has ended up reproducing, and in some cases intensifying, preexisting power imbalances, even between social movement groups. With digital activism, like other social movement activity, those power imbalances manifest as unequal access to ASETs and organizational resources. But really, it's more fundamentally about the unequal distribution of political and economic power, particularly in the workplace. The labor activist groups worked hard to try and remedy underlying inequalities and made marginal but important progress. Ultimately, they were stymied not simply by their lack of digital tools or savvy but also by their status as groups of relatively powerless, exploited people.

The working-class groups did not just face greater obstacles in terms of access to organizational resources and individual ASETs. They also faced greater obstacles in terms of defining and establishing as legitimate the very things they were fighting for. Whereas the Tea Party groups were able to plug into a ready-made, civics-textbook-style narrative of "the people" exercising their constitutional rights to check the authority of their elected officials, the labor groups, especially unions, faced an uphill battle just to establish the legitimacy of their existence, let alone their specific demands. No amount of digital savvy can redress that basic inequality.[91]

This unequal access to legitimacy is a common feature of all movements of the oppressed. Over the last century, scholars have challenged the notion of a pluralist "polyarchy."[92] Whereas the powerful generally agree on what they want and just have to figure out the best way to get it, the powerless first face the daunting task of figuring out what they're fighting for and who they are fighting against, before they can arrive at figuring out the best way

to get what they want. In this North Carolina case, the challenge is further compounded by the fact that a key way of negotiating that process, collective action through a union, is severely restricted by law.

All of these theories—resource mobilization, unequal access to legitimacy, and the two logics of collective action—all played out on the ground with these working-class groups, thwarting any possibility that digital activism could realize America's pluralist democratic promise.

Yet the left-wing utopian pundits were not only wrong about the internet uniting all classes of people to have a democratic voice; they were also not seeing how the internet was, in fact, a factor in uniting conservative voices. But in the early 2010s, few people outside right-wing circles were hearing these voices.

Rightfully Hopeful

After the NC-AFP luncheon and meeting, we all walked over to the legislative building, where Moore TEA activists went to lobby their local representatives in meetings that the NC-AFP had organized. As they strode into the state legislature that day, they were a supremely confident bunch, and for good reason. Moore TEA had quickly become part of a national movement that upended politics at almost every level.

In November 2010, Republicans seized control of the U.S. House of Representatives. On the state level, Republicans won a staggering 680 seats in legislative elections across the country and took control of 20 legislative chambers. That wave crashed hard upon North Carolina, where Republicans took control of the state Senate and House that year.

The results battered the hopes of those seeking the right for public sector workers to collectively bargain. After decades of fighting by labor groups to gain an inch here and an inch there, they were now back on the defensive trying to hold the line. Meanwhile, fueled by conservative ideology and digitally savvy folks like Dee, conservatives had been catapulted from the margins into a position where they could see how much further they could go in dismantling the existing protections for public sector workers.

At the very least, GS 95–98 remained as entrenched as ever.

Chapter Two

Bureaucracy's Revenge and the Organization of Digital Activism

2012: One Step Back

On January 4, 2012, at 11.15 P.M., North Carolina House Republicans called an unprecedented late-night session that demonstrated the extraordinary political power they now wielded. With no advance notice, no public scrutiny, without even informing some Democrats, Republicans voted to override the Democratic governor's veto of a bill that targeted public sector employees. Senate Bill (SB) 727, if it ever became law, would block the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) from collecting union dues with a payroll deduction from teachers' paychecks.

Motivations for targeting the teachers' union were not subtle. Republican House speaker Thom Tillis had previously threatened to pass this bill as payback for the NCAE's opposition to their health care cuts earlier in the session. Brian, an NCAE staffer who managed the group's digital media, told me, "When I met with the bill's sponsor, I was told, 'This is your medicine.'"

The NCAE pushed back hard. And it did so with a communications strategy built around its arsenal of digital tools.

The next day, the NCAE retweeted a local news station's post about the secretive vote: "Teachers call it retaliation. Details on the surprise session

lawmakers held overnight." This targeted message from the NCAE, that this was "retaliation," went out across their social media platforms, as well as traditional media outlets that they had reached out to. To get more social media support, the NCAE posted on Facebook: "If you stand with NCAE; change your profile pic to this [the union's logo]."

The teachers' union also turned directly to its 55,000 members, most of whom were connected digitally to the organization. Via posts on Facebook and Twitter, these teachers had closely followed the conservative attacks on public workers across the country. They were inspired to see online video clips of teachers like themselves fighting back against their own state legislature's attacks, and the NCAE's communication team helped to spread this information. For instance, the teachers' union had retweeted, "Emergency Call to Action: 50-State Wisconsin solidarity rally this Saturday at noon."

"It does make the world smaller . . . to see national rankings, to see teachers making a good wage, having rights," said Brian about the role of the internet with their union. He also said that through social media, teachers were finding out about the attacks on public employee unions outside of North Carolina. "They're doing this in Ohio, they're doing it in Michigan, they're doing it in Wisconsin. . . . There was some pride I think taken when they came after our dues," he said. "We made the connection of what was happening in other states."

Three days after the vote, the NCAE and other public sector unions in the HOPE Coalition filed a legal challenge against the General Assembly. The court eventually found the Republican bill unconstitutional because it singled out the teachers' union.

This swarm of activity, internally and externally, shows how NCAE's digital engagement was among the highest for groups supporting or opposing public sector labor rights. Out of the 34 groups I studied between 2011 and 2014, its digital activist score was in the top third, at 10th, and it was the third highest of all of the left-leaning groups. They were active online with a variety of platforms, from their website and YouTube channel to Facebook and Twitter. Certainly, resources played a role in their digital media effectiveness. But in this case, NCAE had another critical advantage: they had the organizational capacity to keep a digital pulse on its membership and deploy an effective digital strategy.

The late-night vote was only the beginning of the struggle that public sector unions would face in 2012 to hold on to what rights they had in North

Carolina. It was a fight that played out in the courts, in the legislative corridors, in the streets, and online. Rather than advancing their cause, they had been reduced to performing triage, thanks to the sweeping Republican electoral victories in November 2010. The HOPE Coalition's goal of repealing the ban on collective bargaining rights for public employees was dead. Yes, there had been some momentum in 2011 against class inequality from the local Occupy movement and for union rights from the Greenville sanitation strike and the Wisconsin protests. But that surge had not been powerful enough to counteract the majority Republican makeup of the North Carolina General Assembly.

At the same time, conservatives continued to escalate their own digital media campaigns to rally their troops. The Civitas Institute, a conservative think tank, was a leading critic of the NCAE and one of the most digitally combative voices against the teachers' union.

"Our catchphrase is, 'North Carolina's Conservative Voice,'" said Jessica, a paid Civitas staff person who spent most of her day working on their internet outreach. Civitas used education to move "policy discussions . . . to the right," she explained.

The day the bill was vetoed, Civitas tweeted: "Why should the state be providing administrative services to the NCAE?" The following day, Civitas posted on Twitter: "Unscientific poll of SB 727 override. Nearly 100% of reporters and editors & 100% of NCAE leadership upset. #ncvoters yawn #tcot #ncga #ncpol." Civitas was pushing an agenda that they described as anti-establishment, yet it, like the NCAE, was an established organization.

Civitas had repeatedly taken to social media to critique the NCAE and public sector unions more generally. They also had one of the highest digital activism scores, ranking third out of all 34 groups. They had timely, creative features on their website, such as online polls about pressing political issues and personal information about leftist activists.[1] Civitas also posted regularly to social media, receiving an average of 6.52 likes per day on Facebook.

While the NCAE was a large membership-based union, Civitas was a smaller advocacy group. But like the NCAE, Civitas could boast of having an organizational infrastructure that enabled a high level of digital activism. Civitas and the NCAE did not just have the capacity to build online platforms and post a lot of information. Their constituencies also responded to this information and participated online, and they did so at higher levels than those without this organizational capacity.[2]

What makes this observation remarkable is that it defies what is perhaps one of the most commonly accepted notions about activism in the digital age. We have been bombarded with messages about the "flat" world that the internet brings.[3] The information technology revolution was supposed to have ushered in a new networked society that consisted of fewer top-down organizations and more bottom-up networks, from digital activists to start-up businesses and citizen journalists.[4]

As a sociologist, I have been trained to track these types of societal shifts. During another age of social and economic upheaval over a century ago, legendary sociologist Max Weber began to study the new organizations that had emerged. From the rubble of toppled monarchies and crumbling societies, Weber dubbed the new organizational forms in government and business "bureaucracy."[5] It is these bureaucratic structures that are now supposedly being overthrown by digital tools and replaced by a flatter, horizontal, individualized world. This revolution has been cheered by those who believe this networked society is more democratic because of the direct participation that is possible with the internet. According to this account, digital technologies redistribute power in bureaucracies from a concentrated few into the hands of the many to create a more inclusive society.[6]

The poster child for this networked transformation has often been social movements. Several scholars of digital activism have also suggested that the emergence of the internet and digital tools can diminish the need for formal organizations with social movement activity to create movements that are more participatory and democratic.[7] Alexis de Tocqueville observed two centuries ago that civic organizations define American democracy, yet some have suggested that the internet replacing civic organizations defines American democracy in the digital era. This supposed transformation, from organizations to the internet, has led some scholars to argue that this is the biggest shift in social movement history.[8] No longer are the heavy chains of bureaucracy necessary to organize a movement, the story goes.

Bruce Bimber was the first among many to theorize these changes, arguing that we are in a "post-bureaucratic" information revolution.[9] His nuanced argument aligns with those of others who have emphasized that this revolution is not universal, but most prominent with online-intense organizing.[10] Yet I was finding the opposite: intensive online organizing was happening by groups with the most organizational infrastructure.

Other dynamics could explain my finding, such as the nature of my study, which differs from research on event-based political movements, often at the peak of visibility, such as Occupy Wall Street.[11] For some scholars, researching vanguard and short-term movements was an antidote to early digital activism research that sampled from only offline cases or overemphasized organizations.[12] So it made sense to study these unique cases. The result, though, is that we know less about longer-term use of digital activism during the "normal times" of social movements, the ebb and flow of activism on an everyday level.[13]

To avoid any selection bias due to only looking at digitally visible protests, or even just offline movement organizing, I chose a strategy that extends Doug McAdam and Hilary Boudet's framework.[14] These sociologists studied a broader political field of social movement groups because, they argued, social movement scholarship often narrowly examines success-centric mobilizations, resulting in success-centric theories. They likened this limitation to how early astronomers developed earth-centric theories by assuming that everything revolved around the earth. In turn, digital activism theories cannot simply derive from the lens of non-bureaucratic and digitally successful protests but instead, require an analysis of a broader universe of activism.

Instead of starting online with Twitter hashtags or Facebook groups, I started with an issue—public sector labor rights—that on the surface may seem like it would attract just old-school top-down groups. But as I pointed out in Chapter 1, North Carolina union issues are tackled like a social movement, attracting a wide range of activist activities. The result was that the groups I was studying had variation in their organizational structures. And these structures differed in two key ways: staffing and decision-making levels. I could then compare groups' digital activism scores based on this structural variation. Of course, bureaucracy and hierarchy are much more complex concepts than these measures. Yet these differences provided a way to capture movements with networked and less formal infrastructure as well as movements with bureaucratic and formal infrastructure.[15] All of the individuals active on this issue had been part of some type of organization, however new or loosely organized. While it is possible that my findings differed because my sample was not a flashpoint of activism, a large-scale protest did emerge with some of the groups during the course of my study, which I discuss in Chapter 4. Yet to see how infrastructure functions with online use, I focused

on the everyday practices of how most political, social, and labor movements operate.

To be clear, few scholars, including Bimber, dispute that organizations still play a role in social movements. He is not alone in suggesting that some infrastructure and formalization are still critical in the digital era.[16] Others have argued that activist groups are now "different kinds of organizations," less reliant on vast brick-and-mortar infrastructures, or that there are a range of different types of organizational forms, with more or less structure, depending on the quality of digital engagement.[17] Another emphasis is on the growing trend of "prefigurative" movements that aim to function in a horizontal and participatory way to mirror the very democratic political system they strive to create. And the digital platforms that they use are a key part of this process.[18]

Yet all these distinctions had, to some degree, still established that *less* organization could result in *more* digital participation. Indeed, digital tools are often viewed as a substitute for organizational requirements.[19] That left me trying to solve the puzzle of why I saw *more* digital participation with *more* organizational infrastructure.

There are two main factors that explain my findings. The first has to do with the bureaucratic division of labor (staffing levels) enabled by an organization. The second relates to the hierarchy, versus horizontalism, within organizations (decision-making levels). Put together, these two factors make a compelling case for the digital advantages of organizational capacity.

Digital Division of Bureaucratic Labor

Like their respective organizations, Jessica and Brian couldn't be more different. She was a young white conservative. He was a middle-aged white liberal. But what they had in common was critical. They were both paid, permanent employees who were dedicated to digital engagement tasks. Both NCAE and Civitas had the organizational capacity to assign someone to do the digital work necessary for maintaining this online activity, someone who worked full-time and specialized in social media.

This division of labor was one way to mark the emergence of bureaucracy in Weber's time. Rather than someone from a royal family making proclamations about how society functions, they were increasingly made by

individuals who were in an institutional position, regardless of that person's bloodline. This shift from patrimonialism made bureaucrats much more disciplined than patrimonial officials because of the constant threat of losing one's income for any sign of insubordination. Weber described this as modernity shepherding in an institutional reliance on "positions" over "persons."[20] Weber might even be surprised to learn that bureaucracy has taken on such a negative and inefficient moniker because for him, bureaucracy was the best way to tackle a high-volume of tasks.

For some social movement groups today, a division of labor categorizes institutional roles, such as people who carry out communication or leadership work.[21] This process further involves taking these roles and dividing up the tasks in an organization, such as planning a protest, writing up a list of tips when speaking to legislators, or being in charge of a group's social media.

Teasing out and quantifying the impact of this work is tricky, but I constructed a measure of bureaucratic labor based on the number of staff in an organization. Within the political arena of support and opposition toward public sector unions in North Carolina, groups with more staff members had higher digital activism scores, on average. Based on a natural division in the data, I categorized groups as either having "more staff" if they had more than three paid staff members and "less staff" if they had three or fewer. Groups with more staff generally had digital activism scores that were well above average, while those with less staff had digital activism scores well below the average. For instance, organizations with more staff were more likely to update their websites and had more interactive features. They also had higher total Twitter scores, reflected by twice as many hashtags in their tweets, by more retweeted tweets, and by three times as many followers, on average.[22]

With more paid staff, organizations were more likely to develop complex and multifaceted platforms. Neither Jessica nor Brian were sitting in an office cubicle posting random tweets all day with no audience in mind. So these scores measured more than just the groups' frequent posts or sophisticated websites. They also measured the online participation itself. They were able to generate retweets, favorites, and other forms of online participation at higher levels, as well. Overall participation scores for all platforms show big discrepancies, and groups with more staff members rank higher.[23]

Of course, class plays a role. Only one working-class group had more than three staff members while almost half of mixed class groups did, and three-

fourths of middle / upper-class groups were in the higher staff category. But what drove this digital activity was more than having the class-based resources to carry out this work. When I analyzed only mixed class and middle / upper-class groups, and not the working-class groups, I had similar results: groups with more staff were able to generate higher levels of online participation in the form of comments and favorites on social media, for instance, as compared to lower staffed groups. As a result, class does not completely explain the role of a group's organizational capacity with its digital activism levels.[24]

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, Jessica and her colleagues at Civitas had been growing anxious about what they saw as the growing momentum for labor groups seeking a repeal of GS 95–98. Collective bargaining was one of many of the free market economic issues that was the focus of Civitas's work. The group organized speaker events that Tea Party and other right-wing advocates attended, as well as sponsored trainings for grassroots activists on topics ranging from social media to fundraising. Targeting progressive political groups online was a common tactic.

In an online report published in 2007, Civitas warned of the HOPE Coalition's efforts to repeal GS 95–98, saying: "Extending collective bargaining rights to state employees and teachers will cost the state more money, create inflexible labor contracts, and cede decision-making power for setting employment policy from the General Assembly to unions."[25] In another report, they published the dollar amounts that different public sector unions were contributing to state elections.

Since the state legislature had shifted to Republican control, Jessica believed that Civitas had been on the offensive with their communication campaign against the repeal: "I don't see a situation in the next foreseeable 10–20 years when the public opinion in North Carolina moves enough that [a repeal is] really in the frame of politically possible things."

Jessica worked full time on Civitas's social media with a team of people working on digital media in general, including managing its website. That left Jessica to focus on her well-defined terrain of Twitter and Facebook. Civitas had an integrated communication strategy with a variety of ways to be the state's conservative voice with their public online platforms, as well as with the *Capitol Connection* newspaper and an e-mail newsletter, which

they sent to their donor lists. With this communication, they targeted conservative activists, politicians, the news media, and recipients from mailing lists that they had bought. All of these publications linked back to their online platforms.

Civitas's digital influence was widely recognized. A consulting firm had "started doing some rankings of conservative state institutes, so we're playing that game right now trying to climb in the rankings," Jessica told me. She was thrilled at a top ranking that they had bragged about on Facebook: "The Civitas Review blog made the *Washington Post*'s 'The Fix' list for best state-based political blogs."[26]

Despite this digital firepower, Jessica still believed that the conservative movement in North Carolina remained at a disadvantage in terms of social media compared to Democrats and leftist social movements. But rather than look to progressive groups for inspiration, she tracked other conservative think tanks' use of digital media.

"I've been looking at the Heritage Foundation . . . as kind of a model," Jessica said as she described this national conservative group's social media use, especially their expertise with Pinterest, an image-sharing platform. Civitas also had a YouTube channel. She wished they could take more advantage of it, but the person assigned to produce videos had left the organization. She was hoping that they would find a replacement soon because she knew that original video content could boost their social media hits.

One of the videos Civitas had produced took place at a teachers' rally organized by the NCAE. When I visited the NCAE offices to talk to staff members about their digital engagement, Brian was eager to show me the Civitas video, which he said made "fun of our rally." His first comment, though, was not about the politics of it, but the tactics behind it: "The other side is so much better at this than we are. . . . They sent videographers, and they posted it."

As we watched the video, he occasionally interjected "Not true!" Brian added, "They do it, and they're mean about it, and then this guy, he is the husband of one of our staffers, and he kicked the videographers out, so they run tape on him. So they, of course, call him a union thug. And we have to be smarter." Brian recognized the effectiveness of such a video. He was reluctant to get into this attack-dog-style media, yet he knew that it had its merits: "The other side does a better job than we do. . . . as a movement, we're a little behind." Constantly comparing each other's work was common

among social media staff. They were not simply trying to beat the so-called political competition but also hone their own skills.

As chief lobbyist and political director for the NCAE, Brian had been in charge of political education for his union since 2008. Part of this role was doing "external communication" about the NCAE to the general public and potential members, as well as communicating with teachers about state-level politics that affect them. When he first started at the NCAE in 2008, he worked with a team of teachers and staff to transition from a print to an electronic newsletter. When I interviewed him, he was in charge of e-mailing a "Daily Political Brief" every Monday through Thursday to 45,000 people, mostly members.

Describing the content of these e-mails, Brian said, "It's mainly what happens at the General Assembly and about our work down there, bills that are running." As part of his job, Brian had also been a lobbyist for the NCAE as their primary negotiator with legislators. But this was when the legislature had been receptive to their concerns—before Democrats began losing control of state politics.

Before the political turnover, Brian was able to just tell Democrats not to vote for a bill, and they were receptive. But now with Republicans, "They're like, 'You don't like it? Well, it must be something we should do.'" So the union's lobbying tactics changed. He scaled back in-person lobbying at the General Assembly and began to spend "more time actually amplifying our members' voices" to legislators.

He still used Twitter to keep up with what was going on at the General Assembly in real time, and he tracked traditional and other media to keep his membership and followers up to date about legislation and education. But, he said, "The biggest thing, the newest thing that we've really added is this YouTube piece, which is me going out and talking to teachers and educators of all levels in the classroom." Once a week, he videotaped a short interview with a different teacher, edited it, and then posted it on their YouTube channel. He then linked to the video on Facebook, Twitter, and his weekly e-mail. He also sent it to every state legislator. "I just put a nice note, and I say, 'Here's our third installment of Educator Voices—today you're gonna meet Pamela. She's a high school teacher, she's a single mom, she has two children, and she's gonna tell you what it's like to pay her bills on a $42,000-a-year salary.' She may be NCAE, but she has a story to tell, and it's a very compelling story."

By tracking views on social media of these weekly "Educator Voices," he counted the number of times it was shared, which had been 13 times so far that morning. He also tracked who had opened it up via e-mail, and he monitored the responses people wrote to him. Brian received more feedback, he said, from Republicans than Democrats, which initially surprised him. Then he realized it was mostly the newer Republicans ushered in by the Tea Party movement who have "fewer grudges to hold." After thinking about that statement, Brian added, "I'm planting seeds with these guys."

Brian quipped that he was a lobbyist turned filmmaker. He researched how to improve sound and visual quality with video. That he was self-taught may seem like a DIY argument against the need for an organization and its accompanying division of labor. But Brian had something different from your average person with a video camera: he got paid to hone his craft. And he combined this newfound expertise with his almost 20 years of lobbying, communication, and fundraising experience he had built up with other nonprofit organizations.

"[I] let teachers just tell their stories about what [the legislators] were doing to them," Brian said about the Educator Voices video campaign, "and how I can give my teachers and educators a voice." He *did* give members a digital voice by doing the work to make it happen. Digital activism may involve individuals networked with the internet, but the glue in such an online activist network over the long run is often organizations that have the division of digital labor to *keep* those individuals networked. Brian said, "It's my *job* to put the microphone in front of them and help them amplify and organize their voice. Because there [are] 100,000 teachers out there."

Position versus Person

This job, this work, and this labor of digital activism, however, is not often portrayed as that of a paid staff *position.* Twitter and Facebook are often seen as spontaneous individualized digital tools for social movements. Some have argued that the internet is decreasing the relevance of organizations by allowing *individuals* to communicate directly with each other without always having the mediation of organizational agents, such as staff like Brian or Jessica.[27]

A common view is that digital media enable citizens to act less as *members* of an organization and more as individual *users* participating in activism.[28] The implication is that organizational bureaucracy has lost some of its significance in this new individualized online space and culture. Bureaucratic staff was supposed to have been passé. A key claim is that "networked individualism" changes the starting point of collective action from organizations to individuals.[29] Some scholars have gone as far as suggesting that this transition from "organizationally-directed activism" to "self-directed activism" is "one of the most important infrastructural changes in social movements in the digital age."[30]

This organizational revolution is seen as part of a broader shift in recent decades of the notion of civic participation in the United States. The number of people joining dues-paying membership organizations began to wane in the second half of the 20th century.[31] Increasingly, people felt they could be active politically as individuals by sending in a check, for instance, to an issue-oriented group. Rather than having to attend meetings of a general civic or interest group, someone could choose a specific problem to tackle and send in a donation. Still, there was an organization behind this work that coordinated mailing lists and put together newsletters. With the internet, this trend of individual-issue allegiances, rather than institutional loyalties, only accelerated, according to some accounts.[32]

Commonly used launch dates of digital activism include the internet solidarity in 1994 of the Mexican Zapatista land movement's web proclamations, or perhaps the organizing of the Independent Media Center at the Seattle protests at the WTO in 1999. The general claim is that these movements were able to skip over bureaucratic organizations (including the news media) and project their political messages all over the world to individual supporters. What is often overlooked, though, is that organizations on the ground in both Chiapas, Mexico, and Seattle, Washington, were critical to getting the messages out, and this digital information was often shared via solidarity organizations and labor unions.

It is perhaps more useful to go even further back, then, in digital history. Communication historian Fred Turner chronicled how the New Communalist movement—part of the San Francisco hippie counterculture of the 1960s—spawned the first internet communities, including the WELL, an early online discussion forum in 1985. Soon after, many online bulletin board communities flourished, including those that were political in nature.

Turner emphasized that for these digital pioneers, such as Stewart Brand, "the liberation of the individual" was, indeed, paramount.[33]

The epicenter of this rise of the networked individual in northern California was not in a commune in Marin County but in Silicon Valley. This former fruit-farming area was also fertile ground for the corporations that would come to control the most popular internet platforms, such as Google, Facebook, and Apple. All these tech companies would market themselves as promoting individuals expressing themselves online. Apple was one of the first to market itself as being part of a tectonic shift in smashing the state to liberate the individual. Their iconic commercial from 1984 featured a woman throwing a sledge hammer into a Soviet-style Orwellian propaganda film. Five years later, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Berlin Wall fell while tech companies delighted in their continued march toward disrupting the bureaucratic systems—and corporations—of the era. In 1997, Apple's marketing campaign featured Gandhi and Martin Luther King as revolutionary individuals (ignoring the social movements behind them). Meanwhile, young college graduates were flocking to Silicon Valley with a passionate fervor to participate in the dot-com revolution. In many ways, it was a success story. In the 1990s, the most profitable corporations in the world were Exxon and General Electric, but 20 years later, it is the very tech companies that touted the dismantling of hierarchies that are now the most powerful. And, ironically, these same so-called disruptive tech companies have been instrumental in spreading digital political propaganda. Such a worldwide political, corporate, and technological shift went hand in hand with the rise of neoliberalism and privatization—all co-opting anti-authoritarian values and turning them into fetishes of individualism.[34]

For collective action, the individual user argument often hinges on the assumption of two factors. First, that the costs of organizing are lower in the digital era, so organizations are no longer necessary to bear the brunt of that work.[35] One of the earliest proponents of the idea that people can organize underneath the traditional "Coasean floor" of organizational overhead and costs was Clay Shirky in his 2008 book, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*.[36] I steered this cost argument in a different direction in Chapter 1 by showing the hidden costs of online organizing. Working-class groups were often not able to pay the costs of digital activism. Organizing costs have not disappeared but are often buried

and embedded in the resources that middle / upper-class groups already have—digital tools, skills, and confidence.

The second assumption is that individuals can communicate directly with each other without an organizational burden. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg described this digital transformation as producing fewer formal groups and more personalized networks disconnected from traditional organization. Self-organizing networks, they argue, are the focus of the digital shift, rather than organizationally "enabled" or "brokered" networks.[37] In other words, activism is moving rapidly away from a one-to-many framework of an organization communicating to its members to a many-to-many framework of activists communicating with each other.

What I found, though, was a continuation of Weber's bureaucratic staff "positions" guiding networked "persons."[38] Greater online participation from a broader array of people was associated with groups that had more staff dedicated to digital media. Bureaucratic well-staffed groups had more digital activity.

This finding aligned with what scholars have begun to describe as "digital labor," or the recognition that work is essential for what happens behind, in, and on digital platforms.[39] I apply this concept to social movements in the form of *digital activism labor*. Having a dedicated position is not just about the time it allows, but also about the skills the person in that position is able to develop for effective online political engagement.[40] For Weber, expertise was crucial to bureaucratic functioning, as he noted that officials would gain a certain body of knowledge through training and credentialing. For Brian, digital activism was a job. But in staying in that job, he had developed a specialized expertise.

Expertise and the Specialization of Digital Activism Labor

As noted above, Brian already had years of experience as a lobbyist before he waded into digital media. He knew how to communicate a political message, whether it was chatting with legislators or mailing a newsletter. He brought many of those same skills to the videos he began making for the NCAE. The union had bought him a high-end Canon video camera that he taught himself to use. He quickly mastered the intricacies of the video

software's interface and how to format them for social media. Just as essential, he became a student of popular online videos to develop his own guidelines. "One is, your videos have to be under three minutes; your videos have to have good sound; they have to have good lighting; and you have to have a clear message," he said. "And if you do that, most videos are gonna come out okay."

Twenty years ago, when Brian started to do political work, producing a video meant going through a lengthy process with a production house. Today, though, he said, "I can interview a teacher this morning; I could have it laid out this afternoon; I could have it up sometime tonight." The excitement that Brian showed for his video work was palpable, as he believed it was revolutionary. He called it the "democratization of TV production." Yet the bulk of any online democracy at the NCAE was because of his specialization of digital activism labor, an expertise that not every group possessed.

Brian could link, integrate, and track all of their social media platforms, and he understood how they each operated individually. He told me that YouTube was their video platform for targeted campaigns; Facebook was a space for community members and other supporters; and Twitter was for a broader audience, such as the media, legislators, lobbyists, and the general public.

He had an array of tools to measure and dissect the metrics of all these platforms. The data analytics came from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube's dashboards. Brian also used e-mail interaction software that his national union had purchased for them. He then used those metrics to refine the digital messages that had now become central to the NCAE's organizing and lobbying.

For instance, Brian was able to detect that 17 percent of the 45,000 people that received their e-mailed links to social media or to their videos had engaged with the NCAE online in some form. Using these digital analytics, their team learned that it was difficult to get teachers to act on good news, such as encouraging members to thank the governor for vetoing a bill that was bad for teachers. People were more likely to respond to negative messages: "Tell Tom Tillis to quit bullying teachers," was an example Brian gave. "Bills in the middle of the night get a lot of action," he added, referring to the midnight veto override that banned teacher union dues deductions. In other words, they learned to craft messages to get more participation.[41]

It was not just a numbers game to try to get as many people as possible to click, open, and respond. Brian also monitored the demographics of on-

line participants to make sure he had a diverse group of teachers interacting online, especially those featured on the "Educator Voices" videos. "I'm not having a problem finding men who want to talk, I'm actually finding it's African Americans," he explained, since he expected that most of the volunteers for the segment would be women. For an inclusive group of teachers speaking on camera, he had to "manipulate a bit. . . . I'm going to Durham to interview this African American teacher—she's gonna jump ahead of the line . . . [otherwise] that would be the fourth white person in a row." He made this extra effort to encourage African American teachers, who were more fearful of losing their jobs. He told them, "When I do record you, I'm gonna send you a draft, and I'm not gonna put anything out there unless you approve it." This digital diversity took extra work and specialization. More inclusive online participation, then, happened because Brian understood the platforms, monitored who was interacting with them, and then used all of this knowledge to make sure a diverse group of teachers were participating online.

He also curated the messages from his members. Brian's biggest insight from his data analytics was that personalizing their communication made it even more effective. The "Educator Voices" campaign worked because it communicated something that Brian recognized and developed when he started at the NCAE. At the time, he saw a lot of "canned e-mails" being sent to the General Assembly. "When I came on, we used to prewrite our letters, and we used a program called Capwiz, and it would be like 'Vote no on Senate Bill 8—Senate Bill 8 would be destructive to the public school classroom. . . . A UNC [University of North Carolina] study shows that blah, blah, blah.' And it's just anyone can generate 10,000 of those. So we tell people, you gotta write your own letter, tell your own story."

In launching "Educator Voices," Brian wanted messages that were personalized. When I interviewed him, he had just posted a video of a veteran teacher who was a "good old, southern boy with a southern twang from Johnston County." Brian knew that this teacher's narrative—of growing up in rural North Carolina with a family of teachers—would resonate with legislators. Yet even this regional diversity was curated with political savvy and digital expertise. While editing, Brian removed a video segment of the teacher describing how he had grown up in the 1960s "in a time of transformation for southern white boys. . . . Here's this country guy [from] . . . Johnston County, which is Klan country . . . and you go into his classroom, and you

see Black History Month, you see a portrait of Malcolm X [*laughs*], and you get the feeling [he] is . . . making some little radicals out there. They'd probably string him up if they really knew. . . . But I . . . didn't wanna turn off these Republicans." This manufactured, though still somewhat authentic, personalization was something that the NCAE's political adversary was also cultivating with their digital strategy.

TO CASUAL USERS, though, these social media platforms may seem simple. For Facebook, just sign up, post a photo or a link. Twitter was just writing a message with fewer than 140 characters.[42] That any of these posts become a viral sensation appears to be utterly random or dumb luck. A professional like Jessica knew better. She had written her college thesis on social media, and she had attended trainings. Yet much of what she did was to experiment constantly. She'd made a career of learning the tools and tricks to these platforms, as well as staying current, as these platforms evolved their rules and methods to promote content.

While Brian had learned the social media ropes through intensive trial and error, Jessica's expertise derived from more formal training mixed with her own analytics. Yet they both used specialized strategies that worked, such as exploiting social media's combative tendency. For instance, the tweets that Civitas lobbed toward the NCAE were intentional since Jessica knew that controversy was good for their online engagement rates. She monitored their social media feeds for spam or obscenities, but trolls, she told me, "help with the numbers."

Like Brian, she also knew that social media tended to reward personalized, authentic messages, which she understood to align with platforms' algorithms. Yet she was more constrained than Brian because of the nature of a think tank versus a membership organization. Feeling their scripted media posts were "a little cold," she was bent on making Civitas feel more human. At a corporate social media training workshop that she attended, Jessica learned that an effective social media tactic was humanizing posts by changing profile pictures to something creative, like a pet mascot. As Civitas's social media expert, she mused that while these sorts of gimmicks may get a good response for a company, this would not work for her conservative political organization. "I haven't figured out quite how to translate that into something that you still need to be taken pretty seriously, but still have

fun with," Jessica said. And that is what she did in her job. Jessica worked on how to walk that digital line of professionalism and personalization to overcome a manufactured voice.

Throughout her workday, Jessica had her personal Facebook account open to evaluate the types of posts that other conservative friends and family were posting, commenting on, and liking. "I have Civitas's Facebook open at the same time in private mode on Google Chrome because that's the only way you can open two Facebook accounts at the same time," she explained. She also had Twitter open for personal use, but for the organization she used a multifunctional browser, TweetDeck, to keep them separate. Her organizational handbook said, at least for Civitas bloggers, that they had to say explicitly that the "views are my own" and "do not represent my employer." She was familiar with a case from the John Locke Foundation, another group that opposed collective bargaining rights, that also had high digital engagement scores. One of their bloggers was forced to resign when she posted an image Jessica said was "offensive" and "stupid": an image of Obama dressed in bondage and drag. She knew that posting creatively could easily slide into unprofessional content, and she recognized the "legal lines and liabilities as a 501(c)(3). We have to watch, and as things get less formal, it can be harder to toe that line between conservative principles, but nonpartisan." As a nonprofit organization, Civitas could not engage in political campaign activity online and still maintain its tax-exempt status.

Jessica experimented with incorporating the conversational tone she used with her personal social media accounts on Civitas's feed. "One thing I've been playing with recently is . . . seeing whether I get more response when I post things as me, versus when I post things as the organization." Even though Civitas had more followers than her personal account did, her own posts about a subject that had more of a personal edge would receive more "clicks," she said.

She also encouraged her supervisor, who could authoritatively speak for the organization, to start tweeting on his own. Organizational leaders on a senior level have "more freedom to represent" themselves online. She also personalized their dry economic policies with features of local Tea Party activists, such as Dee, whom we met in Chapter 1 and who had been made a Civitas Citizen of the Month. Then Civitas would link to these articles with a personalized twist, such as this Facebook post for Dee: "Thanks for your hard work and dedication in promoting free markets and liberty in our state."

Jessica also kept up with Facebook's constant changes in how often their system displayed their posts. Facebook curates what you see. Figuring out how to game Facebook's algorithm was a moving target for Jessica. "We've tried to do more multimedia stuff recently—video, especially the pictures, things like that," she said, "And a lot of that is because Facebook, their algorithm, if you have a picture, you're more likely to be seen by more people."

As a result, she incorporated more images into their posts, including editorial cartoons and memes: "We'll take a conservative figure in a quote, and then just put the quote in the picture, and then it'll go up." She also encouraged interaction with the images she posted, like a photo they posted on Facebook of President Obama speaking on a podium with a shocked look on his face as former President Clinton was about to take the stage. Atop the image was, "Who's got a caption for this pic?" Yet Jessica was worried that the photo tactic had not been working as "as well as it used to, so I'm starting to think that maybe Facebook has reverted back to lowering it."

Another tactic Jessica used was a marketing system that Facebook had launched: groups could pay the platform to promote their posts. Depending on the size of the fee paid, Facebook guaranteed that hundreds or thousands of people would see a post. Jessica explained that they did not pay to promote every post: "It's either posts that we think are really important, because of what we're doing. We released our tax study—that was a big $50–$75 promotion for that post because we want to get that specific message out there. And then I'll also promote a post if I see the people that see it organically; I've gotten really good response. I'm getting lots of likes, lots of comments, then I may go ahead and throw a $10–$20 promotion on that just to try and build on success." While it certainly took resources to pay to promote a post, Jessica was in a position to understand how this system worked and could strategize how to generate a high digital response.

Jessica knew all the latest terms and trends in managed internet promotion, which had the goal of engaging high levels of clicks, likes, and retweets. Like Brian, Jessica differentiated her tactics based on a distinct platform. Since at the time of my research Twitter still limited the number of a tweet's characters to 140, she would use a link shortener, in this case bit.ly, which reduced the characters of a link included in the tweet so she could get more of her own text into it. This tool also enabled her to see who was clicking on links she posted. She found that she got roughly half of her clicks from Twitter: "So someone will write a post, or I'll write a post to either our blog

or our website. I'll use bit.ly to shorten the link . . . and then I'll use the same link on Facebook just for the stats. And then I can see 50 percent of clicks came from Facebook and 30 percent from Twitter, and 20 percent from bit.ly itself."

She also called on Civitas's political relationships to extend their digital reach. One strategy was to build online relationships with other accounts that have a bigger following so that they would link to Civitas's articles, such as the *Drudge Report,* which she said increased their online metrics. "Success builds on success. Once you're starting to get a lot of engagement, then it opens your post to a higher percentage" of users, she said. "So as you can build that number, either through paid promotion or consistent content, then I think it builds on itself." Despite some limitations in being able to personalize Civitas's posts, Jessica's ability to overcome them with creative social media strategies was highly effective. Civitas had one of the highest online participation scores among the 34 groups.

Both Jessica and Brian adjusted their political communication to both the technology and the politics of the time, which included the personalization of social media. Analyzing the digital metrics of constituents and acting on it, or what David Karpf calls "digital listening," was becoming more and more sophisticated with tools that groups like Civitas and the NCAE were using.[43] This was not always elaborate beta testing that groups like the NCAFP could afford, but it still worked. To understand how these metrics function, it takes not only work but also expertise.

Still, the skills they honed were not purely technical. These groups had the political savvy to use these tools successfully. Brian, for instance, had built on his previous political communication expertise not only to shift the NCAE's legislative strategy but also to monitor and fix the racially unbalanced voices to ensure a broader reach. Video production and communication efforts might now be more accessible thanks to tools that are cheaper, higher quality, and easier for nonprofessionals to use. But a sustained video campaign like the NCAE's, and the analysis of its impact, required the *bureaucratization* of this video production as well. It needed the division and specialization of digital labor that an organization could provide to enable a successful long-term strategy.

Perhaps it was just chance that Brian and Jessica happened to bring their individual skills to their respective organizations. Maybe anyone with enough time can learn to operate a nonbureaucratic group's social media. It's possible,

but not probable over the long haul. Constant learning and working on social media takes dedicated time, and the resulting expertise that emerges comes at a high cost that most groups can't afford to pay. This advantage only widened the digital activism gap.

The focus on digitally visible, sometimes ephemeral, protest movements may end up overstating how new information technologies can replace and overcome the coordination problems of legacy organizations with bureaucratic infrastructure. In contrast to individualized networks, organizational factors continued to influence online digital engagement over the long term in this case. Though the architecture of social media platforms appears to promote networked individualism, organizations often manufacture the beta testing of digital participation with their analytic listening. Over time, political, labor, and social movements cannot rely on spontaneous digital engagement; instead, they'll need to rely on organized efforts to promote their communication.[44] With the emergence of social media professionals and sophisticated software platforms, widespread digital use has moved past the point where activist social media management is random or unplanned over the long term.

If we pull back the online curtain in the digital Oz of activism, we see that well-staffed organizations may be the ones pulling the levers. Based on this case, Weberian bureaucracy may still be necessary to sustain high levels of online engagement within organizations.

Manufactured Personalization

In the context of their bureaucratic organizations, Brian's teachers' videos and Jessica's conversational posts may have been manufactured personalization, yet this personalization of politics is not new. While the phrase "the personal is political" was first popularized during the feminist movement in the 1970s, personal connections have always been a crucial first step of political organizing.[45] Many have gotten involved in politics for personal reasons—whether with a labor movement because they risked losing their job or with a civil rights movement because they were not allowed to vote. Groups have capitalized on these stories as a tactic. The myth of Rosa Parks is that she was a tired seamstress who was fed up by prejudice, so she spontaneously refused to sit at the back of the bus. Yet, she held a position in her

NAACP chapter and was part of the crafting and coordinating of this act of defiance. She and others had planned this act against segregated racism as a test case for the courts and what eventually became the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This does not take away from her personal story, but what we may view as an individual act may in fact be part of an institutional one.

Personalization, though, is supposed to be a hallmark of collective action in the digital era. Online political engagement is presumed to be *more* personalized than that of the pre-digital era since organizational bureaucracy is less relevant.[46] In many ways it is. The internet makes it easy for people to post a selfie at a protest in which a handmade poster is visible, perhaps with their own individual twist on the event's theme. And when activists use a common hashtag to tell their own story, this does, indeed, spread more easily on the internet than it did with other communication methods. But institutional roles can heighten, not diminish, this personalization. Brian knew that people respond more to a teacher's personal story of rising health care costs than a dry report on a study of this impact. Groups with high online participation scores were often able to harness personal stories or capitalize on personalization through a side door into this authenticity with other creative approaches, such as the memes that Jessica created for Civitas.[47]

A common argument is that "organizing without organizations" is feasible because the public and private divide dissipates with internet technologies.[48] This argument is best summarized by communication scholars Deen Freelon, Christopher Wells, and W. Lance Bennett, who distinguished online content as participatory when it is an "actualizing style" of individualized digital engagement rather than an organizationally focused "dutiful style."[49] Yet, the communication teams I interviewed knew what I found across the groups I studied: organizations with the greatest online participation were able to exploit a creative and personalized appeal that inspired individuals to retweet, repost, or react in some way to their online posts. And those groups did this with a cadre of staff who had the specialized knowledge to craft these messages. Digital participation from individuals was more frequently managed from the top down rather than organically from the ground up.[50]

When we view seemingly personalized clicks, posts, likes, or retweets, these individualized online metrics may actually be those orchestrated by dedicated staff.[51] Certainly, not all personal posts within these social movement groups are from an organizational puppet master. And posts may often

consist of rephrasing, reframing, or remixing a post, article, or link that may have originated from a more professionalized group.[52] And without a doubt, bots (short for "digital robots") may also be part of this equation, but they may not be generated by a guy in his basement or a government agent but an institutional machine, or even government, as the Russian hacks and fake Facebook ads have more recently taught us.

How might automation or algorithms, then, fit into the person versus position debate? Social scientists who have been studying the influence of bots in political social media suggest that they most likely did not infiltrate digital spaces like the ones I was studying until I had stopped collecting online data.[53] Yet even if they had made a difference, bots would not be data I would necessarily reject. According to communication scholar Stuart Geiger, "We shouldn't automatically assume that automation is an illegitimate mode of participation in politics."[54] Instead, they would reflect my overall finding of an organizational bureaucracy and digital activism labor influence, as people and institutions are behind them. Geiger added, "So even if it is a 'fake' account, with the software and know-how in distribution [back then], it'd still take a lot of human labor to do that." If well-resourced organizations had bought some followers and retweets to inflate numbers, this would have only reinforced my findings. This calculated process could create more genuine participation, and it would take someone in a position of digital power to carry it out on a large scale.[55]

Yet, this tension between the person and the position within social movements is not new to the digital era. As sociologist Jo Freeman wrote about the feminist movement in the 1970s, "It would appear that the art of 'constructing' a social movement is something that requires considerable skill and experience. Even in the supposedly spontaneous social movement, the professional is more valuable than the amateur."[56] While the professional may not always be more valuable, in this case the professional is more valuable than we may have thought was necessary in the internet age.

Sustained authenticity that gets attention is (ironically) something that requires bureaucratic labor and expertise. On the one hand, scholars are right that the internet enables more personalization. On the other hand, this personalization is not always because of the "person" but rather the Weberian "position." While many scholars have debated how relevant Weber's arguments are for today's institutions, what is striking about the digital era, which is supposedly different from the modern bureaucratic era, is that personalization is supposed to be a key distinguishing feature of digital activism, com-

pared to old-school activism. Yet the most efficient way to spread this personalization is not with random "persons" but with bureaucratic "positions." Weber gives us the theoretical tool to understand what has turned into manufactured personalization.

We may imagine that a viral tweet from a celebrity or politician, or even an average American, may be organic and off the cuff, but its controversial or even combative appeal may actually be staged and managed. Personalization, then, is yet another organizational advantage on top of the division of labor and expertise. But there's one more organizational mechanism that is even less obvious and perhaps the most surprising of all.

Hierarchy and How It Works

One day after the state House voted to ban the teachers' union from collecting dues, the North Carolina chapter of Americans for Prosperity (NC-AFP) posted on their Facebook page: "Despite the cries of murder & death by the loony Left, here is more info on what really happened with removing this tool of the union." Along with this post was an article from Civitas's website about the vote. These two groups often coordinated with each other, like at the luncheon I attended with the national president of AFP, Civitas staff, and local Tea Parties. They also linked to each other's social media posts.

But unlike Civitas's social media team, which was based in Raleigh, the NC-AFP's social media was orchestrated in Washington, DC. It was the only group in this political arena whose online presence was not managed from within the state but rather from their national headquarters.[57] They provided the North Carolina chapter with extensive website and social media development. Its website was slick, polished, and interactive. And all of its internet platforms had an identical look to those of chapters around the country. Facebook and Twitter feeds were active all day, seven days per week. They also had the highest digital engagement scores, often three times higher than other groups. The post on the teachers' union dues had two people sharing it, 20 likes, and four comments. Many posts had even higher figures. Without a doubt, it had the resources and the division of expert digital labor to develop, beta test, and sustain digital engagement. But it also had something else that it shared with both Civitas and the NCAE: it was hierarchical.[58]

As we have seen, the groups in this North Carolina political arena that had the highest digital activism scores had staff members to do digital work. But what types of organizations can sustain, support, and direct staff to focus on digital activism? Certainly, those with money. Yet, I also discovered that groups that had paid staff required a complex infrastructure to maintain that division of labor. They had multiple levels of decision making that created a hierarchy around their digital media efforts.[59]

More hierarchical groups made greater use of the internet than less hierarchical groups. Those with three or more decision-making levels, what I call "more hierarchical" or simply "hierarchical," had significantly higher digital activism scores, on average, than those with one or two levels, or "less hierarchical."[60] On average, the more hierarchical groups updated their websites twice as much and had more interactive features than those from their less hierarchical counterparts. These high scores were not just based on complex websites or posting consistently on social media. More hierarchical groups also fostered more online participation, generating higher levels of internet interaction and participation from constituents.[61] They also had twice as many Facebook comments and more than three times as many retweets and followers on Twitter. Out of 34 groups, the seven with the highest digital activist scores were all hierarchical in their organizational structure.

This does not simply mean that hierarchical groups were authoritarian. They did tend to have a chain-of-command systems approach to direct leaders and staff to carry out work, including communication. Sometimes, a decision-making level was an elected board, an executive committee, or members who voted on the general direction of the organization. This was the case with the NCAE. Sometimes it did not involve any membership voting, which was more common with advocacy groups like Civitas, whose followers did not have a formal say in the group's direction.

Across the board, it was primarily hierarchical groups that had this bureaucratic labor to carry out the required digital work for high levels of digital activism. All the groups that had more than three staff members were also more hierarchical. None of the less hierarchical groups had more than three staff members, and only one of these had any staff. There were some hierarchical groups that had no staff, as volunteers sometimes took on this role. The lowest scores were among the less hierarchical groups with no staff. The top three groups on the digital activism index were hierarchical and

had dedicated paid staff members. Bureaucratic labor helps explain the digital differences between more and less hierarchal groups because these two factors work together. In other words, the gap in scores was higher when these two factors were combined.[62]

This organizational infrastructure—both hierarchy and staffing levels—was not the only path toward higher digital engagement. Social class, as we saw in Chapter 2, and political ideology, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, also played a role. Still hierarchy, in particular, influenced digital activism, in contrast to expectations.

TO SEE HOW HIERARCHY DROVE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT, I asked Jessica to walk me through a typical day at the think tank. First thing in the morning, she checked Facebook or Twitter and then studied her various online metrics. Next step was to hash out a "post plan." While Jessica could finesse the content with creative images, the choice of issues and content were predetermined by the higher echelons of the organization. "I generally get an e-mail when posts or new articles go up on the website. And then make a tweet, put them out on Twitter and Facebook as needed." Civitas used social media mostly for links to their articles and reports to loop back into their website, as well as retweeting select posts from leading conservatives. Of their organization's Facebook posts, 93 percent contained links, and most of these directed the user back to written content by Civitas. Sometimes Jessica wrote these articles, often on a predetermined policy issue, but people higher up on the organizational chain directed the substance. Topics for online content were not random rants by someone sitting at a big desk barking out orders.

"There's an editorial process that almost all our writing goes through," Jessica said. "We have an editor and then a policy director, so it goes through that. And then I'll do kind of the promotion of it." Each week, they had a planning meeting to discuss what current topics fit into the focused set of issues. Given their general stance that unions were part of "big government" in opposition to a free market economy, news about the teachers' union, or public employee labor issues in general, were some of their content fodder. Jessica explained this chain-of-command process: "We have a priority list of issues that are our first priority and second priority, so generally we stay within them. And then someone will pick up a hot-button issue as it comes

around. We'll do a blog post on that or whatever is required. And then generally, each analyst has their own, for the most part, field, and so they'll go [and write about that and] then normally a priority and secondary issue from there."

Jessica also watched Twitter all day to see what was happening at the General Assembly, as well as in politics more generally, so that she could get hot tips quickly to relevant writers. In that regard, she believed Twitter was faster than traditional news media outlets. So she took her tablet out with her when she was at a conference—both to read and post online.

Even when constrained from doing what she believed was more strategic, such as personalization of posts, she had both focused time and focused content. She explained: "[At first] we had people tweeting and doing Facebook, but it wasn't being done in really an organized fashion because it was being done by the communications director, who was also doing like 15 other things." Despite her frustration of not being able to push the digital envelope, she also knew that not having this infrastructure earlier had limited their online impact. Before establishing these routines, their followers did not know what content to expect; now, with this top-down process, they did.

This hierarchical structure paid off for Civitas. They had multiple levels of decision making—not only a board, a director, and other staff, but also influential funders. This connection between classed resources and infrastructure was indeed common. But resources were not the only engine driving digital participation. A clear message, without the messiness and distraction of constantly changing multiple points of view, was also critical. Conversely, broad, horizontal participation hampered the ability to have a clear message across all of the groups in the HOPE Coalition, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Nonetheless, the NCAE, like Civitas, had the organizational infrastructure to centralize their digital communication. They had not only had the division of digital labor, but also a hierarchical system to focus their communication efforts, such as the work they did with "Educator Voices." Overall, the left in North Carolina may not have had a message as cohesive as that on the right, but certain groups, like the NCAE, did.[63] The cogs in this particular digital activism wheel were professionals in a multilayer organizational system. Brian was not a one-man band at the NCAE. He was a senior staff person but reported to the organization's director, the union's

president, and the board, which provided broad political direction. In effect, they had four levels of hierarchy.

In hierarchical groups, carrying out organizational tasks, whether they were communication-related in general or internet work in particular, often went hand in hand with this top-down chain of command. More decision-making levels usually meant more specific orders regarding tasks and how to carry them out. Sometimes this digital work was done by people higher in the hierarchy chain, like Brian, who had a lot of independence in how he lobbied. Brian also had assistance from his national organization, the National Education Association, like Civitas did from national institutions, and he coordinated other staff to carry out social media administrative tasks. In Brian's context, the exact content was more fluid, but there were still very clear messages they wanted to send.

The groups in public sector unionizing that dominated the digital activism space were like Civitas and the NCAE in that they had this organizational capacity. Since the dawn of modern organizations, institutional roles and hierarchical infrastructure have been historically related organizational factors. This relationship persists into the digital era.

These findings relate to what I call *digital bureaucracy*. Digital bureaucracy fosters online communication and participation. It is not the only way, but in this arena, it was a major factor. New media technologies are deeply integrated into the groups that have this organizational and digital capacity. One might expect that high levels of digital engagement are associated with less infrastructure. I found the opposite. Rather than a new networked society in which organizations matter less than individuals, groups that were more hierarchical and had more staff (or dedicated volunteers) had higher levels of online presence and participation. These digital bureaucracies, then, had high levels of hierarchy and specialized labor. Groups that were less hierarchical and had less staff were not digital bureaucracies. But what about groups that had more staff / less hierarchy or less staff / more hierarchy? These "mini-bureaucratic" groups tended to have moderate levels of digital activism and, therefore, fit the digital bureaucracy model.

Digital communication was not a substitute for organization. North Carolina activists, from any group, never talked about how technology was a liberating new way to organize without leadership or organizational hierarchies. Instead, they emphasized the high levels of organization required to

bring people together and to keep them together. The same was true of online interactions. It took work.

To help make sense of this, I found it helpful to go outside the digital activism framework. Scholars who have studied electoral politics have also found that "digital opportunity structures" or "managed digital politics" drive digital use during political campaigns.[64] And others have found that the open source software movement and *Wikipedia,* which have the reputation of being horizontal and democratic in terms of volunteer online participation, actually have centralization, bureaucracy, hierarchy, and traditional organizational structures that often keep them going.[65] What may appear to be open and participatory at first glance may actually have a well-oiled machine behind it, whether it's crowdsourced knowledge or social activism.

Horizontalism versus Hierarchy

Still, digital bureaucracy and the internet seem to be at odds, especially regarding hierarchy. Its opposite, horizontalism, was another key characteristic of organizational change that was supposed to mark the digital activism era. A journalist for the UK *Guardian* newspaper reported on what many have said is the key organizational factor of successful digital activism: "'Horizontalism' . . . has become the default method of organising. Technology makes non-hierarchical organising easy: it kills vertical hierarchies spontaneously."[66] Many scholars have also pointed to horizontalism as a central feature that distinguishes digital-era social movements—how the availability and architecture of networked communication disrupts hierarchy in social movements.[67]

A key metaphor for horizontal digital activism is its spontaneous "rhizomatic" feature—it is supposed to spread far and wide without a central node.[68] Communication scholar Manuel Castells said that the internet is a primary engine driving a "new species of social movement" of horizontal communication.[69] Others have also offered up terms such as "networked protest" or "participatory age" to describe how old-style hierarchical organizations are being replaced by newer decentralized networks that mark more participatory social movements.[70] Hierarchy is all about a vertical chain of command that aligned better with one-to-many or one-to-one organizational

communication tools of the past, such as printed newsletters and brochures or phone calls and faxes. In contrast, the internet's hallmark is its horizontal many-to-many communications architecture.

Not everyone, including some of the proponents of digital activism, has completely jettisoned a hierarchical framework for digital politics and activism.[71] Yet the media and academic needles have tipped in favor of horizontal online activism. Still, it may be the case that my findings took digital activism theories in a new direction because of the issue I was studying—labor unions and collective bargaining—which is probably the most pro-organization issue one could imagine. Yet the advantage of this case is that it actually did attract more and less hierarchical groups, enabling us to see how structure actually operates with digital activism. But so far, I have only presented hierarchical groups and how they operate with digital bureaucracy. It is certainly possible for less hierarchical groups without any paid staff to sustain high levels of digital engagement outside of a protest event or series of events. But to show how and why that may be an uphill battle, I turn toward a group that is less hierarchical. Just because a group has only one or two levels of decision-making and is, therefore, less hierarchical does not mean that it is, or intends to be, horizontal. But given the widely documented link between horizontal groups and internet activism, I will focus on one group that is explicitly horizontal, both in philosophy and in practice.

Less Digital for the Leaderless

The Wednesday night meeting for the University of North Carolina (UNC) Student Action with Workers (SAW) was in an unused classroom on the campus of UNC Chapel Hill, 30 miles down the road from the state capital. This was a busy time for SAW, and their agenda was packed with five major items, all of which focused on supporting the university's lowest-paid workers, especially the janitorial staff.

The facilitator changed midway through the meeting to make sure that one person would not dominate the discussion. They did not have to work too hard to get the 11 people in attendance to pipe up and offer ideas, comments, or questions. One person at the meeting was a university employee; the rest were students. Zaina, a 21-year-old undergraduate of

Palestinian descent, commented, "I really, really appreciate how present everyone is." And by "present," she later told me, she meant participating in the meeting.

The fourth item on the agenda was to develop a strategy for the upcoming Board of Governors (BOG) meeting. The BOG is a politically appointed board that oversees the entire UNC system, and it was considering a vote to encourage the state legislature to eliminate university workers from employee protections under the State Personnel Act.

This April meeting in 2012 was just a few months after the midnight veto override against the teachers' union. On the legislative docket this time was SB 575. It would transfer all the employees working on the 16 campuses of UNC from the State Personnel Act to the authority of the BOG. Opponents worried that the few checks and balances that did exist for university state employees would disappear under this new system, and it would make the collective bargaining goal that much harder to reach.

To keep that from happening, SAW was coordinating with housekeepers, faculty, labor, and other community supporters, many of whom were in the HOPE Coalition. SAW was founded over a decade earlier to organize around issues of labor, globalization, and sweatshops. But recently, they were increasingly focused on the rights of workers at their own university. They had decided to stage a protest action at the BOG meeting.

Once he heard about the protest, Tom Ross, the UNC system president, had requested a private meeting with SAW. But at the general SAW meeting that night, they were all in agreement that they wanted a public meeting with Ross for transparency purposes. Much of this agenda item focused on other forms of communication surrounding the action, including the best way to contact individual BOG members before the event—either e-mail or phone calls—which was debated extensively. They ended up deciding that telephoning and making a personal contact was a critical tactic to try to convince them not to vote for the resolution. Zaina then spoke up: "We need to talk about what do we say to the Board of Governors." The students considered how to craft their message to the BOG in this stage of the campaign. But most of the meeting consisted of everyone discussing and volunteering to do outreach for their broader protest action. Someone had the idea of getting together the next day to make signs and phone calls to their allies, such as those in the HOPE Coalition, and a few people volunteered to do that outreach.

They then discussed tactics for getting press coverage, debating whether or not the media would be more likely to cover their protest if they were dressed up for some type of Friday the 13th stunt. They decided not to, yet some activists had already started to do media outreach, as one student reported that she had sent a letter to the editor at the *Charlotte Observer* and the *News & Observer,* two major daily newspapers in the state. Someone else had already recorded a local radio segment.

Because the BOG meeting itself would be a closed executive session, they were trying to figure out how to get all activists involved that day. SAW had only been able to negotiate to get three representatives into the meeting, so one new recruit suggested that these should be student leaders: "Only point people should go in." Zaina quickly responded, "We are a leaderless movement. There are no point people." She added that when she was interviewed by journalists, she would tell them to call her a "co-chair" of SAW, and she encouraged everyone in the group to call themselves a co-chair.

Toward the end of the meeting, Zaina started to write the schedule for the next day on the classroom's whiteboard. The day was packed with a workers' lunch, law school outreach, the BOG committee meeting, and worker outreach in parking lots. As she looked at the board listing all the work for just one day, Zaina then asked if she could say something about an item that was not on the agenda. Despite SAW not having official leadership, she informed the group that Laurel, a longtime SAW activist, would be graduating soon. Because everyone would start to get very busy toward the end of the semester, and people would be leaving town over the summer, she asked everyone to consider how to keep the momentum going, so they could "hit the ground running when students come back" in the fall. Zaina added that while they were not looking for leadership, per se, as they were a horizontal group, she was still concerned about the vacuum Laurel's leaving would create. They decided to add this issue to the agenda of the next meeting.

SAW attempted to operate in a horizontal fashion with a practice of consensus decision-making and distributing tasks. It was an active group that used a variety of digital media to communicate and organize, whether it was their advocacy with the BOG and university administrators or campus events and protests. Yet they were in the bottom half of the digital activism index, 23rd out of 34. SAW ranked lower than the NCAE and dramatically lower than Civitas.

I thought perhaps SAW's relatively low score was because it was local group. Indeed, SAW was smaller than the NCAE, which was a large statewide group. But among the 34 groups I was studying, there were other small, local grassroots groups that were hierarchical and had higher digital activism scores than even the NCAE. In the statistical analysis, I accounted for size in a few ways. First, the digital activism score incorporates the size of the group, with the number of Facebook likes as an approximation for how much of a reach the group has. I also compared local (smaller) and statewide (larger) groups and found no difference in the total digital activism index. In addition, the hierarchy finding still stands when incorporating group size in a statistical analysis.[72]

Perhaps an alternative explanation of the relatively low digital activism levels of SAW was that they were not posting so much on official organizational social media accounts, and were, instead, posting profusely on their own personal ones. Maybe their score was not representative of their digital engagement. If this were the case, just as with the working-class groups, one would still expect some of their personal social media posts to loop back into the organizational ones—and vice versa. I followed many individual activists' online engagement and did not find evidence that any were avoiding their group's social media spaces. In addition, the digital activism score incorporates more than just the organization's development of their platforms but also how people participate and respond online, whether comments, likes, or retweets. Even with these participation measures, more hierarchical groups dominate. We would expect that all activists and issues have some level of both personal and organizational online interaction, but if people are funneling more individualized posts away from hierarchical organizations, we would expect horizontal groups to have higher levels of participation, which I did not find. But most importantly, on-the-ground observational and interview data reinforce the online digital data.

TO UNDERSTAND THIS LOW DIGITAL activism score and to see how SAW members were interacting and communicating with each other—and other activists—in this effort against SB 575, I attended a "Teach-In and Speak-Out" at UNC one rainy spring evening. The event was held in an overstuffed room in the center of the campus in Chapel Hill. About 50 people sat on chairs and on the floor, with others standing in the back. SAW had orga-

nized the event in coalition with other student groups, faculty, housekeepers, and unions to contest SB 575. They had invited all of the BOG members, as well as the president and chancellor, but none of them attended. The vice-chancellor, who was also the director of human resources, did come and was sitting in the back of the room.

Students from SAW read testimonies from low-wage university employees about their working conditions. Stories abounded with the sexual harassment, toxic exposure, and racist treatment that workers had experienced. The testimonies I heard were from the predominantly African American janitorial staff, whom this southern university still called "housekeepers," recalling the name given to the slaves who had built the university. At the same time, housekeepers had embraced this label themselves. Laurel, a white UNC Chapel Hill senior, said, "Many of the folks who wrote these statements were not able or willing to read them in public because there's still a very, very intense culture of fear within these departments, within the facility services, such as housekeeping."

The students felt empowered to speak up for others. Yet they were not speaking up in public online forums as much as I expected. Why were these stories not digitally translated into "Housekeeper Voices" like the NCAE's "Educator Voices"?

SAW organizers had consulted with other groups to put together a list of speakers for the night, but anyone could volunteer to speak as well. I listened to everyone—student, faculty, and union activists—invoke a statement made by the UNC system president Tom Ross: "Some employees don't trust the university. I don't know why that is." Ross was responding to charges by SAW and many HOPE Coalition organizations that by removing university employees from the State Personnel Act, they would no longer have a procedural system in place for dismissals. Many feared that the testimonies read that night would get even worse without the minimal protections of the Act, which SB 575 would eliminate. They accused Ross of being vague with his "trust" comment.

A professor from North Carolina State University then said, "When I hear about [this] sort of trust and flexibility, as a historian, my argument is 'This is not personal.' I'm not challenging the integrity of any individuals involved in this process [referring to Ross]. I'm just saying the lesson of history in this state is when workers' rights are withdrawn, they are very rarely given back, and that's the lesson that we need to think about."[73] And that was what public

sector workers across North Carolina were facing in early 2012—more and more rights being withdrawn—from the teachers' union dues deductions to these protections for university employees. Labor activists told me that keeping SB 575 from passing would help their broader efforts at repealing the collective bargaining ban.

Laurel wrote Ross's statement on the whiteboard that flanked the speakers. She explained to the crowd why she did so: "We thought that we would send Tom Ross some of the reasons why we don't trust the university." In response, the crowd whooped and snapped their fingers, a common gesture that the Occupy Wall Street movement had used to signify support of someone's comment.[74] Also listed on the whiteboard were the ways that people could communicate with each other and to the public about labor protections for university workers. The meeting's facilitators listed Ross's contact information, as well as SAW's e-mail, website, Facebook page, Twitter name, and a hashtag for the movement to #stopsb575.[75]

Laurel added, "The Board of Governors is requesting that the General Assembly act on this legislation this year. This is the group that is supposed to represent us, the students, the faculty, the staff here. They should be held accountable to us, although they're not. So please," she said, gesturing toward the giant whiteboard with all the ways to communicate on the topic, "please, keep informed."

Despite this call to use social media to a packed and outraged audience, only two tweets appeared with the hashtag in the coming weeks. SAW averaged less than one like per post on Facebook and no comments. These scant posts included photos from the event and a link to a letter to the editor about the issue. Overall, they received approximately 40 times fewer Facebook comments per day than either Civitas or the NCAE.

SAW members were young, digitally savvy, and well educated. They also were not constrained in what they posted and could personalize their political social media. These were the very qualities that should have fueled a greater digital impact, or so I thought. So why were their rates so low? Especially in the middle of a fast-paced campaign, I expected their digital activist score to be higher. The conventional wisdom is that the internet allows people to post on the fly with mobile devices, integrating all things digital into their everyday lives, especially political work. To an extent, this was the case with SAW. They regularly used Twitter, Facebook, and their website, often with their smartphones or laptops. However, their online foot-

print was smaller than that of bureaucratic groups. Given their relatively low digital activism score, I wanted to understand why a horizontal group of digitally savvy students wasn't having a bigger digital impact.

Zaina's story illustrates the first reason why horizontal groups did not have digital rates as high as hierarchical groups. Her efforts went toward inclusivity and being leaderless, not toward a division of digital labor. Even though she was one of the key people who would post to digital media for the group, she was not a dedicated volunteer for it. Instead, she did a bit of everything.

A political science major, Zaina became interested in SAW as a first-year student when she read an article in the *Daily Tar Heel,* the student newspaper, about a new policy for housekeepers on campus. "If you are caught sitting down outside of your allotted break time, which is a half hour in an eight-hour shift, you can be suspended without pay," she explained. "So the majority of these women are middle-aged. A lot of them have health conditions. Obviously, they're dealing with chemicals on a regular basis. You're standing on your feet. I mean it seems [*sighs*] like common sense. It's hard for me sometimes to grasp how cruel a policy like that could be implemented and enforced." After Zaina read about these working conditions, she sought out a SAW activist, Laurel, who told her about her interview project with housekeepers to document their conditions. What struck Zaina the most was what many housekeepers were told by their supervisors, "'Don't speak to students unless you're spoken to. . . . Students don't want to talk to you.' . . . I was so upset that this is the narrative being told about me and my peers because I just thought, 'That's just not true.'"

Eventually, she became one of the main activists in the group, which occasionally did have some division of labor—though Zaina again reminded me that she was not *the* leader. Even though she and the other co-chairs did not have the focused time to specialize in the managed features of digital media, they were still strategic with communication tools for different constituencies. For housekeepers, they used printed flyers because of digital literacy constraints. Assuming faculty were not as up to date with social media, they used e-mail to reach them "because professors are a little bit older and they're maybe not as Facebook [savvy]." They still viewed Facebook as a primary way to reach out to activists, especially students who were getting involved for the first time. For Zaina, Facebook was a "necessary evil." Nevertheless, she said, "I genuinely use Facebook as an organizing tool and without Facebook I don't know how I would organize."

Zaina devoted all her free time to her activism. But she was not critical of students who only participated online. She told me, "Facebook is the easiest way for students [to] participate. You'll notice a lot of students might, for instance, 'like' something on Facebook or post something on their wall, so it's kind of this really simple act of solidarity where it's kind of saying: 'I support this.'"

She was empathetic with students who might only have time for a click because she believed it could be the first step in getting more involved. And she also understood how busy students were because she, herself, felt overwhelmed with everything that she was doing, especially trying to keep up with everything online. Zaina did a lot of digital media work for SAW, but she spent most of her organizing time on the ground, handing out flyers and meeting with students, faculty, and workers, in addition to attending classes full time. When I talked with her, she had just come from class and afterward she rushed to deliver a letter to Tom Ross's house. "This is a [*bangs table to emphasize each word*] Full! Time! Job! [*laughs*] I mean I love it, I can't imagine my life at Carolina any other way."

Rather than designating someone to concentrate on social media, though, SAW spread out this work when they got together, and took time to map out their media messages. Zaina confirmed what I had seen at their meetings—that they spent a lot of time dividing out tasks on a case-by-case basis. "Who's e-mailing who, who's doing publicity, who's reaching out to workers," she said, "All of these different little pieces have to come together for us to succeed."

Zaina had seen people step up to the plate, so she had faith in this system. "When push comes to shove, so to speak, people are just going to be doing whatever they need to do, and sometimes you can't plan it out perfectly, and that's where you really need to have this group trust in one another to get the job done."

Other SAW students echoed Zaina's point about being inundated with activist work, especially the social media and other communication tasks that they shared. "Everybody has a lot of things going on, but students [are] very busy," Alana, another SAW activist and white UNC Chapel Hill undergraduate, told me. "And we have our eggs in so many different baskets, so it's difficult to balance it all, but somehow we're doing it. My e-mail inbox is constantly flooded."

Alana was a confident and active social media user, as well. She used Facebook for learning about political issues from other organizations, friends,

and the media, often reposting. Twitter, for her, was for more activist event-oriented information. Like Zaina, she understood the basic differences across digital platforms. But neither had what Brian and Jessica possessed: a bureaucratic organization that enabled them to focus their *time* on communication and the specialized expertise to generate online participation—and sustain it.

Instead, while they were certainly heavy users of digital technology personally, their public postings were random and not as targeted as the other groups' posts were. This was common with most of the horizontal groups, at least the ones that were online. They lacked someone who concentrated their time on digital activism. Groups without specific volunteers or paid staff had more difficulty implementing managed systems for website and social media development. Groups like SAW developed some organized digital media strategies, like the whiteboard internet addresses, but were less able to follow through with consistent communication tactics to keep it going. It was a fluid, rather than a focused, media plan.

Part of this digital inconsistency was probably tied to the fact that they were a student group. They were not in school during summers and holidays. Members had to prioritize classes and exams. So establishing a permanent division of labor—staff or volunteer—was difficult. The sentiment of feeling pulled in many different directions was common with many of the people I spoke with in the nonbureaucratic groups. Activists either had full-time school or work or both.

Even groups that had a small staff struggled to maintain digital strategies. Organizations in this study that had three or fewer staff people, and did not have a volunteer focused on communication, had lower levels of digital engagement. The HOPE Coalition had a tiny staff and relied on 100 percent consensus for any decision, so they were horizontal in this framework, even though member organizations of the coalition varied widely in their structure. HOPE's digital engagement was relatively low. Like other horizontal groups without the division of labor to sustain a social media presence, they would create an account on various platforms but did not have someone to update websites or write social media posts regularly.

Groups without a communications team were often trying to find current or new activists to do different tasks on a continual basis. Of course, there was some division of labor with less hierarchical groups, including horizontal ones. Zaina's plea at the meeting for people to fill the shoes of

an outgoing co-chair makes this clear. But for horizontal groups, work was either shared or divided out periodically, sometimes at each weekly meeting—all in an effort to empower and include everyone. This constrained groups like SAW who did not have someone in a dedicated position long term to hone their skills and focus full-time on one specific task, such as social media. Specialization was generally not sustainable. While resources were a piece of this puzzle, it was generally more of a strain for less hierarchical groups. For SAW, that difficulty of dividing up tasks had to do with the fact that being horizontal was an intentional choice and core to their identity.

Horizontalism: Where Is the Digital Democracy?

Still, this was a surprising finding. I wanted to dig deeper as to why a horizontal group like SAW was using the public internet so little. More online participation, not less, was supposed to have been associated with horizontalism as opposed to hierarchy.

The idea is that horizontal movements encourage people to be more active participants. Realistically, though, there are all sorts of obstacles that limit who can actively participate in such a movement. But the argument has been that the internet lowers many of the barriers, expanding the numbers who can be active in horizontal movements, as well as amplifying their impact.

In the case of a group like SAW, one might expect that the internet would allow for greater participation, which might compensate for the lack of a division of labor or the continuity that comes with having a full-time, dedicated person working on digital media. When we talk about the participatory culture that is supposed to be associated with digital spaces, it's not just simply responding to an e-mail that a staff person sends to tell you how to lobby your state legislator, or some other casual activity. Instead, it is direct participation and *decision making* in the group, a key part of the collective identity of explicitly horizontal groups like SAW. In fact, the number of levels of decision making was how I had categorized groups as either more hierarchical or less hierarchical in the first place. SAW only had one level. SAW was different from the NCAE, for example, as the former worked to involve other students in every decision.

One might think that valuing transparent decision making would translate into using online tools and social media platforms to allow members to voice their opinions and possibly even vote on the direction of an organization or movement.[76] If this is the case, wouldn't online decision making boost the digital activist scores for horizontal groups? A lot of the decision making in groups like SAW should take advantage of the transparency afforded by the internet, rather than any secret backroom deal-making of bureaucratic groups. Given SAW's relatively low score, I wanted to find out how transparent digital decision making might be compensating for the dearth of dedicated volunteers for digital activism. To uncover more of the roots of this hierarchy-based digital activism gap, I asked SAW activists to explain to me their last major decision and how it took place, and whether and how the internet was a part of it.

The decision by SAW to tackle SB 575 was not a simple one. Before this bill was introduced, they had spent months working on a campaign for a Housekeeper Bill of Rights.[77] This earlier effort sprang from a study of housekeeping, conducted by a university consultant that confirmed many of the employees' complaints about verbal abuse, harassment, and retaliation for filing grievances. When the university failed to act on the report, SAW began working with housekeepers to develop the Bill of Rights. This was also part of a broader effort with other unions who wanted to gain community support for housekeepers, as well as empower them to understand that their conditions were universal. Both SAW and the workers saw this human rights angle as an effort to recruit more workers to the union and build their movement.

As work on the Bill of Rights progressed, other state workers came to SAW and alerted the group to what they felt was a bigger threat: SB 575. Both the housekeepers and SAW knew that while the university had pushed for such legislation in the past, the new Republican legislative majorities made it a real possibility. Yet Zaina and SAW were torn about what to do: continue with the Bill of Rights or shift gears to 575?

At first, SAW tried to balance these two main projects with a working group for each. Not surprisingly, the amount of work became unsustainable. Zaina and Laurel believed it was time to pick one focus, but they struggled with how best to discuss it with their group. They did not want to impose this new direction onto members who had also devoted themselves to the Housekeeper Bill of Rights. After a long discussion over a series of meetings,

they decided by consensus to focus all of their time on stopping SB 575. Zaina said this whole decision-making process happened "organically." They not only believed in but also practiced open decision making. "A part of our politics and the way we identify with ourselves, we want to be as transparent as possible," she said.

I wanted to know why they did not use a more public platform, like Facebook or another online interface for decisions like these. Couldn't posting and debating online be the ideal way to be transparent, as well as enable busy students to vote and participate in a meeting they couldn't attend?

At first, I thought I had found the answer. Perhaps I was looking at the wrong place for their true digital activism score. Most of the activists and staff from other groups had said they used e-mail for basic communication. Because of privacy concerns, I did not quantify or evaluate e-mail, and it also was not *public* social media, the foundation of digital democracy claims. But as early adopters, maybe SAW activists were using newer or different platforms than e-mail. As I probed, however, I discovered that it was not a new platform they were using. They were one of the few groups that maintained an old-fashioned listserv, previously called a newsgroup or a discussion forum. Actually, they had two listservs.

Few groups in this study—even those that were horizontal—used organization-wide listservs. These formats allowed anyone to post a question or comment in a many-to-many system. SAW was one exception. One of their listservs was for public announcements to members and their allies: "SAW announce." This listserv was event-based. "A very specific kind of mobilizing tool," Zaina said, for "when we have a very concrete goal in mind, and we need to involve a larger group of people, and we need them to mobilize their respective communities." For the members of SAW to plan and organize their core group, they had "SAW secure." The announcement listserv was more public than the private one, so I asked about the difference in terms of student participation, especially for decision making.

Zaina replied that the group still preferred making decisions face-to-face. There were exceptions. Like other groups, some decisions could be made online in the "SAW secure" listserv, but these was rare and reserved for less weighty decisions or those that would most likely be supported by everyone; an example would be a call for someone to tackle a task, such as: "This is the Google doc; these are my edits; what do you think about this, yes or no?" Zaina laughed while she told me about this listserv: "So sometimes it

can be chaotic because again there's this urgency, and you're kind of like, who's doing this, who's doing that, and you need someone to kind of jump up and take the lead on it." These last-minute logistics were sometimes relegated to the listserv. Zaina added, "You don't have vision conversations online. . . . Meetings are really the space of hashing things out, really explaining, contextualizing, planning." This activity preparation was done in person, and Alana told me: "When it comes down to the nitty-gritty of making decisions, it's always better to meet face-to-face." Personal e-mail exchanges or the listserv were simply not able to accomplish the transparency that SAW students said was critical to their group.

Some of the resistance to using the internet for group participation was practical, based on how SAW operated. All of their decisions needed to be unanimous, as the group operated on consensus. So using the "SAW secure" listserv conflicted with this approach. "Online, I think it's really just a matter of who's checking their e-mail really regularly," Zaina said. "Not everyone has the capacity to read all the e-mails that I send out." As a result, "We don't want a few people knowing everything and not sharing with the group and not taking other opinions into account. That's really important to us." Online decision making, they worried, would not necessarily include everyone. Even during their current high-paced campaign against SB 575, when the internet could potentially facilitate fast decision making, they still opted to use face-to-face meetings, not e-mail or social media. "It is challenging when you're balancing urgency and timeliness," Zaina admitted. The presumption is that digital tools would be more efficient for member participation, but SAW didn't do it because they didn't find internet platforms either inclusive or transparent enough. "This campaign has been really an interesting challenge because a lot of the times, decisions have to be made almost immediately, and so we have had the difficulty of how long do we wait for feedback on this?" Because they couldn't know when or if everyone would respond through the listserv, e-mail, or casual interactions on campus, these all seemed less efficient. Even though students were busy and coming to meetings could be challenging, Zaina said: "In meetings we get a lot done."

Zaina even believed that digital decision making could put their horizontal approach at risk: "I think there comes a time that, even in a core group, you have the core-core." So while the "SAW secure" listserv was for the core group, Zaina explained that the "core-core" consisted of the people who "are always going to respond to your e-mail, and it kind of becomes this thing

where I guess that's kind of how leaders arise in a movement or in an organization." Zaina worried about this when people would only e-mail her and she would run the risk of becoming a "go-to person." She said that this had happened in their campaign against SB 575: "I've definitely gotten personal e-mails a lot from people, and maybe that's because my name might be on a letter to the editor or something. So I think there's more of an exclusivity aspect to the communication in ties online." Zaina avoided this possibility by always trying to e-mail the entire listserv, rather than individuals, about organizational issues, but acknowledged that people's inboxes would get overwhelmed. So the ultimate solution for her was in-person meetings: "When we meet as a group, we are all in it together, and we really feel this sense of communal bonding, and we really feel like we all are a part of this. There isn't this same potential feeling of point people as I felt like online."

SAW viewed organizational decision making as going hand in hand with trust-building, which many described as edifying and uplifting. I asked Zaina how, exactly, they built trust. She said that through their meetings, leafleting, and protests they'd become like family who understood what they were each going through. Together they were able to invest in each other to combat helplessness during the uphill political battle they faced. This bond was what held their movement together, Zaina said.

Horizontal participation and decision making, in particular, was an intricate part of building connection within their group, as well as recruiting newcomers. This communal sentiment was what drove activists away from using the internet for decision making.[78] Zaina said that on a listserv you don't ask someone, "How are you doing today?" She did not discount the ways in which digital technology can connect people, especially with activism, and she said that she could not live without it. Zaina was not a technophobe, and she used digital media for her organizing on a daily basis. But, she added:

> With the necessary evil aspect to [the internet], I become very frustrated or disturbed—or concerned maybe is the best word for it—that organizing has become less relational, less personal. I think internet activism has really kind of taken on all this identity and all this meaning but I really, truly believe that talking to people face-to-face is just the ultimate organizing tool. I . . . can't imagine life without [the internet]. But I don't want to get to a place, and I think we're already halfway there, where signing an online petition

> means that I am an activist. To me, being an activist is knowing the community on the ground that you want to operate within and stand in solidarity with. . . . That element of out-of-touchness is something that I hope we always strive to struggle against.

Most people I interviewed, across all types of organizations, shared similar experiences with and preferences for trust-building discussions that occurred before and after face-to-face meetings. Chatting about family or other personal issues, or even organizational dynamics, fostered trust, which many said was more difficult to develop online. It was not that the internet was untrustworthy per se; rather, that people need to build trust offline first in order to make online interactions workable, especially for weighty decisions. For explicitly horizontal groups like SAW, they did not view the internet as a reliable mechanism for inclusive, participatory decision making or as a forum for trust-building, both crucial to their organizing goals. This lack of trust in online spaces helps explain why they did not have as high a score as expected.

Even leaders of hierarchical groups reported how critical this in-person experience was. One explained the need for in-person meetings, especially for controversial issues: "[Board members] need to know each other. They need to learn how to deal with each other productively and respectfully. And it's just harder to do that if you don't get together every now and then face-to-face as a group to do it."

In-person interactions were not just a feel-good fuzzy moment to get to know other activists. For some organizers, they were also ways to weed out people that might be suspicious. A Tea Party leader explained: "I want to meet people face-to-face . . . see whether they are consistent and genuine. How do they shake hands? How do they greet people? Are they fake or phony? . . . I want to look them in the eye and talk to them, see if you can trick them to see how genuine and consistent they are."[79]

But how did these activist sentiments align with what I saw online? Across all the groups in the political arena, I first looked for any possible signs online of organizational decision making. Across the three online platforms, I found very little. A few groups used their websites to announce their annual meetings where voting on organizational priorities may occur, but static websites were not the vehicle that had most recently driven the belief in digital democracy. Most groups' websites were not very interactive, though some,

like Civitas's, included participatory features like online polls—although those polls were not channeled into any public decision-making process, since it was not a membership-based group.

A team of researchers and I coded samples of Twitter and Facebook posts. I did not expect that rapid-fire Twitter would be a place for reasoned debate, but I cast a wide net as to what could be considered organizational participation, not just issue posts. Twitter had been a megaphonic boon to protest movements, but for everyday organizational processes, its use was minimal. Twitter was the platform used by the fewest groups. Nine did not have an account, and some of those that did rarely used it. In fact, for organizational decision making, its use mirrored that of a website—occasionally broadcasting information about a convention, rarely a meeting. Twitter's stream of posts also did not have the group features of Facebook, where one discussion could easily be viewed and debated. Twitter has since incorporated more thread-like features, but the content is often more diatribe than dialogue.

Of the public platforms I examined, Facebook was the only tool that had both the design and capacity to maximize transparent participation with its many-to-many features.[80] But on Facebook, across all groups, few decisions were made, and even discussions about organizational decision making were rare. Regardless of whether or not a group was hierarchical or horizontal, on average only 1 percent of the Facebook posts were about organizational decision making and were either about a specific vote or more broadly about the organizational direction or process.[81] Based on a content analysis of posts, 14 out of the 34 groups had no social media discussions on the topic. The few posts that did, only included information about upcoming meetings or issues that might be on an agenda. SAW did not have any Facebook posts related to decision making.[82]

What about e-mail across the groups for decision making? Public platforms might inadvertently air a group's dirty laundry, and e-mail has at least a bit more privacy than public platforms. It is an ideal way to communicate directly to a group's constituency—whether to members or a board—about pending decisions. Many groups still used some version of a basic "reply all" method of e-mail communication. Some organizations with more sophisticated technology used software packages to organize their e-mail, but this system rarely had a way for people to talk to each other, like a listserv. By all indications, though, SAW's listservs were not the only active and interactive e-mail exchanges. Although I did not measure and compare these commu-

nication tools, through my interviews, all groups seemed to use e-mail for meeting prep but not for decisions, except in rare cases.

Still, one might imagine that statewide groups have a greater need to use the internet for organizational decision making, and perhaps SAW did not need to use the internet for decision making or participation because it was simply easier for them to be in the same place every week. Scholars have said that the internet enables groups to overcome the collective action problem of people needing to be in the same physical location.[83] But statewide groups had equally low levels of online posts for decision making as local organizations.[84] Based on interviews, e-mail was similarly inadequate for decision making. Some groups did make some of their decisions on e-mail, but these were low-stakes.

Even hierarchical groups rarely made decisions via e-mail. One leader said that his group's executive committee can make certain, less important, decisions over e-mail, but that doing so involved a multistage process. First, he sent an e-mail to his board members asking if they were okay making a decision online. If anyone objected, a conference call was scheduled. If the issue was still not resolved, the group saved the decision for a face-to-face meeting. The importance of in-person meetings was so striking that members and leaders would sometimes drive six hours across the state for meetings to vote on agenda items. Of course, some private conversations about organizational decision making, away from formal meetings or institutional platforms, occurred online. However, the insistence on in-person meetings was unfailing across all groups, and no one viewed the internet as a decision-making tool.

Nonetheless, I continued to look for efforts from organizations that might encourage public online decision making. There were some scattered and indirect attempts from a few groups. For instance, the NCAE's leadership would poll members through their ExactTarget e-mail software to rank issues of importance. They also used social media to get a pulse of their membership. Brian explained: "Facebook isn't a referendum on what we do, but it is something we pay attention to closely." He added, "It's not to say that Facebook wags the dog." Brian explained this quip—if teachers do not like an NCAE leadership decision, they could express that on Facebook, but this feedback would not shape their priorities. Instead, teachers, through yearly conventions, have ultimate control over the direction of the union, but the day-to-day is in the hands of leaders and staff like Brian.

Online decision making barely registered for these groups in North Carolina, but online participation, in general, did map onto hierarchy levels. As we've seen, groups with more staff and decision-making levels had greater digital activism scores overall, as well as higher online participation rates in particular, such as Facebook comments or Twitter retweets.

One distinction is that a key part of the digital activism score is whether or not groups design their platforms for participation. Did they structure their website so people can comment? Did they mention other Twitter users or use hashtags to encourage a response? Did they set up a Facebook page that they could control or a group that is more participatory? Across the three platforms, whether or not groups built these platforms for participation is what I call their "architecture score," and hierarchical groups actually ranked higher on this measure than horizontal ones. With Facebook, though, many hierarchical groups went in the opposite direction and restricted online participation on the platform. Yet, they still had more people participating online. For instance, a communications staff person of one hierarchical group lamented that he could not turn off the ability for people to post comments on their Facebook page. "People can comment on posts that we put up, but they can't make original posts on our Facebook page. And that's the only thing you can't turn off on Facebook—you can't stop people from commenting on your posts. You can stop them from posting, you can keep them from posting pictures, you can keep them from doing just about anything you want, but you can't stop them from commenting on your posts, so you can't control that." He was distraught that people were able to spoil their Facebook posts with comments. They viewed themselves more as corporate communicators who did not want to mar their image with anyone, including members, publicly advertising grievances or posting anything embarrassing to the organization.

A key finding, then, is that more hierarchical and well-staffed groups intentionally designed their online presence to enable online participation that they could control and manipulate, not for democratic participation. Groups like SAW, however, were practicing horizontal decision making and participation but with little help from the internet. And all groups, whether hierarchical or not, had the same average percentage of online posts (20%) that encouraged people to join in organizational activities—online or offline.[85]

I had thought that perhaps SAW's horizontalism would compensate for not having paid staff, rather than it driving their score even lower. It did not.

Certainly, their listserv was important for their communication, but it did not seem to be giving them a digital edge with public platforms, and their horizontal decision making might even have contributed to the digital activism gap.[86] Participatory decision making was not an affordance of the internet for SAW, or other groups, for that matter.

It's certainly possible to imagine a horizontal organization that has the digital division of labor and the systems in place to facilitate high levels of online engagement. Spontaneity and digital decision making may happen with spikes in some horizontal protest movements, but I did not find that here. It is also important to note how we may not often see this kind of digital prowess in less hierarchical groups over the long term. Digital technology working in sync with horizontalism through transparent and participatory decision making may be what we expect, but not what we always get.[87]

This assumption that communication methods could up-end centralized bureaucracies is not new to digital technologies. Over a century ago, Michels argued that political organizations inevitably get stuck in an "Iron Law of Oligarchy" in which a handful of leaders always end up dominating, however democratic a group may have started.[88] This theory has endured, but over the years, scholars have argued that organizational printed materials and public forums were a key way for members to challenge stodgy leadership.[89] Others have argued that since the time of Michels's writing, internal participation has simply increased across the board in the American social movement landscape.[90] Sociologist Francesca Polletta suggested that contemporary activists are more aware of participatory and trust-building processes than a century earlier.[91] And with the internet, this is presumably even more of the case. Digital technology might be able to overturn the Iron Law, although no one has tested this theory in organizations over time (myself included) before and after the advent of digital technology. Still, it's possible that leadership may not be able to consolidate power by obscuring decision-making processes with digital transparency. But is it probable?

One of the earliest claims of digital decision making that often makes the rounds of social movement discussions is the case of the Independent Media Center, commonly called Indymedia. This horizontal movement arose from anti-globalization actions around the world, particularly with the 1999 protests against the WTO in Seattle. While the mainstream media plastered photos of broken store windows and tear-gassed protesters on

their front pages, Indymedia activist journalists were posting on-the-ground stories on their own websites about justice issues related to the WTO. At the time, this type of citizen journalism was novel. Indymedia was not one entity but a series of collectives around the world. I was in San Francisco for some of the planning meetings and in Seattle for the protests. Yet I have noticed an increasing disconnect between the writing about this event and what I observed. Some research suggested that Indymedia celebrated differences among members online and facilitated consensus with a broad array of activists participating in online planning and policy debates, contradicting the Iron Law.[92] Building on this case, scholars began writing about other digitally connected movements, pointing out that online discussions created a space for diverse voices, especially minority views and disparate opinions of more marginalized members, helping to facilitate consensus, with some even finding that the internet increases participation and debate within existing organizations over group priorities.[93] But these analyses tend to privilege the online. Yes, Indymedia collectives were communicating with each other around the world, but they had lengthy in-person discussions as well. In fact, Indymedia highlighted the need for physical spaces, given that mobile technologies were not so prevalent at that time. Moreover, the WTO protests in Seattle are often deemed an Indymedia event, when in fact hundreds of traditional organizations, such as unions, were active in the planning, some of which did take place on e-mail, still novel at the time. But digital communication was only a part of the logistics puzzle.

In kind, the Occupy Wall Street movement, in particular, has often been conflated with horizontal digital decision making. But anyone who has participated in an Occupy General Assembly knows, from Manhattan to Oakland to Chapel Hill, decision making mirrored the SAW approach, with lengthy and frequent meetings in person. In fact, this type of participatory approach is what Polletta described in her book, whose apt title is *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*.[94]

Back at UNC, SAW co-chairs were not hiding in the backroom making decisions, but neither were they on digital backchannels doing so. Because they worried that their digital listserv or e-mail would spiral down to just a few leaders bickering, they had their own endless meetings. That SAW defies the digital participation argument builds on what some other researchers are also finding: that the internet does not necessarily make for democratic decision making because a few people still tend to dominate debate; that the

internet has little effect on an organization's democratic capacity; or that collective decision making is simply not compatible with individualized social media.[95] Instead of a revolutionary participatory tool, the internet just happened to be the dominant communication tool at the time of my research and simply became normalized into the groups' organizing repertoire.[96]

IN THE END, although horizontalism is often the touchstone of digital democracy, this was not the case for two fundamental reasons: online public participation was actually greater with more hierarchical groups, and organizational debate rarely happened online.

The association between hierarchical organizations and higher levels of digital participation levels may appear counterintuitive. Hierarchy involves a vertical chain of command, while the internet's hallmark is its horizontal many-to-many communication architecture. However, the chain-of-command system of digital communication practices was not necessarily an undemocratic process. Hierarchy in and of itself is neither democratic nor undemocratic. Hierarchy can go both ways.[97] As Jo Freeman argued in her critique of the feminist movement, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness,* a lack of structure can actually be less democratic when leadership roles are not transparent.[98]

Hierarchical decision making is not the *direct* engine driving differences in online participation simply because little decision making is done online. Instead, hierarchy provided the scaffolding for the digital labor to enable more people to comment and click. More hierarchical groups tended to have the organizational infrastructure to support and maintain online platforms that encouraged digital participation but not necessarily online democratic debate or decision making. Online participation contributes little to internal democracy. Scant debate occurred on public online forums or in organizational e-mails. Certainly, it happened in private discussions, whether online or offline, but not with collective digital deliberation. Regardless of the levels of hierarchy, groups in this study rarely used the internet for direct decision-making purposes. And since organizational debates are largely absent online, the digital participation that *did happen* was democratically weak.

But what of right-wing groups that weren't as hierarchical? While some Tea Party groups were bottom-up, the groups that better fit this category

were Preppers. These far-right Patriot groups, which prepared for government or economic disruption with food and weapons, were staunchly anti-organization and anti-establishment. People in these types of groups did not believe in top-down hierarchies but in individuals doing their own thing—individuals who happened to be doing things together politically. Yet they were opposed to the democratic principles of horizontalism, collectivity, or consensus in participatory decision making. Often, one person dominated the small Prepper groups. If this person chose to focus on digital media, the group's scores were slightly higher. If not, their online engagement might be lower, so digital activist scores varied greatly. I go into more detail about these groups in Chapter 3, but when I would ask Patriot activists how the internet might be tied to democracy, their eyes would light up at the word "internet," but not at the word "democracy"; they would often bristle upon hearing this term. "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for dinner," they often explained. "Democracy is mob rules," was a common expression for Patriots.

Yet *Smart Mobs* is exactly what internet guru Harvey Rheingold named his book about what he called a "social revolution." This digital democracy was supposed to have been participatory, pluralist, and personalized. It certainly can be, and I witnessed pockets of it from many types of groups, but the internet over the long-term favored centralized activism over connective action; hierarchy over horizontalism; bureaucratic positions over networked persons.

That is not to say that nothing has shifted for social movements with the advent of the internet. Communication is more efficient, especially for groups with more bureaucratic resources. But my findings suggest that rather than being less relevant in the digital era, for social movements over the long term, organizations are in fact more important than ever.

Yet innovations can still shock these structures. What has happened with digital activism and organizations is "settlement," a term introduced by sociologists Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam. They are among a number of scholars who have been pushing for an integration of two fields of sociology: social movements and organizations. In fact, they came up with the term "strategic action fields," which they describe as "the fundamental units of collective action in society." They go on to describe, "A strategic action field is a meso-level social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common under-

standings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field's rules."[99] So in this case, a strategic action field could be these North Carolina groups on the left and the right vying for power or it could be interpreted more broadly as American political institutions. Fligstein and McAdam describe a number of elements of this theory, including how an "exogenous shock" can lead to settlement within the field. It is possible in this case, then, that the diffusion of social media technologies was a shock that reverberated across social movements, perhaps initially those who were horizontally inclined. And now there has been a settlement, with centralized organizations dominating. Both stability and disruption are part of this theory. It is not as if technology is irrelevant. Social movement and organizational actors responded to this digital shock, showing that power is not always stable, as we have seen with hashtag or other forms of digital activism, like Occupy. In turn, another shock was political in nature—for conservatives it was Obama and for progressives it would be Trump. Yet as both Fligstein and McAdam, as well as Gramsci, point out, one shock, digital or political, does not completely disrupt. A variety of factors work in fluid sync—and in this case, classed resources and digital bureaucracy were key elements for digital engagement, and so was political ideology, as we will see in Chapter 3. Indeed, the idea of a strategic action field is that the distinction between a movement and organization breaks down. We need to view them as part of a whole.

Foundational scholars of modernity, whether Weber on bureaucracy or Michels on oligarchy, developed their organizational theories when large institutions outside of the state were just beginning to spread. The cold and dark images that may arise from Michels's "Iron Law" or Weber's "Iron Cage" may seem to have little to do with our light-filled and fast-paced networked society. So in the context of a shift, not only in technology but also in organizational allegiances, theorists have suggested digital technology use transformed these theories by privileging individuals over these very impersonal institutions that had expanded over a century ago. But I found that structured organizations dominated in this digital sphere. They were still very much at play, suggesting little has changed in organizational theory for social movements *because* of the digital era, despite the enthusiasm for digital networked individualism. Leaderless horizontal movements may be on the rise, but their expansion may be less connected to the internet than the correlation would imply. And participatory digital culture itself may be tethered

to conservative bureaucracies more tightly than the 1960s counterculture could have ever imagined.

ON APRIL 13, 2012, SAW activists arrived at the scheduled BOG meeting ready for a confrontation. The previous night, SAW members had attended a BOG committee meeting where they believed SB 575 was going to be discussed. But they felt the committee had given them misleading information about when the discussion was happening. As a result, they missed a chance to speak before the committee approved a set of "guiding principles" for a new personnel system that would be put in place should SB 575 pass the legislature.

When SAW members showed up at the full board meeting on Friday the 13th, they took turns rising, one after the other, to interrupt the meeting by reading statements of opposition. They were each ushered out by police, so most weren't around when the full BOG voted to approve the "guiding principles." Their work, their organizing, their hours of late-night meetings, failed to have the desired impact on the BOG, or galvanize a larger public opposition to the attacks on public workers. Fortunately, they caught the luckiest of breaks: SB 575 failed to clear enough procedural hurdles in time to be considered before the end of the 2012 legislative session. But the activists believed their efforts had a role in its defeat.

Though victorious, SAW and other groups organizing for public workers understood that a new version of SB 575 could well be proposed in the coming years. But the fight in 2012 also showed the limits of their influence. Even though they did not have a high digital activist score, SAW was quite active, especially for a student group. Still, they didn't seem able to consistently leverage the tools of the digital age, either to amplify their message, turbo-charge their organizing, or more efficiently run a volunteer organization whose composition would naturally ebb and flow from one school year to the next.

More generally, this lack of digital bureaucracy, even if to some degree it's by choice, would leave such organizations at an even greater disadvantage in the years to come. While such horizontal groups would struggle to appoint someone to tend to a neglected Facebook page, political opponents would be refining into a science what makes content go viral. They'd be learning how to master the dark arts of renting and organizing armies of

bots to flood social media with supportive or misleading messages. And as the public and media began to put greater credence on social media as a barometer of popular sentiments, those whose voices were not resonating were at a growing risk of being completely drowned out.

The Digital Bureaucracy of the Tea Party

It might be tempting to dismiss SAW's digital struggle as the result of their simply being a local volunteer-driven organization or their lack of direct financial resources. But while these may have been factors, such descriptors could apply just as well to the many Tea Party groups sprouting across North Carolina at the time. Yet despite similar challenges, Tea Party groups did in fact develop a digital bureaucracy. And they did it despite their desire to promote individuals over the collective.[100] As a result of embracing an organizational structure and often hierarchical decision making, they had some of the highest digital activism scores among the grassroots groups.

For the Caldwell County Tea Party, a full-time mom and volunteer organizer named Christine had taken charge of the group. On Facebook, Christine, then 50, had a photo of herself, a white woman wearing a pink v-neck shirt, with a flag, gun, and Bible in her hand. One evening in June 2012, she was facilitating the Caldwell County Tea Party meeting at a local public library. Among the 12 people at the meeting, she was the youngest.

Members discussed who would open the meeting with a prayer. When it was decided that Joan, who is Catholic, would do it, others joked, "Don't do a Hail Mary, just do a general one." After giving thanks to God, she ended the prayer with: "Help guide our decisions to preserve our freedom and liberty." It turned out that it was Christine who guided the decisions that evening but not without the full participation of everyone else present.

As president, Christine stood in front of the room and moved through the agenda, which focused on a voter guide. The group had put together a questionnaire for Republicans running for statewide office in the upcoming primary. They wanted to know who stood most resolutely in support of their Tea Party principles. Christine handed out a print copy of the candidates' answers but also projected them on a screen in a web format that had links for more information about each politician. Christine told the group: "They're

my opinions, tell me if you disagree." People began to pipe up with their feedback and discuss the candidates.

The guide included questions they had posed to candidates on a variety of topics, including public employee unions, particularly teachers' unions. All the candidates were opposed. This was no surprise to the attendees and was what the Caldwell County Tea Party had wanted to hear from them.

One member recalled a candidate saying he was a "progressive Republican." Christine responded, "Yes, and he was beat up for that, and I was one of them on Facebook. I said anyone who describes himself as a progressive anything is not for us. He explained it though. I have it on Facebook, let me see if I can pull it up, and I'll get his exact words." She looked at her laptop screen, which was projecting the voting guide, and she scrolled through the candidate page on the group's website. Christine sighed in frustration when she could not pull up the link. "If I had internet I could show you," she said. For some reason, the library's internet was not working as it usually did. Throughout the meeting, she still referred to other online resources, including candidate e-mails, Facebook pages, and websites, as well as the group's online address. She also showed which candidates had the endorsement of other local organizations, such as the Caldwell Republican Club and the Asheville Tea Party Political Action Committee.

Christine ran the meeting by introducing a topic, giving a long explanation, and then opening up the floor for discussion. She talked almost half of the time and was the driving force in the group, but she was not domineering. People would pipe up with jokes about Muslims or Obama—or about both. And many people raised questions about the candidates without having to be called on by Christine.

The Caldwell County Tea Party was hierarchical. Like many Tea Parties, they had several committees, a steering committee, elected leaders, and, in this case, a central and charismatic leader at the top. Yet they were still participatory and grassroots. In fact, Christine had fought against the Republican establishment when she ran for Caldwell County Republican chair a few years earlier. In her candidate statement, she had written: "My plan is simple. I want to win as many Republican seats as possible in 2011 and 2012. I am squarely on the GOP team. I do believe in every word of the 2010 NC GOP Platform. I have listened to Rush Limbaugh since 1988 and have been a registered Republican since I first registered to vote in 1983." She had gone on to say, though, "I've never really felt welcome in the Caldwell County

Republican Party." She believed that the leadership dismissed her enthusiasm for rejuvenating the party, such as her ideas for a vibrant website. She ended her statement with: "The Democrats are organizing. They are coming for our children." To her, it was imperative to rally as many people as possible for conservative politics, and she felt like her local Republican Party was getting in her way.

For Christine, the Tea Party model was different from traditional party politics. On the one hand, it was anti-establishment; on the other hand, it often aligned with the Republican Party. For her and her Tea Party, that meant working with the existing establishment party structure. This complexity and contradiction of working with and against the system played out in the organizational structure of the Caldwell County Tea Party itself. People felt comfortable participating, yet it was also highly structured (like many other Tea Parties). Christine told me that before each meeting, she puts together the agenda on her own, sends an e-mail about the meeting, posts an announcement to Facebook, and preps any materials, as she did with the voter guide. She said she previously used the internet to put questions to members about what the group's priorities should be and to seek feedback about the agenda. "We stopped doing that," she said, since "that's not a time saver." They met up to two times per week. They met that often because "I have so much information to pass on."

Back at the meeting, they spent time dissecting the responses of candidates whom they found were against their principles, but they also directed some of their energy to praising one particular candidate. They were excited that he knew a leader of the Family Research Council and that his son had been featured on public debates protecting the Constitution, especially against big government. "This is why I wish I had the internet," said Christine. "I could show you a clip of this [kid] debating at moot court."

Joan: I would have liked to see some of that debate.
Christine: I'll stick it on your Facebook page.
Joan: Facebook? Just e-mail me!
Christine: Come on, no one e-mails. Use Facebook.

Christine took this opportunity to explain some of their digital inner workings. She asked who had received two e-mail notifications about meetings. A few people raised their hands. Christine continued: "It's because

you're on the [website] page and the e-mail listserv. See this number? [*shows the group the number on their website*]. We have 3,700 people subscribed to our website." She explained how people receive notifications via e-mail if they have subscribed. Someone asked what another number on the site was: "46,000," and Christine explained that it was the number of people who have viewed their web page, which she managed.

Since the primary was looming, toward the end of the meeting, she suggested: "So tell people to go to the Caldwell Republican website or Caldwell Tea Party website, or just write your favorite candidates on a piece of paper and tell them to go vote." As indicated by their high online participation scores and the discussion at the meeting about their internet presence, the membership was generally digitally knowledgeable about many online formats. Eight separate Caldwell County members had administrative access to their website, and four posted regularly. But it was Christine who was the person who focused much of her day on digital labor. Their website, which was based on blogging software, was basic but lively, as it was updated frequently. She also tweeted for the organization.

Facebook, though, was the "grand central hub" of the organization's communication system, as James, a Caldwell County Tea Party member, described: "The Tea Party is kind of Facebook centered. I mean it's like the Tea Party is a Facebook organization almost in this county." He was able to keep up with what was happening with the group when he could not attend meetings, and he appreciated Christine posting things like "'What do you folks think of this?'" He thought that if a post received "10–20 people giving thumbs up, that might influence some decision," but, he added, members needed to be at a meeting to vote.

This group was in the top quartile of digital participation among the groups supporting and opposing labor rights in North Carolina. The Caldwell County Tea Party's active online media presence was not simply the result of spontaneous participation by occasional Tea Party activists. As the group's leader, Christine was a highly skilled unpaid volunteer who devoted over 60 hours per week organizing online and offline. She described her day, which included using a combination of a desktop, a smartphone, and an iPad periodically from 7 A.M. to 11 P.M. Much of that time was devoted to maintaining their Facebook page, their website, and their Twitter feed, as well as to communicating with other Tea Party groups via e-mail. She recognized the amount of work it takes: "It's a big job." She not only devoted the time,

but she had also developed an expertise, as well. For instance, she knew how to schedule many of her social media posts to go out in the mornings, which she knew was a strategic time to maximize the number of people viewing them.

In one way, Christine was an exception to many Tea Party leaders. As we saw with Dee in Chapter 1, they tended to be retired and, therefore, could devote their time to this digital institutional role. In Christine's case, she wasn't retired but had the financial support from her family to do the work and could focus her time on the group's digital presence. Although staffing resources were in-kind rather than paid, labor remained important for digital media engagement for Tea Parties. They had full-time volunteers who often had the personal resources to act like staff members. Volunteer labor produced significant social media participation within these organizations. And this volunteer labor boosted the digital activism gap based on staffing levels. If we count Tea Party groups' systematic and consistent volunteers as staff, hierarchy and staffing levels are even more highly correlated.

In a ranking of groups by digital activist scores, two of the Tea Party groups I studied were in the top five and another ranked sixth.[101] Tea Party members' high levels of digital labor and digital engagement were remarkable for a few reasons. These members defied the common belief that digital activism is the provenance of the young. Embedded in the term "affordance" is that a technology has something new to offer. The assumption is that the new is, well, for the young, and the old is for the old. In terms of organizational years, Tea Party groups were relatively young. They emerged in 2009 at the height of the social media explosion. According to many Tea Party activists, starting a Facebook page was a natural step, as the platform had become open to the public just a few years earlier. As James said, "Our Facebook group . . . that's our membership roll."

We might have expected this to be the case—that newer social and political organizations, like Tea Party groups, would take advantage of these new online affordances more extensively. Some have suggested that older, offline social movement organizations are resistant to digital change.[102] This claim implicitly draws on a classic sociological theory of Arthur Stinchcombe on the relationship between the era of a group's founding and its organizational structure—that groups are imprinted by the era of their founding.[103] Do groups that emerged in the digital era use the internet more and in more participatory ways than older groups? Not really. As I explained in Chapter 1,

counter to the union stereotype as old-school, I found that a group's era of founding generally did not shape its internet use over the long term. Half of the organizations in this study emerged in the pre-digital era, before the launch of the web. A few more of these newer groups launched in the social media era than in the web era.[104] Organizations that were founded in the digital era did not have higher digital activism scores, on average, than groups that were formed before the public launch of the internet browser in 1995 or the acceleration of social media in 2006. Digital era groups were not more likely to use the internet for their organizing.[105] All but one of the 17 groups founded before the web era were, indeed, more hierarchical. Of those founded in both the web and social media eras, the groups were equally split between groups that were more hierarchical and those that were less so.[106]

Perhaps digital engagement is not a question of organizational age but of human age. Internet use among youth is consistently higher than those from older age groups.[107] And scholars have suggested that people, implicitly older people, who do have experience with traditional social movement organizations are less likely to be digital activists.[108] I found the opposite. These senior citizen digital warriors in Tea Party groups were not only older in age, but many had also been involved in Republican Party or other organizational politics. Certainly, many activists from a variety of groups did talk about how younger members spent more time online than older members, but two key findings suggest that the association of youth with digital engagement did not hold here. First, the Patriot groups tended to have relatively high digital activism scores but also typically involved mostly members who were senior citizens. Second, the one organization whose members were almost all younger than 25, SAW, had average-to-low digital activism scores. The digital activism in this study defied Stinchcombe's theory that organizations are imprinted with the era of their founding.

What is also remarkable, though, is that the Tea Party groups sustained their participation well beyond their initial mobilization efforts. Horizontal and leaderless movements that made headline news around the world, such as Occupy Wall Street, spawned other movements and even electoral victories, but they generally could not sustain themselves.[109] Many Tea Party groups, though, did, years after their founding around 2009. They built the organizational structures to do so and, certainly, they had help. Nevertheless, Christine was quick to tell me: "We are all stretched a bit thin. Most of us are retired or unemployed. Everyone says that we have the Koch brothers

on our side, but I don't even know who they are. Give me their number. This is just a boogeyman from the left."

Still, while they may not have always received funding directly from the Koch brothers or Art Pope—a North Carolinian who was the source of big money going into conservative state politics—many attended trainings and events from Civitas and other conservative groups, like Moore TEA from Chapter 1. They benefited from other groups' bureaucracies. These groups also had a strong network supported by these hierarchical institutions, even while every Tea Party site was unique, organic, and expended substantial digital labor of their own accord.

This work that the Caldwell County Tea Party put into their voting guide and the elections, both digital and otherwise, paid off. Unlike SAW's request at their speak-out for people to post on social media, the Tea Party's internet voting guide generated a lively online conversation because they had the capacity to do so—both in terms of resources and infrastructure. This work also set the stage for the upcoming statewide elections in 2012. Together, the meteoric rise of this wave of groups had turned state politics upside down. And yet, things were not moving as fast as the new conservative forces would have liked.

By the middle of that year, the teachers' union could still deduct dues from teachers' paychecks, and university employees were still protected under state law. The General Assembly hadn't passed SB 575. Groups on both sides of the issue were eyeing the upcoming election to see if the tide would be turned in their favor.

But the political right seemed to be more frustrated than the left at the slow progress in passing their agenda, and so conservative groups, like the Caldwell County Tea Party and Civitas, began mustering their digital forces for the coming election, which would prove to be even more transformational than the last one.

Chapter Three

The Right's Digital Evangelism and Its Boots on the Ground

MOREHEAD CITY SITS ALONG THE southeast coast of North Carolina, a small community known for its fishing, minor-league Marlins baseball team, pristine beaches, and a growing population of retirees. Getting there from Raleigh is a 2.5-hour drive that takes one through the state's sparsely populated barbecue country, around gigantic hog farms that have transformed the region's look (and smell), across the stunning Croatan National Forest with its pine trees and bogs, until one finally arrives at this city of 8,000.

About a five-minute drive from Morehead City's downtown, three retirees sat down for lunch at their favorite spot, Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits. While visitors to Morehead City might feel they had tumbled into a world far removed from the rest of the state, one of the men, a retired nuclear chemist, said he knew of a place that was much more out of touch.

"One of the most isolated places in the world, and I've been there, is a university," said Ken, "All you do is talk to your friends, and your friends are the same ones who think the same way you do. . . . They only talk to people who make themselves feel comfortable."

Ken was sitting with Verne and Bob. The three retirees and friends also happened to be leaders of the Crystal Coast Tea Party Patriots (CCTPP).

"Sounds like DC," Verne quipped.

"In a bubble," added Bob.

"You always hear on the news that Congress is out of touch," Ken continued. "They never go home and talk to their people. . . . So, how can you make intelligent decisions without doing that? So that's my philosophy."

Ken had worked for the federal government for 30 years in both the military and the Department of Energy. "As a scientist, I believe you got to look at both sides to make an intelligent decision. If you want to make stupid decisions, that's easy," he added. "But if you want to make informed decisions, you have to read what this side says and what this other side says. You have to also seek what the facts are and not what the feelings are."

This viewpoint, the three white men agreed, drove their digital activism.

As the person responsible for promoting the group's lively Facebook page and Twitter feed, Ken worked tirelessly to distribute information. While he wrote posts himself, many others were retweets or links to stories from news outlets, such as the *Carolina Journal,* a statewide conservative newspaper run by the North Carolina John Locke Foundation, or *Breitbart News,* a national right-wing news outlet.[1]

I was interested in learning more from activists like Ken, Verne, and Bob since I had noticed their active online presence. They seemed to defy the stereotype of the digital activist. Most of the early hype around digital activism focused on protest movements of the left. Right-leaning movements' digital activity was given little attention in the media, even dubbed "Astroturf."[2] Even after Trump's election in 2016, a common assumption was that conservatives had been duped by fake news or Russian hackers. A few years earlier, though, I was finding a broad spectrum of active right-wing online activity—some sensationalized, but much measured and analytical. I was curious how the CCTPP's political ideology might factor into what they did online. I had already found that social class and organizational structure shaped online activism. Both of these capacity factors had challenged the pluralist view of the internet—not every type of social movement group is online at equal rates. But were right-wing and left-wing groups using digital technology equally?

Ken's statement about academia and left-leaning politics was right in some ways. Scholars tend to lean further left.[3] And, when I set out to do this research in 2011, few academics had examined conservative movements' digital use for public activism. In fact, most research on social movements focuses on progressive causes. Some had analyzed underground far-right groups' internet activity, especially online discussion forums. Since then, a

handful of studies have compared left and right populist movements online.[4] But the vast majority of digital activist research has focused on left-wing movements.

As a result, the exact role of political ideology within digital activism has been a puzzle. Yet, three general arguments have emerged. First, many have connected digital activity with left-wing protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street both because of egalitarian associations with internet use and because these types of movements are usually the object of study.[5] The second line of thinking is that ideology is less relevant to digital activism because online participation comes from individual experiences rather than organizational dogma.[6] The third argument is that political ideology's role in digital activism hinges on the broader context—when a group is the "out-party," they use it more.[7] A possible fourth argument—that conservatives dominate digital spaces—was not yet on the radar. Trump and the debate about the influence of even more sophisticated tools like bots and clickbait would come later.

So where do right-wing groups fit into these arguments? I originally chose to conduct this research in North Carolina because it had a wide variety of conservative groups compared to places like my home base in Berkeley. Studying the relationship between digital activism and the politics surrounding collective bargaining rights for public employees was a way to cast a wide net to include, hopefully, a wide range of groups on all sides of the debate. Indeed, these components in the U.S. South generated a broad political spectrum of groups organizing around this issue, from the far left to the far right and those in between. But it was this very ideological divide that helped explain why Ken and his friends with the CCTPP were some of the most prolific users of digital technology.

Using the digital activism scores that comprised how much they and others interacted with a group's online platforms, the CCTPP ranked fourth among the 34 groups involved in this labor issue. On average, Tea Parties had higher scores than their left-wing grassroots counterparts.[8] The CCTPP's high level of internet use was common among conservatives. The top five groups on the digital activism index were right-wing. Conservatives had more complex websites that were more often updated, as well as a higher number of Facebook comments and tweets per day than progressive groups. Eighty-two percent of right-wing organizations had Twitter accounts compared to 65 percent of left-wing groups, boasting a greater number of tweets,

Twitter mentions, and a higher overall Twitter score. In general, they were more likely to set up online platforms and update them regularly. Conservatives dominate the digital activism score even more when we throw in the additional factor of a group's political strategy—whether a group was reformist or radical. The gap then widens considerably between reformist right-wing groups with high digital activism levels and radical left-wing groups with low digital activism levels.[9]

I'll come back to this distinction regarding strategy later in this chapter, as it highlights the complexity of my research. It's clear that most right-wing groups in my study were using the internet more than left-wing groups. Can this be explained by only one of the three factors I am examining: class, organization, or ideology? The answer, of course, is no. Rather, what I began to see is that several of these factors, when combined, would amplify the effect of the others. These factors build on each other and further widen the digital activism gap.

Quantitatively, when a group's ideology was paired with these other elements, the ideological difference increased and had more dramatic statistical effects. In other words, a conservative ideology strengthens, not replaces, the other structural factors. For example, privileged right-wing groups have substantially higher digital activism scores than left-wing working-class groups.[10] Notably, class composition and ideology were highly correlated: all the working-class groups were left, so certainly class differences drove the ideological gap, as well. However, ideology exacerbated these differences. Not only were the most digitally active groups conservative, they also had members who were from a middle / upper-class background and an organizational structure that was hierarchical.

I also found that the common view of left-wing horizontal groups as being associated with high internet use did not fit the mold. It was the opposite. Right-wing groups that were more hierarchical in their decision-making structure were the top users of the internet.[11] Hierarchy and ideology complemented each other to produce this difference. Conservative hierarchical groups had the infrastructure *and* political motivation to use the internet.

Ideology, therefore, was an additional mechanism underlying a group's use of internet technologies. Even apart from the factors of hierarchy and class privilege, these right-wing groups were invested in digital engagement. Yet this embrace of digital media by right-wing groups seemed to go almost wholly unnoticed outside their immediate circles at the time. The popular

perception of internet use, fed by the media's focus on the use of technology by left-wing protest movements, had people looking in one direction while a wave was cresting from just outside their field of vision.

Interestingly, it was not just outsiders who were mesmerized by the left's digital media use. Right-wing activists themselves were not always aware of the extent of their conservative digital ecosystem. Their perceptions of the left's dominance in traditional news media and electoral digital campaigning were often projected onto an overall left-wing digital advantage. But they were not naive. For instance, one North Carolina conservative think tank staffer, who had a pulse on social media, praised the infrastructure of the Obama election team that gave the left, he believed, an overall "liberal advantage in social media."[12] But, he was also well aware of a sleeper ecosystem: "There's certainly enough people in conservative social media that there's a lot of interaction going on, and a lot of information being exchanged."

He was right. A well-organized and resourced digital movement on the right had been growing in North Carolina. Grassroots conservative groups had received some attention because of the elections in 2010, but they were generally not on the digital activism radars of pundits or the liberal public. While Tea Parties were the focus of the far-right grassroots conservative movement, that was not the whole story in North Carolina. A much broader array of conservative groups was active, including those who opposed collective bargaining rights for public employees. Tea Parties were just the tip of a vast conservative iceberg. The depth and breadth of this digital juggernaut would not become popularly acknowledged until well after statewide elections in 2012 that sent the state careening further to the right than it had been in decades.

This chapter puts the 2012 elections and the progression of the collective bargaining bill on hold, in order to pull back the curtains and see what was happening behind the scenes with these right-wing groups and their social media use.

What Is Ideology?

Before further examining the puzzle of conservative online activism, it's important to clearly state what I mean by "ideology" in this context. After I had identified all the groups that had taken a stand on the issue of public

employee collective bargaining in North Carolina, I categorized each one based on their support for (left) or opposition to (right) the issue. Out of 34 total groups, 17 happened to fall on the left side and 17 on the right. Left-leaning groups included student, labor, civil rights, and other progressive organizations. Those who were right-leaning included professional advocacy groups, such as think tanks and pro-business associations. Also on the conservative side were grassroots Patriot groups, such as those in the Tea Party movement. The term "Patriot," often used by group members to describe themselves, is part of the far-right populist movement.[13]

This basic distinction created the boundaries for the ideological digital activism gap. But to understand how and why this difference was happening, I wanted to go deeper in my definition. In the American context, ideology is commonly classified as that of Democrat versus Republican or liberal versus conservative. While these terms are useful for a first layer of analysis, they fail to get at the more profound meaning of ideology. In this study, the grouping of organizations into left and right generally mapped onto electoral politics, but that was not always the case. For instance, one public sector labor union supported a Republican candidate for governor.[14] However, the more time I spent with these political, labor, and social movement groups offline, and the more I observed what they were posting online, I came to understand that ideology was deeper than any issue, candidate, or party.

Theorist Antonio Gramsci had observed in Italy almost a century earlier that ideology was, indeed, more than ideas.[15] A predominant view in his time was that ideas were thrown about in the less important cultural or "superstructural" realm while the economic or "structural" domain was what really mattered. But he was critical of this claim that "structures" simply drive ideology.[16] Applying a Gramscian lens to what I was finding, ideology was more than mere ideas or just economic structures. It was a recipe comprising intellectual thought, social movement groups (or more broadly institutions), and group members' everyday practices or what Gramsci called "praxis."[17] Broader economic and political forces were still a part of this equation in North Carolina but were embedded in these three ways that ideology was produced. In this way, ideology is not rigid or static, but rather the linkage of *ideas, institutions,* and *practices* evolving and shifting with time and context.[18] In fact, some have suggested that rather than political ideas leading to activism, cultural practices themselves further drive participation in ideologically driven political work.[19]

But in North Carolina, how can one account for these three ideological factors (ideas, institutions, and practices) and their impact on digital participation? Let's start with the basic difference in *ideas* between left-wing and right-wing groups.[20]

Ideas: Fairness versus Freedom

Unions and their supporters gathered in front of the General Assembly building in Raleigh on a sunny day in February 2011. Dressed in light jackets with union buttons and caps, activists that day included members of the HOPE Coalition, Black Workers for Justice, UE 150, the NC-AFL-CIO, and other groups representing low-paid sanitation, mental health, and other state workers. Rev. William J. Barber, the radical preacher from Wayne County and the president of the NC-NAACP, called for an equitable "People's Budget" that would require the wealthy and corporations to pay their "fair share" because the "pain is uneven."

The crowd cheered each successive speaker with "Amens" and cries of "People's Budget, People's Budget!" Across the street, counter-protesters chanted, "USA! USA! USA!"

"There are those who may try to shout us down," said Barber, eyeing the Patriot groups on the other side of the street. Then, with his voice rising, he said:

> Even in the state of North Carolina, our Constitution tells us . . . we hold these truths to be self-evident that all persons are created equal. . . . If our friends have a problem with us, they have a problem with the Constitution. . . . If our friends have a problem with people being paid right and people treated right, they have a problem with God almighty. . . . Collective bargaining will not hurt North Carolina. It will lift North Carolina. . . . Having a living wage will not hurt North Carolina. . . . A people's budget will not hurt North Carolina. It will lift North Carolina. . . . Will someone help me lift North Carolina? Lift up justice! Lift up righteousness! Lift up America!

Cheers erupted from the crowd.

"We're standing here united, and we're not going anywhere," Barber continued.

The crowd started chanting "Workers' rights are human rights!" as they held signs that read "Tax the Corporations and the Rich" and "Defense of the Public Sector is a Safety-Net for Human Rights."

Barber told the crowd in his rousing voice, "We *collectively* serve the state, we *collectively* sacrifice for the state, but we cannot *collectively* bargain with the state."

They had gathered that day as part of the nationwide movement to support Wisconsin public employees who had occupied their own statehouse in protest of restrictions on collective bargaining. Most of the speeches by the North Carolina labor leaders that day focused on the southern battle to attain these labor rights. Barber and others targeted repeal of GS 95–98 that prohibits contract negotiations in the public sector. The statewide election the following year, in 2012, could seal the fate of the collective bargaining ban, but to understand the ideological differences in *ideas,* it's useful to step back to see how labor supporters and opponents faced off that day.

The message of the union and the NC-NAACP crowd was fairness. To them, fairness meant a negotiated union contract with equitable wages and a mechanism to prevent discriminatory firings or harassment. According to the message that day, the rich shouldn't prosper off the backs of workers. To get there, these ideas of equality went hand in hand with the political practices of organizing an inclusive movement, bringing together a diverse group of people and a broad variety of ideas. As I will show in Chapter 4, the left's lower levels of digital engagement reflected that ideology. During the time of my research, the NC-NAACP had about average digital engagement, much lower than four Tea Parties. And the HOPE Coalition, the group that was spearheading the repeal, had one of the lowest levels in the entire political arena of groups supporting or opposing these labor rights.

Across the street from the pro-labor rally were conservative activists like David, who was videotaping the event. Afterward, he wrote on the far-right NC Renegade website about the day's events, "You can hear the counter protesters in the background of [Rev. Barber's] speech voicing their opposition to an assault on our freedom. His quote 'we collectively serve the state' clearly shows his goal for a communist/socialist state where our money is allocated."

David, a Patriot activist and avid social media user, feared that these types of pro-labor protests were part of a "Jasmine Revolution," a term he used for events such as the Arab Spring. He worried that the NC-NAACP and labor unions were part of this effort to redistribute wealth, which pro-labor pro-

testers simply called fairness. David called it an attack on freedom in a post on the NC Renegade website: "It is another means to siphon off money and resources from our economy to support corruption and intimidation."

David not only wrote and posted articles to the site, but he was also a frequent tweeter for his group. He did not hide behind a screen. He had gone to the protest and videotaped the event. David was a big advocate of a free flow of unrestricted information, even posting online unedited versions of the day's pro-labor speeches, including Barber's. He accompanied the videos with the note, "You can decide for yourself whether the issue is collective bargaining or the beginnings of bottom-up terrorism."

Also at the counter-protest that day was Randy, an activist involved in many Patriot groups, including NC Freedom. He proudly told me that he had made his sign for the counter-protest on his own; it wasn't a machine-made sign that someone had handed to him. He said, "My wife says call them rallies, not protests—well, I'm protesting, right?" With a grin, he added, "She's trying to get me politically correct. It ain't gonna happen." Randy's independent spirit was not limited to his personal relationships. It also played out in his political ones. He emphasized that his political ideas were individualist and that he would not blindly follow a collective, like a union. Admitting that the words on the poster were "smart-aleck," his homemade sign read, "The South Whips the Union. Millions Freed." Pro-labor activists failed to find it funny, as they viewed it as a reference to slaves being whipped. According to Randy, unions were outsiders, just like the Union Army in the Civil War, and they needed to be kept out of the state to free southerners to do as they please. Otherwise, "You're taking choice away." This was a common theme from Patriot groups. As Randy explained, he never saw "any good outcome from . . . northern aggression. When they took states' rights away, the federal government became our dictator."

Standing next to Randy at the protest was Joe, who was dressed in a black leather jacket with flag and military patches. He was using a megaphone to help generate the chants. But Joe later told me that their movement had something better than a megaphone.

Joe was the Patriot from the Introduction who had quipped about conservative digital activism, "Paul Revere had a horse. We have the internet." This was a reference to the cry that Paul Revere was (mistakenly) said to have made in 1775 as he rode on his horse warning colonial residents that the British Army was approaching.

Like Randy and David, Joe was another grassroots conservative activist in the state and head of the Moccasin Creek Minutemen (MCMM). The three white men were leaders of different Patriot groups. They were not Tea Party members, yet they were all still part of a vast grassroots digital ecosystem, along with the CCTPP. They varied in the extent and type of their digital use, but they were all passionate about how the internet was critical to their political work, something that I did not find with the left-wing groups. To unearth the root of this digital motivation, I wanted to better understand their political ideas of freedom. I could then make sense of their digital practices within and across these organizations.

In the midst of public employee labor efforts in the form of the HOPE Coalition and other left-wing groups, gaining *collective* rights represented the ideas of *fairness* that the left held sacred.[21] Yet the right-wing movement in North Carolina had been growing to take back their *individual* rights, and keeping public sector union contracts illegal epitomized this idea of *freedom.* Any collective can squash individual liberties and personal choices according to this account: freedom of individual rights trumped fairness of the collective.[22] In the least unionized state in the country, the word "union" was met with derision among conservatives. This view that public sector labor unions stomped on individual freedom emerged in online and printed materials, as well as in conversations. As one conservative activist described these two stances at the protest in a blog post, "One side wants to achieve 'economic and social justice' through redistribution of wealth and power. The other side wants to be left alone to live their lives and prosper in accordance with their industry and ability."

Ideas: The Free Market and Taxed Enough Already

I sat down to chat with Joe and another activist, Mary, after one of their MCMM meetings at a steakhouse in Zebulon, North Carolina. Joe told me that he had worked on a tobacco farm as a young child to afford clothes for school. After he finished high school, his only option, he believed, was the army. Once he got out, he went to work for the railroad. He was frustrated that he was working harder than his unionized co-workers but made the same amount of money as they did. "One of the problems you got with

unions is that your [work] all goes into the same bucket," he told me. He believed that when you privilege the collective, like with unions, it threatens not just the free market but also the freedom of the individual.

"They're being paid these ungodly amounts and benefits, and it's breaking the backs of cities," said Mary. Many conservative activists I spoke with believed that the Reagan years of the 1980s ushered in a golden era of free markets. But the financial crisis of 2008 bolstered their view of public employee unions as the poster child of what was destroying the free market economy. They were led to believe that public sector workers and their unions were to blame because of their overly generous pensions gained from collective bargaining.

Mary echoed many conservatives' views that unions once had a role in American society, especially back in the day when unions fought against gross injustices, such as child labor. "Even Franklin Roosevelt, communist lover that he was," she said, "he understood you can't do that. So private unions, you got a knit mill or something you wanna unionize, fine. Public sector, no, absolutely not; there's no reasoning for it." Patriots often waxed nostalgic in general about the past, including unions.

"Now you take teachers, policemen, firemen, you know, God bless them," Mary laughingly told me. "I've dated firemen and policemen, love them, love their cute little uniforms. But they're not negotiating against the taxpayers. So who's there? It's this nameless blob of people that have to pay their taxes. We don't have a choice."

Free market advocates like Joe and Mary explained their opposition to collective bargaining in the following way: in any kind of bargaining, both parties must be invested. In the private sector, the employer owns and directs the capital, and workers own their labor, so the worker and employer need to work together to negotiate a contract. In their view, this concept does not apply in the public sector, where the owner (i.e., the individual taxpayer) is not at the bargaining table.

"Public sector unions negotiating, and the politicians, you get this vicious catch-22," Mary continued, as she and Joe became increasingly animated as they talked.

Joe: Well, they're spending somebody else's money.

Mary: Right, they take the taxpayers' money and say, "Sure, you can have all that." Then the unions turn around and raise money and give it to that

politician. He raids our taxes and gives it to the union, they raise money, and give it to the crooked politician.
Joe: You know, it's a vicious cycle.
Mary: It's a cycle.
Joe: You seem to be a very smart young lady at times [referring to me].
Mary: So that's why no, unequivocally, no on public sector unions.
Joe: I was just joking with you, but I wanted to see if you were listening. . . . You know what? You [referring to public workers] work for me. The money you're spending is my money. You wanna be a county commissioner or whatever? You work for me. We are forgetting that.
Mary: Public employee.
Joe: And that money that you're throwing around? It's our money! It doesn't belong to you [referring to public sector unionized workers]! Where did you get it? It comes from us! If you print it, who the hell is gonna pay it back? We are!"

Like Mary and Joe, Patriots often viewed public employee unions as colluding too much with politicians to whom they gave donations, and that the taxpayer was left to foot the bill. As one of the MCMM's first Facebook posts said, "Do you believe in personal property rights; or the rights of the collective?" Powerful labor unions take the free market away from both employees and employers, they believed. Their idea of free markets was the first of their three freedoms they advocated.

Ideas: Freedom from the State and Just Saying No to Big Government

Grassroots Patriot activists were not the only ones championing this view that the free market was threatened by public sector collective bargaining. The *Carolina Journal,* the North Carolina-based outlet that was often a source for Patriot groups' online posts, summed it up this way: "Public sector employee unions should not have an unchecked ability to extract tax dollars from the state budget for their own well-being. . . . At its core, the debate over public sector union power is a debate over the public versus private provision of goods and services."[23]

Conservatives, from Patriot activists to professional advocates, believed that these economic freedoms were being taken away by an invasive "big

government." This term, along with "Washington" and "the establishment" were often used interchangeably to mean "freedom hijackers." What those on the right wanted, they said, was to make their lives better, like they were before, especially before Obama took office.[24] When pressed, they would say that Bush was also responsible, especially for spending on the Iraq War, but many were motivated to get involved politically only after Obama was elected. Their goal was to bring back their government to the republic that the Founding Fathers had intended. It came down to a strong belief in small government and that individual taxpayers needed to keep their money: public employees should not have a contract with the government because "we," the individualized public, are left out of the negotiations, and we own the government, which has taken on a life of its own. A common metaphor was that big government was a drug—as Americans increasingly rely on services like health care, social security, or *public sector union wages,* addiction sets in. People then become dependent on the idea that government has to solve all of their problems.

Joe, from the MCMM, used the image of an all-powerful overseer. "The Founding Fathers realized that government could become so powerful, so big, big government, to enslave its citizens," he said. "And it's happening right before our eyes, and it's starting in kindergarten." He added that "we got so many frickin' rules and regulations and laws, we don't even know what they are, there are so many of them."

The MCMM had posted on Facebook, "Are you afraid of the government? If yes; Slavery is what you and your children belong to." Another post read, "When will you get off your duff and help take this great nation back. Are you scared of government agencies?; Remember Big Government is watching and listening to this post; do you think it's ok?"

Joe explained the effects of what they viewed as a government takeover. With a tone of exasperation in his voice, he said, "This is the greatest country on the face of this earth. I feel we're losing that. I felt for a number of years now, we are losing that. We're losing our patriotism, we're losing our values, we're losing our Constitution. . . . It's the most unbelievable document, other than the Bible, that we've got. It has made us the greatest nation on the face of the earth . . . just like the Romans. What are we doing now? We're turning away from the Constitution, we're turning away from God." He then quipped, "Free sex, I missed that part."

This sense of loss motivated Joe and other Patriots to try and bring back these freedoms: "We're distrustful of our government. . . . Give them an inch, and they'll take the rest."

This is the difference, in their eyes, between a republic, what they believed they lived in, and a democracy, which they associated with the left. A republic, they would emphasize, respects individual freedoms, unlike a democracy. Patriot group leaders often used the term "democracy" with derision and equated it with misguided egalitarianism. Its opposite was individual rights, and they often reprimanded me with a gentle chuckle that the two were very different. This was a key reason why many said they revered the Pledge of Allegiance, which begins "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the *Republic* for which it stands" (emphasis added).

Freedom Fighters

Tea Party groups in other parts of the country have also generated these messages of resentment, fear, and loss.[25] In his research of right-wing movements, sociologist Rory McVeigh called this fear of losing privileges "power devaluation."[26] He argued that conservative movements arise because of people's belief that their power has been devalued. Right-wing activists in North Carolina talked unfailingly about how much better life used to be, especially before Obama's presidency and Obamacare. This belief in the decline of privileges, or "freedoms" to use the word of the people I interviewed, meant that they thought they no longer had as much power—and needed to take back what they'd lost. Other scholars have pointed out that Patriot activists often feel as though someone has stolen their country from them, a feeling bordering on paranoia.[27] With the "Make America Great Again" slogan, Donald Trump capitalized on this sentiment that had been brewing for years before he became a candidate for president.

Unlike left-wing movements that often try to gain privileges, McVeigh pointed out that right-wing movements, from the KKK to the Tea Party, are comprised of people who have already had privileges—or power. To respond to this sense of power loss, they mobilize into social movements because they

do not feel as if "institutionalized channels" are listening. Patriots in North Carolina did not feel like big government was paying attention to them, which included the Republican Party. But as a symbol of this loss, their primary target was Barack Obama. Part of this mourning, scholars have argued, draws from the increasing racial equality that Obama represented. Some white voters felt threatened that a person of color rising to such prominence meant that they were losing power in the process. This went beyond Obama's position on issues, since Obama was arguably the most conservative Democratic candidate in 2008.[28] McVeigh described these freedom-seeking, or power-seeking, movements as having the "goal of preserving, restoring and expanding the rights and privileges of its members and constituents." On the one hand, they were frustrated that the government was ignoring them, yet on the other hand, they wanted that same government to shrink.

In contrast, left-wing groups are "primarily oriented toward winning new rights and privileges for constituents."[29] In other words, left-wing groups wanted the same rights and privileges that those on the right believed they were losing. During the time of my study—which coincided with the rise of right-wing populism—conservative groups were able to unite around what they were *against*.[30] In this case, they were against their freedoms being taken away as others were gaining fairness. Freedom over fairness drove the groups that opposed collective bargaining.

My distinction between freedom and fairness may seem a bit simplistic and linear. Indeed, concepts such as these are messy and fluid. Certainly, people on the left can care about freedom and conservatives about equality. Across the country, Tea Party groups commonly level criticisms of "freeloaders" who are "cutting the line," which could be interpreted as a lack of fairness; but such criticisms are often directed at African Americans and immigrants.[31] Yet some scholars have found egalitarian values among Tea Party groups.[32] And even within the same group, different viewpoints can emerge.[33] Still, the freedom-versus-fairness dichotomy is a common and parsimonious way that many have conceptualized the difference between right and left overall.[34] More importantly, this general distinction emerged from my analysis, rather than my assigning such a divisional definition to these groups before I began to study them.

Even with these overarching freedom ideas that Patriot activists espoused, scholars have suggested that there are many flavors of groups, even within

the Tea Party movement. For instance, Chip Berlet described the diversity of political perspectives—including fiscal conservatives, libertarians, the Christian right, the Patriot movement, and conspiracy theorists. Katherine Blee and Kimberly Creasap even argued that the term "right-wing" should be reserved for racist and violent movements, unlike more straightforward conservatives.[35] Along this line and given the spectacular rise in right-wing movements, much research has justifiably focused on *why* right-wing populist groups have emerged. Scholars recognize a variety of reasons that could all fit into McVeigh's power devaluation framework, yet they tend to focus on either specific economic or cultural shifts.[36]

I was not looking to test these specific origin theories of Tea Party groups per se. What I was seeking was to understand the high levels of digital use among the many types of conservatives that I had studied in North Carolina—all of whom wanted their power—or how they described it, their freedom, back. Yet both the economic and cultural explanations for conservative populism did help me make sense of what I was finding: that both factors matter—and are related. Like sociologist Arlie Hochschild, and others who have spent a substantial time on-the-ground researching these movements, I found a deep connection between material and symbolic explanations, rather than just one or the other.[37] We often want to find one reason to explain why something happened. Countless articles, in both the media and academia, have tried to explain why Trump won, for instance. To find the silver bullet somehow might make it easier to understand. But the 2008 financial crisis was not the only rationale for the rise of the Patriot movement, nor for its high levels of internet use. Therefore, the right's dramatic rise was due to more than economic reasons, such as their belief that they were losing the free market to greater government intervention. And while many Patriot activists I spoke with bent over backward to try to show me that they weren't racist, their all-white movement centered on the ousting of an African American president, and memes posted were occasionally what Blee and Creasap called "cloaked" in racism.[38] Yet I also found a related key explanation. Patriots felt as if they had lost another freedom: they no longer saw themselves—or their issues—reflected in the news media. And this, it turns out, was a key freedom idea that was the gateway to high levels of internet use.

Ideas: Freedom of Information and News Media Nostalgia

We were talking in Jon's office at the John Locke Foundation in a discrete tan building in downtown Raleigh. The John Locke Foundation owned and operated the news organization where Jon had served as editor for about a decade.

"I've always been a journalism skeptic, even though I've been one since '72," said Jon, a white man dressed in sharp business casual. An editor of the right-leaning news outlet, the *Carolina Journal,* Jon had not always been conservative and had even been a mainstream journalist for over 30 years.

After growing up in a military family, he went to college in his Georgia hometown. As a sociology major, Jon had to do a community power study of a small town. While working on this project, which involved interviewing people, taking pictures, and writing about it, he realized not only that he loved the work, but that it was also basically journalism. Switching schools and majors, he ended up with a degree in journalism from the University of Georgia.

Meanwhile, he was in and out of the air force but was still immersed in the leftist activism that surrounded him in the late 1960s. "Back then, everybody was liberal because it was the Nixon years," Jon said. But he remained a skeptic about what he considered extreme and sometimes "stupid" leftist responses, such as a women's rights protest against a curfew on campus. He would nevertheless sometimes tag along and take photos of such events. His college roommate became a Students for a Democratic Society leader, and Jon said he found him one night soon after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in a friend's "hippy house" stuffing "T-shirt rags into Coke bottles filled with gasoline [*laughs*]. So I said, 'Bill, what the hell are you doing?' He said, 'I'm gonna create diversionary tactics for the Black Revolution.' I mean you couldn't ask for a week that was more strange."

Jon described these events as an outsider, as a journalist might, as if he was never really in the midst of them. "I thought these people were just out of their minds." He volunteered with the liberal "anti-establishment" and "anti-government" McCarthy campaign in Washington for a short stint, but then he returned to his air force base the next week. He eventually went into a PhD program in political science at Duke University but dropped out to work at a newspaper. He later served as press secretary for Alabama governor Fob James when he was still a Democrat.

Jon eventually became managing editor of the *Herald-Sun,* the daily newspaper in Durham, North Carolina. He had been a Democrat for years, but after he visited Russia in 1990, he said that he returned a "radical for capitalism." He then began to notice what he perceived as a liberal predisposition at his own newspaper. "That was about the time I started reading our paper with a different eye and saying, 'We do have a lot of bias in this thing.'" He didn't like how his colleagues mocked conservatives in the newsroom. "I'm advocating evenhandedness and all of a sudden, I was a right-wing zealot in the newsroom. That opened my eyes a lot." He began writing a column that would point out this perceived bias, such as the newspaper labeling a local right-wing civic group as conservative but not adding a liberal moniker to a left-wing group. "And that's the kind of thing that happens all the time in the media, and it's even worse now. I mean it's much worse now."

He felt that he was outnumbered politically, not just at the newspaper but where he lived too. He joked with me that his neighborhood in Durham, home to Duke University, was an enclave of liberal professors. But, he soberly said, "I was ready to get out of mainstream journalism—I just thought it had gotten so corrupt and dishonest." When the Paxton Media Group bought out the *Herald-Sun* in 2004 and fired senior management, including Jon, he saw it as an escape hatch. "As far as a career change, I am so glad they ran me out the door that day because I was not happy anyway. I had sorta gotten alienated."

I asked Jon what had happened more broadly in journalism, aside from his personal transformation into a conservative, as many southern Democrats were becoming Republican at the same time. He said that the watershed moment was Watergate. "Since that time, newspapers have gotten in bed with government. They weren't back then. I mean they may have still been all liberals, you know, because I was at the time," said Jon as he harkened back to when he believed journalism was better. "But still, government was still the bad guy. They were dangerous because they have cohesive power, and they can take your stuff and kill you legally, and people were afraid of government. Now it's just absurd how the media . . . and I'm talking about national media too—they defend government . . . and it's really dangerous because if you look at the start of journalism, what was its job? It was not to be a lapdog. It was to be a watchdog, and they just don't do that anymore."

Freedom from the Media

Just as the same conservative critics now chide the news media's coverage of President Trump, every Patriot activist I interviewed echoed this sentiment of the news media being part of the establishment.[39] One referred to the mainstream media as the *Lügenpresse* ("lying press"), a Nazi-era smear against anti-Hitler media. And one sign at a Tea Party rally simply said, "Don't Trust the Media."

Ken, of the CCTPP, likened it to Soviet-era propaganda. In a tweet, he said, "R U old enough 2 remember TASS the Soviet news agency? Now we have MSNBC, NBC, CBS, CNN, & PBS. Time 4 a change #tcot #ocra #teaparty." My interviewees often lumped "big government" in with "big media." They viewed the corporate and public news networks as simply arms of the same Washington establishment. Too much was at stake. "Whether you are liberal or conservative," said Ken. "[You] make so many decisions without knowledge about what [you] are making decisions on." The source for that knowledge, Ken believed, did not come from traditional news media, at least like it used to.

This was a frequent complaint—the news media used to be great and no longer was. This nostalgia often emanated from the grassroots conservative trenches. Randy of NC Freedom asked, "What happened to the good old journalists where they had a wrinkled shirt, and they'd go right in somebody's face and get the truth, or get in trouble, take a chance? . . . I don't see that anymore."

Randy recalled being glued to CNN, the 24-hour news network, in its early days during the Gulf War. But he thought a change had happened in news coverage during the Obama administration, "when I started noticing, wow, this thing is getting biased." While he considered most news outlets to be too liberal, he mused that at least Fox News, the notorious conservative news outlet, has "two sides to each story." But Randy had decided recently to disconnect from cable TV because "we don't even have journalists anymore." Even Fox, he said, especially Bill O'Reilly, was "just conservative entertainment—that's all that is anymore."

Randy still went online to get news from Fox, CNN, and MSNBC, just so he would know what everyone else was saying. He also read his local Chatham County newspaper and sometimes listened to Rush Limbaugh, but he insisted that it was only for entertainment. He told me quietly, "And I do have other news sources that I won't discuss."

Patriot leaders like Randy talked about consuming news content every day from a variety of sources. In fact, in contrast to progressives I interviewed, conservatives often said that they read and watched more than just news outlets that aligned with their beliefs. Still, Patriot activists always mentioned conservative media as part of their news diet, but it was never a simple solution, in their view. They constantly monitored the media to analyze how they were covering the news; even Fox did not escape their scrutiny. One activist said, "I prefer Fox, but they are not foolproof."

Despite these critiques, Randy did not hesitate to try to get mainstream coverage of their political events. "If there's something I feel passionate about, I'll go down to WRAL [an NBC-affiliated TV station in Raleigh]. . . . I like to go and introduce myself," he said, as he explained how he worked to develop relationships with reporters. "And that's kind of important because reporters can tell, 'Hey, this person is crazy' or 'This person is legitimate.' . . . Sometimes . . . they'll put something on because it's a slow news day, and I get that once in a while."

However, Randy believed that it was only because he was a conservative that he had to go down to news stations himself, unlike "liberals [who] have mass media on their side . . . and that's where I think that we're at a disadvantage. We have to work a lot harder." He was particularly frustrated with the lack of coverage when the Tea Party movement first emerged. Although he insisted he was not a formal Tea Party member, he had done coalition work with them as part of his work with NC Freedom and other groups. He recalled the first Tea Party event in Raleigh: "We had over 3,000 people there, which is a lot, now for Raleigh . . . and not one media outlet showed up, not one—it wasn't even in the newspaper." I asked him if the Raleigh *News & Observer* or any of the local TV stations had sent reporters. "None," he told me. To add further insult to injury from Randy's viewpoint, it was only after liberal politicians started criticizing the Tea Party that an ABC news affiliate finally showed up with a helicopter and realized that a massive amount of people were gathered. With bitterness in his voice, he said, "It was our opponents that finally got us the media."

Yet he also felt ambushed by journalists. Randy told me that a reporter once accused him of being a paid activist. He was furious at the implication. "If I see something that's wrong or a lie, that's gonna cause damage to our society or anyone, I jump on it like a heartbeat. . . . Is somebody giving

me money to do this and that? Absolutely not." Like many Patriot group activists, he felt misunderstood and misrepresented in the media.

"They took it out of context," David told me, referring to news reports of a comment he had made at a public event. The NC Renegade leader was quoted as saying that the best place to advertise for the Tea Party was at a gun store.[40] David allowed me to record his interview but repeatedly asked me to turn the recording off (which I did) when he wanted to tell me information he considered sensitive. David believed he had been burned too often by the media misquoting him and distorting his movement.

"We're not a bunch of damn rednecks wanting to carry guns," said Joe, the MCMM activist, with a chuckle. Patriots simultaneously despised the news media for calling them "redneck" yet also embraced this term themselves as a form of self-identity.[41] At one MCMM meeting, a preacher, the guest speaker that night, said with a smile on his face, "They may call you redneck, may call me redneck, but I'll tell you what: rednecks are kind people, not stuck-up, and love their country. I've seen that other crowd," referring to the political left.

From their reading of the news media's script, Patriots often embellished the redneck part they played. During a CCTPP meeting, Bob thanked a Republican candidate for coming to their meeting and "facing the angry mob that is the Tea Party." A woman in the audience quietly quipped that yes, indeed, they were "racists and gun-carrying." Her husband added "religious, constitutional, and conservative." They were smiling the whole time, and then the woman quickly added that they were being sarcastic. Still, it irked them that the news media often painted the Tea Party based on what just a handful of people might say on an issue. Bob had earlier complained, "You get one or two or three people who talk like that, and the media just goes boom! The whole Tea Party is painted with that."

The redneck, or paid-activist, stereotype was often a trigger for a broader conversation I had with Patriot activists about the media. But it was more than their identities that Patriot activists believed were mocked or misconstrued in the media. It was the very economic and political freedoms they held so dear. Patriot activists believed that the mainstream media often distorted them, what they did, and what they believed in, ultimately failing to represent their reality. In their eyes, the liberally biased news media was either covering them inaccurately or not at all.[42] Their freedom of speech, or what they more often called *information,* had been silenced by an increasingly hos-

tile news media. At the same time, research has shown that the news media framed them positively more often than negatively.[43] But whether or not media portrayals are accurate is missing the broader point. What is key was their *perception.* For instance, Jon perceived the *Herald-Sun* as liberal, while many recognized it as the more conservative among the rival papers in the area.

As a result of this frustration with the traditional news media, Patriots believed that this institutional channel was slipping out of their control. In contrast, they felt empowered by new digital media.[44] Information was therefore the third part of the freedom engine that drove online participation. In the eyes of these North Carolina activists, they had little freedom of speech in the liberal media because it failed to report threats to freedom and stereotyped them in the process. The news media used to cover issues and perspectives that were important to them but no longer did. Just as free markets and freedom from the state had flourished in the past, so had the news media, according to this account. They used to have freedom of information, they thought, but even that had been taken away. It is in this context that we can begin to understand the high levels of digital engagement among right-wing groups. If they did not have freedom of speech in the traditional media, they needed to take things into their own hands.

Freedom Practices: Truth Tellers

If conservative activists believed that their freedoms had been chipped away—free markets, freedom from the state, and freedom of information—what did they *do* about these ideas? Patriot groups viewed their core mission as getting "the Truth" out. Their tactics varied, much like those on the left, but what distinguished groups on the right was an enthusiasm to tell people the Truth in the face of what they considered biased, or what many (most famously Trump) have subsequently called fake news. I capitalize the "T" in "Truth" in this context to try and convey the reverence that conservatives bestowed upon the word. Truth was their rallying cry. Truth, Patriots believed, was not coming from big government nor the mainstream media. It needed to come from them.

Joe, the leader of the MCMM, said to me after one of their meetings, "And we're gonna sit down, and we're gonna educate you . . . and we're gonna

convert you—not to a Republican, but you're gonna be a conservative. And we're gonna have you say an Amen before it's over with."

I often heard this religious conversion overtone in how these groups talked about spreading information, just like spreading the Word of God. They were evangelists for their Truth. Joe told me what his main task was: "I fight for liberty and Truth." I'm borrowing the term "evangelist" from Christianity as a way to describe someone who tries to convert a non-Christian into a believer. Evangelism evokes two key aspects of what these groups were doing: telling someone—that is, passing on information—as well as trying to tell someone "the Truth," which is another common Christian term. The Truth is often used as another term for the "Good Word" of the Bible. Over and over, Patriot respondents used the word "Truth" to describe their principles of freedom. As one told me, "We need to know the Truth—that's one thing I try to do—find out the Truth and tell others."

When I accompanied some Tea Party activists to lobby state legislators, we first met in a parking lot, where one leader carefully handed me a button to wear with their logo and a copy of the Constitution. She quipped with a wry smile, "I assume you don't have a copy of this." Conservative groups often handed me reprints of American revolutionary-era documents, such as the American Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or writings by the Founding Fathers. These documents, similar to the Bible for evangelical Christians, represented the Truth to members of these organizations and provided them with a clear guidepost of right and wrong. The Truth was in these documents, and there was no debate about the content, in their eyes.

If I asked a question about their ideological beliefs, Patriots often suggested I read various books that they would then recommend to me. I often heard a gentle laugh if I didn't know a conservative reference or some concept that was essential to their ideology. But they would persist in trying to educate me, so I would know the Truth. Patriot interviewees spoke passionately about their view of American history, which held the key to their ideas of liberty and freedom. They were happy to talk at length about why their political views were correct.

During an interview with Randy, he confided in me that his activism was inspired by God. He said that he always aimed to glorify Christ in his activism. At the end of the interview, he said he was disappointed that he had not converted me. With the mixing of religion and politics, I was not so sure which one he meant.

Patriot activists and professional advocates used a variety of methods to get their Truth out to as many people as possible. Their aim was to provide information that would help others to learn about, organize for, and defend their liberty. From movies at weekly meetings and community radio announcements to one-on-one discussions and printed documents, Patriot groups had a number of communication strategies to share their Truth. But one tool especially lit up their eyes: the internet.

Informationalizing the Truth

Motivated to share the Truth, conservatives I interviewed believed that the internet could bypass all types of mainstream media. In contrast, those on the left did not share this same level of internet enthusiasm. As an alternative to what conservatives viewed as biased and liberal media, digital technology was an ideal method of direct information dissemination of their Truth. They were *digital evangelizers.* Conservative digital practices were unequivocally focused on information. Content from right-leaning groups was often about national politics and memes while left-leaning content was more likely to be about group events or photos of themselves.

The type of information that right-wing groups posted online mirrored their ideas around getting their Truth out. On social media, conservative think tank and advocacy groups like Civitas or the *Carolina Journal* would usually post links to articles or content from their own sites. Grassroots Patriot groups, like Preppers and Tea Parties, often posted links from these North Carolina sources or from national news outlets like *Breitbart News* or the *Drudge Report.* As a result, much of the conservative content was mediated. They posted, on average, a higher proportion of links to articles or videos (78%) on Facebook as compared to groups on the left (68%).

A research team and I coded these articles, videos, or other links for whether the linked story took a stand on a contentious political issue as opposed to, for instance, a human-interest story or a straight news event. Some might now call such debatable content fake news, but the coding of these articles occurred before this term emerged. We also did not verify the veracity of the content—simply if the article was more opinion and sensationalistic than sourced and journalistic. Many of the posts were, indeed, about debatable content, often in the form of articles with a right-leaning slant. For right-wing groups, 45 percent

of their links concerned these contentious political issues and opinions, while 34 percent of left-wing groups' links had such content. An even higher percentage, though, came from Patriot groups, with 54 percent of their posts having links to articles or videos featuring these opinionated political issues that were not straight news stories. In other words, the difference between right and left seemed to be attributable to conservative groups sharing information—or *their* Truth—about politics. The themes of the conservative groups' content varied but centered on their perceptions of freedoms being taken away in relation to Obamacare, gun rights, or unions.[45]

If Patriot groups wanted to get their Truth out, what did they want people to do with these posts? And, if conservative groups posted more links to articles, what does that mean for how they viewed this information in relationship to recruiting people to get involved? The two sides of the political spectrum posted content that encouraged people to participate in their respective group activities at the same rate. For both right-wing and left-wing groups, about 20 percent of Facebook posts encouraged participation in the organization—invitations to come to organizational activities—whether face-to-face meetings or other in-person events—or to get involved in online activities.[46] But because they had higher rates of posting in general, particularly posting articles, conservative groups had higher scores overall. In other words, conservative groups had the additional goal of what I'm calling *informationalizing*.

"Informed citizenship" is a relatively recent phenomena in the history of American democratic models of participation, according to Michael Schudson. And this late-19th-century ideal of citizenship only accelerated in the middle of the last century when individuals demanded more public transparency from elites, long before the emergence of the internet.[47] Furthermore, informationalism is a term that Manuel Castells coined to contrast the digital era to that of industrialism—in that the economy now functions based on information, rather than manufacturing. Many Patriot activists emphasized the importance of using the internet to be "informed," so I'm extending this term to the digital activism realm.

Digital Evangelizers

To better understand how digital evangelizers used digital tools to get out Truthful information, I turned to the CCTPP.

"Oorah!" yelled Bob to open up the CCTPP meeting at the Golden Corral restaurant in Morehead City. In the room reserved for their group were small tables filled with about 35 people total, including some retired military personnel from the nearby Cherry Point military base, which explained the Marine Corps greeting. Other attendees included local residents, many of whom were also retirees to the region. In addition, the meeting attracted people vacationing in the coastal area, who had heard about Tea Party meetings from the group's Facebook page, website, or a local radio station. Before the meeting, Bob had set up a table at the entrance to welcome people, as well as to request donations in a clear plastic container with a small American flag taped to it. This setup, which catered mostly to retired conservatives, mirrored other Patriot meetings across the state that I had attended.[48]

After a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance, Bob made introductions and then turned the meeting over to Verne, who was wearing a T-shirt with the words "Tea Party Patriot" on the front and "The Wounded Warrior Project" on the back.[49] He opened up a discussion of "non-Tea Party business," or non-administrative agenda items, which ended up being the bulk of the meeting.

First up to speak were politicians running for local and national office who had come to the meeting to garner support. Candidates' speeches focused on the recurring themes of free markets and less government. One said, "Growth is an engine that can only keep running if we do not take too much money away from county taxpayers." After the candidates pitched their platform, Bob thanked them and then led a discussion of the Republicans who did not show up. One member said of a candidate who was not in attendance: "[He's] a good man, good man of faith, but doesn't have Eastern Carolina values—more like New York, San Francisco, Seattle." This us-versus-them mentality was common at this and other Tea Party events, especially with the "us" being conservative southerners and the "them" liberal northerners. And such distinctions were a key part of their education efforts.

The CCTPP then discussed extensive details of two regional programs that had aggravated the group: windmills and solar panels. Even as he opposed both alternative energy programs, one attendee emphasized, "We all want to make a difference in the environment. We want good, smart, things to come." An emphasis on making educated decisions was a theme throughout the meeting. Bob added with a friendly warning toward the candidates in the room: "A politician's best friend and worst enemy is an informed electorate."

The entire meeting consisted of educating each other by hearing from candidates, discussing pressing political issues, and even analyzing in detail a local budget. Spreading information was fundamental for this and other Patriot meetings I observed. They seemed to have a keen eye for detail with numbers, in-depth arguments, and a healthy skepticism. Yet the razor-sharp focus on their freedoms kept discussions in check. As Verne summarized, "There's more talk of specific candidates this year, but that's because it's an election year. Overall, we spend a lot more effort on issue advocacy and education."

This informationalizing was not limited to meetings or online but was incorporated in other tactics, as well. From handing out leaflets at 4th of July parades and conversations on the street to letters to the editor and political rallies, they saw it as their mission to educate. Bob explained: "Education is primarily what I see the Tea Party as, an education source for the voters."

Bob, who was celebrating his 66th birthday with Verne and Ken back at the Bojangles restaurant, talked about how he found out about the Tea Party. "I read about it in the paper," he said, referring to the local *Carteret News Times,* which had a community section for civic groups like the CCTPP to post free announcements.

Bob brought up what they all described with reverence as the K-Mart Rally, which was the first major Tea Party event in their area. It drew, he said, hundreds of people at a K-Mart parking lot. The following year they were going to have another one, but "corporate headquarters objected to it, so we moved the rally. That hit the papers big time. There were lots of letters to the editor and things like that because corporate was getting involved in something we considered to be a local issue. Well it was in the papers, on the news, on the radio. Lots of people heard about it."

The local radio station was one of the ways that the CCTPP used media to get out information. They reported that they would often call into local radio stations to talk to different hosts. These stations were not explicitly right-leaning but, as Ken explained, "It's local talk radio, so it's going to be conservative. Eastern North Carolina is pretty conservative." They simply did not have the patience for national conservative call-in programs. "Who wants to stay on hold for three hours to say two lines and be interrupted by the host?"

Despite their critiques of traditional news media, Patriot activists were also immersed in it, as it was part of the fabric of their organizing. They

tended to use local and regional media for their activities. National media, though, was both the main object of their criticism and the source for many of their online posts and links. Activists who were vocal about their critiques of the mainstream media were also voracious consumers of it. For instance, Randy's diverse news habits mirrored those of other Patriot activists. "I follow the *Washington Times, Drudge Report, Washington Post, The Hill, Daily Caller,*" he said, as he listed just a few. "Then I follow other people who follow different things . . . somebody's always posting something on Twitter that came from the *Huffington Post, Politico,* or some other more liberal side too." In fact, Patriot activists were adamant that they were not presenting one side, often citing the multiple media sources that they consumed, both conservative and mainstream (progressive outlets were only rarely mentioned). In effect, they believed they were verifying information before reposting it. As part of sharing a prolific number of news article links on Facebook or Twitter, most activists would post an accompanying comment.

Ken, the CCTPP's main social media curator, also incorporated statewide conservative media into his news diet, such as the *Carolina Journal, Civitas,* and *Plothound,* which he explained is a North Carolina-based *Drudge Report* that compiles conservative lists but for North Carolina stories. He said he read both statewide and national conservative blogs, such as the *Daily Haymaker,* all of which he used for social media posts for the group. It was in this broader media ecosystem that their digital media consumption and evangelizing operated and overlapped.

"Information is always streaming from different sources, and I would not have time to read them all in a day," Ken explained. Yet he did devote hours every day to reading and posting. "I can sit there and read a lot . . . [because] part of my philosophy for the Tea Party, and I think it's shared by other Tea Party groups, as well . . . is that education, people on both sides, whether you are liberal or conservative, is so critical for decision making."

This need to be better informed worried Tea Party activists like Ken and motivated him to share what he found. He explained how he decided what to post on social media from all these sites. "I read a lot of news and ideas for posting, especially from Facebook and Twitter from the sources I follow," he said. "And pick nuggets out of everything that I find."

Across the ideological spectrum, the vast majority of respondents I spoke with talked about the internet less as a mass organizing tool and more as a straightforward communication device. But conservatives, as opposed to

progressives, often viewed it as a revolutionary communication tool, which motivated them to use it.

At the same time, they were not Pollyannaish or naive about it. They were conscious and self-reflective of their work and how digital technology fed into it, often peppering their comments on the internet with humor. Verne, the CCTPP's volunteer webmaster, joked that it was "tiny waves flying through the air." But he was not saying that as someone who failed to understand the mechanics. Verne was an early adopter of computers, reminiscing about how he had a microcomputer desktop before IBM began selling personal computers. "I was experienced with computers pre-internet, before Al Gore," he deadpanned, referring to the national joke about Al Gore's claiming to have started the internet. But then he said simply, "I've been around more or less since the beginning" of the digital era. This was an important distinction to him because his interest in computers was tied to his passion for conservative informationalizing.

"I thought at the outset that [the internet] was eventually going to be a very powerful means of counteracting the left-wing bias of mainstream media," Verne said, "The first, real, strong effort in doing that was Fox News. As you know Fox News really came along a couple years after the internet."[50] Like many conservative activists, he acknowledged that the internet also enabled "opposite viewpoints," which was essential to his beliefs "because it gives everybody a mechanism for expression, and they can *choose* what they read."

Verne spent what he said was "extensive" time, though, curating and mediating what people could choose to read on their group's Facebook page, as well as what to post on the group's website. "I have to spend and *do* spend several hours [every day] surfing in order to find topics that I think will be of some interest to our readership, and, of course, you have to draft some intro to it of that nature," he said, describing the posting of comments to an article. "That is the day-to-day, and in addition to that, the site itself is . . . not completed, it's still a work in progress." Yet the CCTPP still had an updated and interactive website.

Like many of the digitally successful groups, the CCTPP possessed this digital labor pool of skilled volunteers. Ken and Verne looked after their social media while Bob, who ran a landscaping business, did e-mail "up the wazoo" for the group. But he was the first to admit that he was not exactly digitally savvy. "I tried to do Twitter, but it was just a nightmare." He wasn't

able to grasp how this microblogging platform worked, comparing it to when "a lot of us had to call the kids to program the VCR." Despite this age hurdle, he was still an advocate, and was still one of the biggest digital evangelizers in the political arena.

The CCTPP had a website, but some Patriot groups in this political arena started to use Facebook as a substitute for updating content or for even having websites. Conservative websites tended to have social media button links and were frequently based on blogging software, or they simply took advantage of Facebook group pages. These sites presented many opportunities for leaders to post content and updates through interactive features, and right-wing activists were more likely to take advantage of them. Yet, as I have previously shown in Chapter 2, it was not just groups that emerged after the mass diffusion of social media in 2006, like Tea Parties, that had high digital engagement levels. The age of the group was not a factor, and as it turns out, nor was the age of its members. It was not young lefties but older conservatives, in this case, who embraced the internet and saw it as an anti-establishment tool. Patriot groups normalized social media into their organizing practices because of their ideas around the internet as an evangelizing tool for the Truth. As one Tea Party leader told me, "People use [the internet], regular people, not government people or bureaucrats. . . . Without the internet, we'd have to rely on the newspapers for news."

Digital tools were not the only way conservatives could get information out, though they were excited about how much better these tools were for distributing the Truth than by analog means. Still, one activist retorted that if the internet were taken away, they would still "send smoke signals, runners, or ham radio." They were on a mission.

The Digital Faithful

As I began to understand the practices of conservative digital evangelizers, I wanted to learn how these activists viewed their audience. What about the other participants in this online conversation? Who was in the digital church pews? While groups differed on their political strategy, an overwhelming number of respondents emphasized that the audience was not a collective but individuals who would make their own choices as to what to do with the online information.

The CCTPP was captivated with their digital audience. "It brings people on," Verne said, in describing their website, which he had been revamping to improve its look and usability. While he did not use the sophisticated software management tools of some of the professional groups, he was still able to track the locations of visitors coming to their site, as well as who had signed up through it to get on their e-mail list. At first, he joked about someone in the White House who had viewed their site. He added, "We get hits from all over the world. I think some of them are from the military who have been posted elsewhere," referring to how their region of North Carolina is somewhat transient because of the military, as well as retirees and vacationers. Some of their members go to Florida in the winter and want to stay plugged into what is happening. Still others, as Bob said, will be visitors from out of state who "will seek out a local Tea Party meeting. Kind of like an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous]." However, he concluded, "the core is still the Crystal Coast, which is, of course, exactly where we want it."

They were also aware that 70 percent of the registered voters in their county (Cartaret) were Republican.[51] "One of the reasons you see so much support for the Tea Party in Carteret County that you do is that in some degree we are preaching to the choir," figuratively referring to their digital evangelizing. Verne said their "readership" used their website and social media platforms more as an alternative source of information that people consumed rather than debated. He described how there was no formal way for people to offer suggestions about what should be posted and that digital back-and-forth communication was more for "leadership-type things." He added, "Well, I am about the only one involved in any online work other than just the readers logging on. Are you asking if the readers have any input or offer suggestions? No." Instead, people could choose to do what they wanted to do with the online information. And as for "instantaneous" feedback and dialogue? Face-to-face, he said.

Randy's Right

Like the CCTPP, Randy also viewed the audience for his digital evangelizing as individuals choosing to do what they wanted with online information. They could choose to read it in the first place—and then decide what they wanted to do with it. This perspective was common across many

of the grassroots Patriot groups, but especially with Prepper groups like Randy's.

Randy not only blogged for NC Freedom but also had a personal blog called *Randy's Right.* He took pride in the fact that he had a strong following, so he didn't have to promote his blog posts anymore. Over sweet tea and chicken 'n' dumplings at a Pittsboro diner, Randy told me about his daily routine. The first thing he did after waking up was check the 200 or so e-mails he received from his high-speed-connected desktop computer. These messages would often link to news reports that he would read and then blog about. On his personal Facebook page, he would post a link to his blog but didn't do any other promotion. He would then "get on with the rest of the day." He used to be on so many political listservs and mailing lists that he would get over 1,000 e-mails on a daily basis, he told me, so he decided to streamline his inbox. Because of this "insane" volume of content circulating among the "converted," he decided to cut back and unsubscribe from listservs. He also chose to be minimalist with technology by having a mobile phone that could just text and call—and only that to appease his wife, who he said insisted he have one for emergencies. "If there's something that's important, one of my buddies or somebody can call me." One of the listservs from which he had unsubscribed was a local county-wide bulletin board system, but NC Freedom and *Randy's Right* had built up such a reputation that someone else would always repost his blog on this county listserv. He liked that he didn't personally have to send e-mails out any more about his posts, as people had already signed up to get a notification about them.[52]

"If something is up, I can say okay, this is what's going on. I put out a truthful statement," he said about the implicit message to his audience. "It's up to them how they wanna take it, how they wanna respond to it. . . . What you can do is, the individual chooses, they can sign up. That's up to them."

Rather than not being able to afford these digital tools like many of the poor and working-class activists I interviewed, Randy said that this cutback was a choice. And choice is what Randy, a prolific internet user, believed drove his and others' digital media use.

This philosophy did not stop Randy from monitoring the locations of the people reading his blog posts, like the CCTPP did. He boasted that his readers were from all over the world, countries such as Australia and even in the Middle East. He was particularly pleased with having an audience in what he called Muslim countries. As a retired trauma nurse, he had recently

gone to Egypt on a Christian mission trip. He recounted that it was in that predominately Muslim country that he really "experienced knowing the presence of evil" for the first time. He viewed Muslims as connected to "the entitlement society" that lures you in with government programs. And the problem, Randy said, was that "any time the government does anything, once you do it, it's there forever, and is expected." Examples of this ranged from public union wages to Obamacare. For Randy, then, "What is our job to do in the time we have left, is to try and save souls and bring more people to the Truth," Randy told me. "So when I blog this morning, I'm just trying to bring people to the Truth. You gotta start somewhere. . . . If I see something that's wrong or a lie, that's gonna cause damage to our society or anyone, I jump on it like a heartbeat."

For Randy, putting out the political Truth was part and parcel of his Christian mission to convert individuals. He chose what to blog based on whether he could glorify Christ in the process. "If I'm not, sometimes I won't do it." But he also dismissed that what he was doing was deeply profound. "I don't spend that much time, trust me—a lot of that stuff is just copy and paste," he said. "I'm no brilliant person at all. I do think I'm gifted with a lot of common sense." Randy did believe, based on his extensive networks, that the audience for his and other digital evangelizing was making a difference. "It's happening all across America. People are seeing the Truth, and people are scared."

While he was enthusiastic about how the internet in general, could spread this Truth, Randy was much more measured with social media in particular. He was a user of Facebook, but he found Twitter pretty "useless." He believed that private Twitter accounts could be effective for rallies but in general the celebrity and glamorized use of it had just created worthless "white noise." Before pundits and scholars were decrying the dramatic rise of both Trump and bots on Twitter, Randy said, "I just don't like to have a bunch of robots," referring to the mechanical nature of the platform. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Preppers did tend to be more suspicious than other conservatives about a government and corporate takeover of the internet, yet similar to Tea Parties, they also saw its function as more of a digital bullhorn than a town square. "The internet is a simple way of communication—that's all that is, just quick access to communication from point A to point B, or point A to a thousand people," Randy explained. When I asked him to imagine a world

without the internet, he hesitated before answering and then said quietly, "It's not that I'm trying to avoid it—I'm trying to think of the safe answer here. I'll just put it this way—ham radio—and that's all I'll say." Preppers were prepared not only with emergency food and ammunition supplies but also communication devices as well, and as a former ham radio enthusiast, he was ready.

Digital Minutemen

The audience in the minds of grassroots right-wing groups, then, are individuals making their own choices, rather than a collective to organize. Randy viewed his political work like he viewed his audience: as an individual and solo endeavor. He had worked in the name of NC Freedom and in coalition with a lot of conservative groups, yet he did not have a staff for media work, like the *Carolina Journal,* or a designated leadership structure, like with the CCTPP.

The key finding from Chapter 2 was that organizational infrastructure helps maintain and sustain high levels of digital activism. Is this focus on the individual-as-audience or individual-as-activist a contradiction? Not quite. Preppers like Randy worked more as an individual than with a highly structured organization, and, as a result, his group's digital activism score was not as high as the structured Tea Parties, and dramatically lower than the hierarchical right-wing media organizations, but it still was in the top quartile. It was also above similarly organized left-wing groups and, in Randy's case, his group's score does not even include his individual blog.

Consistent across the right-wing groups was the belief that individuals should do everything on their own, which is why they viewed the internet as the perfect vehicle for this ideology. But the reality is that digital activism still takes structured work. Structured organizations with the political motivation were even more likely to take on this digital work.

Like Joe's comment about how Paul Revere had his horse and conservatives have the internet, many Patriots believed they were *digital minutemen* in their online efforts to share information about what they perceived as attacks on their freedom and liberty. And in many ways, this is an apt image: one individual riding around spreading information while allowing other individuals to decide to take up arms or not. Similarly, Patriot groups

engaged in digital evangelism of their Truth so that individuals could do what they wanted with the information. Therefore, they are digital minutemen. Yet they are also digital evangelizers because they wanted to convert individuals who have free will. Christians view conversion in the same manner—one soul at a time. Patriot terminology may be familiar to Christians, similar to the oft-quoted Bible verse "You shall know the truth—and the truth shall set you free." Indeed, I use the term "evangelizer" as a take on a Christian evangelist, but it is also a play on the Silicon Valley technology company job title "Chief Evangelizer" that came into vogue in the late 1990s during the dot.com boom. An evangelizer is a marketer.

Yet just as there are different types of Christians, the conservatives' ideological harmony was not without cracks. Strategy differences across the right-wing groups complicated their digital dominance. David's story highlights this variation in *how* groups carried out their political work.

Strategy: To Radicalize or Reform

"If you went to NC Renegade right now you'd see nothing," David said about his group's website, "because Anonymous took down GoDaddy." He was not mad at the hackers for damaging the company that hosted his website. Instead, he laughed when he told me about it because he identified with Anonymous's strategies.

David had also been drawn to another radical movement. "I was really impressed with them," he reflected about the Occupy Raleigh protesters. "They got more done at one of their meetings with their hand signs. . . . It may have looked goofy, but they were very efficient." David shared the Occupy Wall Street movement's distrust of the corporate system, so he had gone to some Occupy Raleigh events. He had even posted an announcement and article for a "We Are the 99 Percent" save-our-homes rally on the NC Renegade website, which included a scathing critique of big bank bailouts. David expressed affinity with Occupy's resistance against the corporate and political establishment. He liked their strategies but not their overall objectives: "They knew something was wrong, [but] they didn't know how to fix it."

While David said that Occupy's organizing methods "put Tea Party people to shame," he was not a left-wing activist. Instead, he viewed Occupy as being "based on the Tea Party," which aligned more with his side of the

political spectrum. He may have had similar anti-establishment critiques to the financial crisis as Occupy did, as well as some mutual enemies, but his response to many political issues, such as labor rights, was vastly different from the radical left groups in North Carolina that supported unions.

David had once led the statewide 9–12 Project, which was a far-right Glenn Beck-inspired organization that allied with the Tea Party. Yet when I interviewed David, he had disavowed the Tea Party movement, much of which had begun participating in electoral politics rather than protest strategies. Frustrated that these groups were aligned too much with the political and economic establishment, David now identified more as a "Prepper."[53]

Preppers like David had embraced this once-derogatory term that described people like him—preparing for an economic, government, or infrastructure catastrophe with arms, homegrown food, and political education. "I do seminars on different things on finances and safety and preparedness. But as far as a political solution, there is none." He, like other Preppers, believed that the system was broken, so they had to prepare to defend themselves and their own liberty.

On the surface, all these groups David mentioned may have had a different political orientation but seemed to be fighting "the system" in the same way: Anonymous's hacktivist libertarian perspective, Occupy's leftist orientation, and the Tea Party movement's conservative point of view. At first, I was confused by David's alliances, which seemed to up-end the left-right continuum. As a Prepper, he was very far-right, yet he aligned with those on the far left. A key way that I came to understand this puzzle was to go back to thinking about ideology as being about more than left versus right in a linear way. Since ideology was also practices, this difference in strategy was simply part of this ideological variation.

Groups like David's were *radical,* while other conservative organizations were *reformist,* which were grassroots groups that engaged in electoral and lobbying work. While a set of groups can be on the same side of a political issue, what they did, both offline and online, varied. And, as it turned out, these strategy differences mapped onto their levels of digital engagement. David's group, NC Renegade, and others he had participated in, were online quite a bit. Yet right-leaning radical groups like his, on average, had lower digital activism scores than right-leaning reformist groups.[54]

But what, exactly, did reformist or radical mean in this context? Even beyond their ideas of what political change needed to happen, strategy was

also associated with their practices and what they *did* to make that happen. I categorized a group as radical if it had both radical *ideas* and radical *practices.*

While David had thrown up his hands at the political system, some had other goals in mind: elections and lobbying. A group was reformist if it sought incremental systemic and legislative reform, primarily through lobbying. Targets for reformist groups were candidates and elected politicians. In general, reformist groups wanted to influence legislation and directed their strategies toward that arena. In general, most reformist groups had a much broader agenda than overturning the collective bargaining ban. But for these types of groups, their broader agenda was also reformist. All the reformist groups focused on electoral and legislative strategies.

On the surface, it might seem that all the 34 groups I was studying in North Carolina had a reformist goal: support or opposition to legislation on collective bargaining for public employees. In 2012, the groups on the left of this issue were hoping for a last-ditch effort to keep enough Democrats in power to make this repeal possible, while the right was counting on Republican wins to keep it from happening. This electoral year would be a tipping point for labor rights. For the reformist groups, elections—and the legislation that can follow from favorable politicians—was their primary focus. But not all eyes were focused exclusively on this legislative prize. For the radical groups, electoral politics was just one part of a larger agenda. As a result, building on sociologist William Gamson's classic categorization of social movement groups, organizations were radical if they primarily engaged in contested activities—such as protesting, picketing, or prepping with the hope or expectation to broadly change the political landscape.[55] Radical groups may have participated in lobbying, but their primary goal was to organize, or to support organizing, for radical, systematic political change. I only categorized groups as radical if they sought more than legislative change through protest tactics and other methods of subverting the current system of government or capitalism.

Certainly, movements and groups shift their strategies over time, and some incorporated both protest and electoral tactics. This binary approach to groups as either radical or reformist may seem narrow, but this distinction derived from what the groups were concretely doing and saying at the time. Across all the groups in this collective bargaining arena, 21 were reformist and 13 were radical. Of the reformist groups, eight were left-wing, and of the radical groups, four were right-wing. Overall, groups that were

reformist in their strategy used the internet at higher levels than radical ones.[56] Reformist groups updated their websites twice as often and had more interactive features, and, overall, they had higher website scores. They also posted on Facebook twice as much as radical groups did. With Twitter, reformist organizations incorporated ways to encourage participation, such as using "mentions," five times as often. This involved typing another Twitter name after the "@" symbol, usually those of "influencers" or people who have a lot of Twitter followers themselves. In contrast, radical groups were less likely to design their digital platforms for participation, so it was more difficult to engage people on the internet.[57]

But how, exactly, did these high rates among reformist right-wing groups happen? They were not blindly following the puppet strings of the Republican Party—at least not completely. None of the Patriots I talked to were optimistic that either party, even a reenergized Republican Party, could change what they viewed as a broken system. Right-wing groups, in general, had a dash of reverence when talking about Republicans, as compared to Democrats, but many viewed them as having the same problem: "George Bush was a big-government, one-world-government kind of person too, as was George Bush senior. I think they're both wonderful human beings, but they were way wrong in their growth of government," said one activist.

And when the 2008 financial crisis happened, concurrent with growing unemployment, all the right-wing groups were united in their scapegoating of public employee unions, viewing them as the problem instead of Wall Street corruption. But unlike reformist conservatives, radicals also targeted the banking industry. They had some differences, not only in their approach to fighting public sector unions but also in their ultimate solutions. Despite a universal belief in freedom, from either Obamacare or labor unions, reformists and radicals were divided over whether they wanted to work predominantly in (reformists) or out of (radicals) the electoral system. These strategy differences helped shape how they viewed the dissemination of information, of which the internet was a key part.

Radicals: Survival, Sentience, and Social Media

David's view was common among radical Patriot groups. He had become frustrated with the Tea Party movement, which he saw as selling out to the

Republican Party and too focused on "anything but Obama." This frustration with other Patriots, especially Tea Party activists, was based on what he told me they'd often say: "'We gotta get Obama out.' Well, I go to people, 'What's more important, a president or the Constitution?' 'The Constitution,' they'll say." But according to David, they would still add, "'But we gotta get Obama out.' So I say, 'It doesn't much matter, does it?'" He believed the solution was deeper than just getting Obama out of office because Republicans weren't any better. He and other radicals had biting criticisms of their reformist counterparts. Many Patriots viewed Republicans as just as complicit in the system as Democrats.

These radical groups didn't want to work with the Republican Party, but some of the Tea Party groups did. These differences in strategy, then, ultimately shaped their digital activism, just as they did with left-wing groups. A radical outlook ended up affecting how, and how much, they used the internet to get their Truth out.

David was the epitome of this radical element among conservatives. An avid internet user, his group, NC Renegade, had a higher level of internet use compared to many left-wing groups but paled in comparison to his reformist counterparts on the conservative side. I interviewed him at work, a family-owned business located in a squat building in suburban Raleigh. Their offices were in a large room, partitioned into cubicles. They did commercial printing and also marketed guns, displayed in a glass case near the entrance.

After we sat down for an interview, David told me how frustrated he had been with government regulations and how they had affected his business over the years. But his main concern, he told me, was skyrocketing government debt. Not convinced that I understood how pressing this issue was, David walked me back to his desktop computer to show me a few websites that he routinely pulled up, especially one that featured a debt clock. Many of his social media posts reflected this anxiety. He viewed it as a big ticking time bomb, which is why he said he needed to prep, or be prepared.

David frequently grilled me with questions about what I knew and didn't know in relation to his political beliefs. He asked me why I would want to participate in an economic system that is doomed to fail. He was very interested in my family situation and seemed genuinely concerned that I would be able to take care of my family and help them prepare for an inevitable financial or political collapse.

David explained his position by asking me if I had read *Atlas Shrugged,* by Ayn Rand. When I told him that I hadn't, he laughed and called out to his adult son who was working in another cubicle how amusing this was. He did the same thing whenever I didn't know a particular author or concept in his conservative repertoire. But then he became quite serious and said that it was important to read Rand's book to understand politically what's going on because a lot of people are "sentient." In other words, "We already know what we're gonna do. We're gonna do the same thing John Galt did in *Atlas Shrugged.* We don't have to do anything—it's gonna collapse." He was referring to the political system, which he believed will destroy itself. In the novel, the engineer, inventor, and philosopher John Galt begins to question the government's socialist appropriations in the wake of an economic depression. David's interpretation was that Galt eventually decides to stop participating in the bureaucratic state because it will implode on its own.

I was puzzled by this John Galt analogy since David was, in fact, doing things. He was not only posting videos online of events and writing blog posts, but he was also speaking publicly and teaching workshops. "I do seminars on different things on finances and safety and preparedness. But as far as a political solution, there is none." When I asked David about this seeming contradiction, he pointed out that I was missing a step. "The people that have been watching and basically becoming educated, for the most part, they keep their mouth shut; they're getting prepared, and that's the end of it." In other words, if people know the Truth, especially about a financial collapse due to mounting debt, then through information, often found on the internet, they can become prepared. Interestingly, John Galt also seizes the airwaves in *Atlas Shrugged;* digital evangelizers like David were seizing the communicative power of the internet.

But there was a catch. The Preppers I interviewed were much more careful and cautious than other conservatives with what they said to me and others. Not all the radical Patriot groups were overtly Preppers, but they all had similar views of the ideas and practices of a radical strategy. For instance, David emphasized to me that being a Prepper does not mean there's a plot: "That don't mean anyone is prepping to overtake the government—it means we're preparing to protect our family, life, and property, is all that's saying. And never want anybody to ever think different than that." He said that he will have a good conscience because as everyone else is dying off, he will have

prepared to save his family, and then he will be there to rebuild. Jesus said to prepare and that's what a survivalist does, he told me.

An emphasis on an inner circle was critical to the Preppers' philosophy online and offline. They were not a militia group planning to attack. Quite the opposite. They were digging in to be prepared to defend their position. Joe told me, "When the pressure hits, and the hammer falls on this nation, it's gonna hit us economically. And these people are gonna need people who they trust, and we trust, and who we can go to, and so they can keep going. And it's all about keeping our economy alive, even in the worst of times, so our local economy is what's gonna matter, so that's part of what we do, that's a small part."

And that small, local, trustworthy element did not always align with the public internet. They did not always use it to organize directly for this element of their work. These groups also participated in public protest activities, but this was not their focus. Many used the internet to spread information, like other conservatives, but more as a warning beacon than a rallying cry. The internet was critical but not the only tool used to prepare.

They also didn't have the additional goal of educating people about politicians. Still, David posted links about the national debt, political collapse, nuclear electricity outages, or other imminent threats. He often went out and videotaped political activities, wrote about them and posted it all online. He said he got his information from listservs and Google searches, with such search terms as "Occupy Violence" and "Bank Runs." And he would occasionally post about upcoming events, including protests, but most of their organizing was with their small, local communities, which they trusted, not with social media.

Still, David was *informationalizing*. Ninety-five percent of the NC Renegade posts were links to articles, usually unaccompanied by any text. This was unusual. Whereas most groups posted commentary or text to social media, and only occasionally posted article links unaccompanied by a comment, NC Renegade only posted links, without any commentary. While the radical right's internet levels were lower than those of the reformist right, their leaders were still online. But one puzzle I had while interviewing the Preppers, in particular, was why they posted online at all about a system of government they were critiquing when they did not believe there was a political solution to the problem, unlike many of the Tea Parties.

David posted multiple links each day, but when I asked him about the role of the internet in his work, whether planning protests or workshops, he said that he did not think the internet "plays a big role." I followed up by asking David why he bothered to spend any time posting articles. He said, "Because you still can help people. I mean, the government is not gonna come and help the people in the future."

Both the radical right and the reformist right used the internet for informationalizing, but radicals were building their own more secret cadre that did not always want the world to know their plans. Plus, collapse would happen regardless of what they did online.

Reformist: The Tea Party Movement

But what of the reformist groups who had such high scores? It was not just professional organizations like the *Carolina Journal* or the North Carolina chapter of Americans for Prosperity (NC-AFP) that had high scores, it was also Tea Party groups, who dominated the top of the digital activism index. Most of the Tea Parties in this political arena were reformist. On the surface, this may seem like a contradiction. The outside perception was often that the Tea Party movement was all about up-ending the political establishment.

They certainly talked about radical politics and fighting the establishment. A question I asked everyone was how they viewed social change, as well as how the internet factored into that. This was one way to understand how groups viewed their political strategy. Conservative grassroots activists were quick to answer that my question sounded too much like socialism or what a Democrat would want. But then they would almost always respond with their *ideas:* that the whole political establishment was bankrupt, including both parties.

By digging deeper in interviews, as well as observing what they actually did, both at events and online, I could see that most Tea Party efforts were focused on electoral, not protest, politics. Their *practices* were hyper-focused on elections and communicating about that to me, each other, and to the broader public. This is not to say that this position was without controversy. It was clearly a point of contention. After I had posed my social change question to one Tea Party leader, she was concerned that she had not been clear

and may have led me to believe that they wanted something more radical. So she followed up with me in an e-mail the next day to clarify her response to my question: "Our path for reform is at the ballot box."

There was no "official" or unilateral Tea Party nationally—or even statewide. Certainly, other Tea Parties across the country, and even in North Carolina, may have been more radical. Nationally, over time, the Tea Party populist insurgency that had appeared radical began to splinter into groups that wanted to work within the system and groups who found this a contradiction. The Tea Party groups in North Carolina tended toward mobilizing for Republican candidates.[58]

Yet in this North Carolina case, many of the Tea Party leaders were once part of the Republican Party themselves. One Tea Party was started by a woman who felt shut out of her county's Republican Party, while another was started by the women's club of their local Republican Party. And yet another Tea Party group had a communications director who was also simultaneously the president of the men's Republican Club. This was Ken of the CCTPP.

Ken was busy with the CCTPP's social media. But he also toured the area encouraging Tea Party-sympathetic people to run as candidates with the Republican Party. At the same time, they had no qualms critiquing the leaders of the North Carolina Republican Party, calling the House speaker Thom Tillis a "hack." And they were proud that they had helped unseat the Republican incumbent. "The GOP did tap a local businessman. He was very well funded, backed by all the lawyers, and had over $400,000 in campaign funds. The guy we supported had less than $40,000. The outgoing senator was retiring and based on the letters to the editor and our weight behind him, we beat the snot out of him, this other guy, by 70 to 30 percent," explained Bob, another CCTPP activist. He added that "Raleigh was spinning like 'What happened down there?' . . . it's not necessarily money. [With] a grassroots campaign going, you can pretty much accomplish miracles." The CCTPP had even explicitly made the decision not to register as a tax-exempt group so that they could support political candidates. But the group's activists emphasized that they were mostly an educational group—whether for candidates or issues.

This educational focus not only aligned with conservatives' general informationalizing practices but also with a reformist strategy on elections. Reformists deployed their digital army for electoral campaigning, and as a

public and outward tool, this was ideal. While conservatives were enthralled with how they could harness the internet to get their Truth out about what was happening, reformists had an extra incentive—to lobby and promote specific candidates.

In fact, among the four categories of right, left, reformist, and radical, the most dramatic digital activist gap was between the reformist right (the highest) and radical left (the lowest). (Chapter 4 will delve further into left-leaning groups' strategy and digital use differences.) Despite this strategy variation on the right, the conservatives I studied showed disciplined unity in communicating freedom ideas in their digital practices. What helped bind them together was the third aspect of ideology that helped shaped digital activism: institutions. The right-leaning groups were not detached from each other but united in an ecosystem of freedom-oriented institutions. High levels of digital engagement were supported by a web of groups that worked in sync.

Freedom Institutions: United for Digital Activism

"It's all economic and freedom issues," Jon emphasized. "The only revolution we're trying to foment is living within your means in government—that's it." As editor of the *Carolina Journal,* the leading right-wing paper in the state, he had a pulse on conservative informationalizing in North Carolina. In my efforts to see how this ideology of freedom—of ideas, practices, and institutions—all came together, I found that Jon's story traced how this ecosystem of conservative groups fostered digital engagement.

"The whole economic thing, which is what we're about, and the too-big government doing what it wants—those are *their* issues, and those are *our* issues," said Jon. The "our" was the *Carolina Journal* and the John Locke Foundation. The "their" were Tea Parties.

As a journalist who had been covering these economic freedom issues before the 2009 launch of the Tea Party, he was adamant that the *Carolina Journal* had not altered its philosophical focus because of this insurgent movement. Instead, he emphasized, "It was a group that was receptive to our ideas, that's all, and it hasn't changed." And it is this hyper-focus that made Jon reflect, "That's why I think we have a big following in the Tea Party."

In 2009, Jon had gone up to the 9–12 Project rally in Washington, DC, the precursor event to the Tea Party, along with a half million other people. "It was all about money. It's all about debt, mortgaging our kids' future. There was no abortion, there was no immigration—it was all about money."

At the *Carolina Journal,* Jon was in his element. He sat at the epicenter of the right-wing media network in the state. He had the experience in journalism and the politics of conservatism. But what about technology? "I was always interested in unmediated communication," he said. He was proud of his early digital efforts as managing editor at the *Herald-Sun,* where he had encouraged other reporters to read—and write—blogs and to stay current back in the pre-social media days when blogs were the digital avant-garde. He was not the only person on staff pulling the paper on a digital path, but he generally felt resistance from some of the reporters under him and the publisher above him.

That isolation, both digitally and politically, disappeared when he became editor of the *Carolina Journal.* All of a sudden, he had unlimited resources and free political rein. When he started, he said, there was just one website, that of the John Locke Foundation, and one blog, *The Locker Room.* And they had the print version of the *Carolina Journal* in what he thought was an unattractive design. Nonetheless, his new job provided latitude to extend their digital reach, as well as produce journalism on the kind of conservative topics he felt were missing and mischaracterized in the mainstream press.

Soon after, they expanded their online presence with a site redesign that had separate portals for the John Locke Foundation and the *Carolina Journal.* They also added five regional blogs (and bloggers) covering most of North Carolina. According to Jon, these local blogs quickly took off and were the main reason their online presence grew so much every year, driving many of their page views and visitors. He noted that it was quite "expensive to set those up, get them designed, and then hire bloggers that you can trust, to write something responsibly without you having to read every one of them." As a result, they accomplished what they had criticized the national media for not doing—reporting on local issues with a conservative bent. An upshot for them was that this local coverage was ideal for grassroots Patriot groups who yearned for this type of journalism. Local readership then looped back to the reporters. Jon explained, "A lot of these grassroots people will contact us . . . about stuff that is happening in their area that we ought to know about." While readers' calling in story tips was not unique to the dig-

ital age nor to conservative outlets, the *Carolina Journal*'s online distribution and engagement levels with Patriot groups was novel.

In addition to the website content, they had Twitter and Facebook feeds for both the *Carolina Journal* and the John Locke Foundation.[59] Each of their reporters also had social media accounts. These feeds broadcasted not only articles, like other media outlets do, but also local events and research reports the foundation had issued. "It's not really to engage in snark and political comments. We do that on our personal ones," Jon clarified. In a serious, low voice, he added, "Our internet presence is very important to us."

Throughout the interview, he spoke with this type of reverence for their digital work. It was not an afterthought, like his experience at the Durham paper. Yes, he was a paid editor, so it would have been surprising if he had not been positive about their journalism. But like all the representatives of conservative groups I interviewed, he was enthusiastic about the internet.

Despite the focus on their digital strategy, though, Jon was quick to explain to me why they still printed a newspaper, as if he had to justify it. They published about 65,000 copies, which they mailed to 30,000 people on their mailing list, mostly donors and conservative leaders. He said the print paper is a huge amount of time and effort, but he could not "imagine us giving it up. . . . It's amazing the credibility it gives you to have your own newspaper, especially professionally done." And in the face of the liberal media critiques, credibility was paramount in his effort to be a key voice of this statewide movement.

But what voice did they project? Jon believed that he had complete journalistic independence, like any other editor, and he emphasized that he had never even met Art Pope, the controversial and powerful right-wing funder of the John Locke Foundation, until a few years after he started the job. Even then, he reported that they had simply met by accident at a public event. According to Jon, that journalistic "freedom" also applied to their bloggers and especially those writing for their main blog, *The Locker Room.* This blog would also get the most traffic of all their sites. And anyone on staff, including interns, was able to post to the blog. "I've been here seven years, and I don't ever remember that being a problem," he said.

Sitting up in his chair, he leaned forward across his desk and said, "All the reporting here is real reporting—it's not opinionated. Now the bias comes in, just as it does in the mainstream media, with our story choices." He leaned back a bit and added, "Our stories are written straight, and you know, that

goes back to John Hood, our president, who has a journalism background from college." He also bragged about his ace reporter, who happened to walk into the office during our interview to chat with him about a story. After he left, Jon admitted that this journalist may not have been the most polished writer but was an accomplished investigative reporter who had exposed many cases of government corruption.

Though Jon may not have been policed by his bosses, that may have been because he kept the stories focused on the three freedoms. "We do what the mainstream media ought to do, and that's . . . keep an eye on government."

Yet like other leading activists, the same media he critiqued he also consumed. He didn't subscribe to the print version of the main North Carolina daily, the Raleigh *News & Observer,* but he read the e-edition every day, which was simply an electronic version of the printed newspaper, so he could "see where stories are played . . . and how they treated it in the paper—sorta shows how they feel about the story."

The offices of the *News & Observer* were just around the corner from those of the *Carolina Journal,* yet Jon did what he could to distance the two papers. He said the *News & Observer* was "as bad as any. They've got a couple of good reporters, but their editorial page is just so hidebound and knee-jerk pro-government, big government."

He also disparaged them for doing less reporting than they used to, not only on freedom issues, but in general. Acknowledging the previous decade's slashing of newsroom staff at newspapers across the country, he believed the *Carolina Journal* was at an even greater advantage because it did not have to cover the local Kiwanis or the local high school. They were not even trying to be a paper that covers everything. They could focus on the issues they wanted to. They could be niche.

"We don't have to cover that other stuff. We cover what we think is interesting. And we're to the point now where [other papers' reporters] call us. Because they know that if they hear something sleazy or something, they call us," referring to the limited time that other journalists might have to cover a juicy story. "We have a much better relationship with a few of their reporters than we did like even five years ago, when basically they looked down their nose because we were a think-tank newspaper," Jon said. He suggested that the tables have now turned, as journalists call their staff asking for insight into a story. The journalist in Jon even propelled him to give *News*

& Observer journalists a scoop on a story that was not within the *Carolina Journal*'s political scope.

The official target audience of the *Carolina Journal* was not mass appeal, Jon told me: "We're looking to influence about 10,000 people. And there are people in that legislative building over there," he said, referring to the General Assembly, as well as "people who are city councils, county commissions, donors, party people, politically active people—that's our audience. We're not trying to get the man on the street. . . . We're not rabble-rousing for that—that's not where we're at."

Yet, they did get the interest of grassroots rabble-rousers, so to speak, as he must have known. He was coy about not sharing readership demographics, but he knew what I had witnessed within the ecosystem of right-wing activists and groups sharing their stories online. In fact, every grassroots Patriot group I studied had reposted *Carolina Journal* articles. Jon even acknowledged that anyone who thought that conservatives did not have this intricate web of online engagement was not paying attention.

And he also knew how they were able to do it, how essential the digital links were: "If you don't have that link people can share . . . it's like a tree falling in the forest for a lot of people. So having that link, that's how it gets . . . the wildfire thing." In addition to their social media and websites, as well as their printed paper, they also relied on both "professional e-mailers"—and those activists who were "below the radar"—both of whom had extensive e-mail lists. "If I send a link to one of them," he said it will go to thousands of people. But he also could count on some key "digital influencers," like Instapundit, which occasionally shared their stories, as did their managing editor or even Jon's daughter, who was an on-air personality for Fox news at the time.

The grassroots "rabble-rousers" in the state also coordinated with the *Carolina Journal* to volunteer to put the paper in shops and at local fairgrounds. The paper intentionally overprinted for Patriot events. "If you got a crowd of conservative-thinking people, we'll take our stuff," Jon described, referring to both the paper, as well as marketing materials, like free teabags that had "Join the John Locke Foundation. Be a donor" printed on them. Their outreach staff member would tally up how many extra papers they needed each month based on upcoming meetings. "They gobble it up. If you go to a Tea Party rally with these things . . . and it doesn't even have to be the current one—it can be one that's two months old—they just want it."

And it was this niche, this focus on the freedom issues, that helped power the reposting and sharing by a variety of conservative groups. Jon suggested that the distribution goal of their primary news site was not "mass appeal," although multiple and overlapping audiences were a key part of the *Carolina Journal.* He admitted it was costly, but it seemed to pay off. All of it. Their freedom ideology, overlapping with other groups in this political arena, worked in digital harmony.

Bridging Freedom Institutions

What connected these groups opposing labor rights was a network that was tightly unified around a freedom ideology, or what one activist described as the "glue that bound everybody together." And this unity supported the circulation of social media posts. It was not just that the groups on the right focused on freedom, as the left-wing groups focused on fairness. It was that their specific ideas about freedom were in sync across the groups—from Preppers to professionals. I often got the same phrase verbatim from different Patriot activists across interviews: "limited government, fiscal responsibility, and the free market," and a close approximation of these phrases were on a variety of websites and Facebook pages.

These three principles were "core issues we can all unite around and not get distracted with all this other social issues and stuff," said Ken from the CCTPP. Across the board, conservatives told me about this laser focus, and many were often quick to point out that this is what differentiated them from the Moral Majority in the 1980s. Gun rights came up occasionally as a form of big-government intrusion, but no one volunteered to talk about abortion or gay marriage when discussing their main issues or why they got involved.[60]

This specific focus enabled people who may have had differing views on social issues to get involved and stay involved. Verne explained that their "admission" standard was low for the Tea Party. "You will find that some of these stereotypes are substantively true. In that these people tend to be very much pro-life, they tend to be religious, they tend to be strongly supportive of the military," he said. "But, they are not exclusive. For example, I'm an atheist, but I'm accepted." Bob added, "He's our token atheist."

And this narrow and cohesive view of freedom, regardless of opinions on social issues, may have not only widened the net of participants but also contributed to their more extensive digital sharing. Of the conservative groups, those with the top scores overall were the professional advocacy groups, whose mission, of course, was informationalizing, so that was not surprising. They included the *Carolina Journal* and Civitas. But some of the grassroots groups, like the CCTPP, were close behind them in their internet use.[61] The Patriot groups who were not Tea Parties, such as Preppers, had much more variation, with some high and some low scores.

But because of the coordination across conservative groups, even the organizations with lower digital activism scores worked closely with other Patriot groups for digital content because they valued it so highly for distributing information. For instance, the MCMM had a blog-based website and used Facebook but had a relatively low overall digital activism score. They were pleased with NC Renegade and NC Freedom for announcing their meetings and other events for them. And Randy not only had his own blog, he also contributed to NC Freedom and worked closely with David, posting on the NC Renegade site too.

Some of this cross-fertilization of online content grew out of the connections that Patriot groups had with each other across the state. As opposed to the left-wing groups, who rarely posted extensive online lists of links to other organizations, all Patriot groups had dozens of links on their websites to other Tea Party and Prepper groups. Direct online connections were also plentiful. "We all operate autonomously, but we also try to stay in contact with other groups," Ken of the CCTPP explained. "The groups primarily communicate by e-mail." These networks did meet in person, which is where they made their major decisions, rather than online. Yet digital communication was the bedrock of how they connected with each other across the state. While this may not seem surprising in the digital era, and certainly groups on the left had multiple listservs and e-mailing lists, the right-wing groups, as a whole, were better organized, better coordinated, and offered a more coherent, consistent message.

But it was not just Tea Parties and other grassroots Patriot groups that had strong digital connections. Coordination happened across different types of groups, especially between grassroots and advocacy organizations, the information wing of the conservative movement in the state. Verne said that he was constantly getting e-mails from groups like the Koch brothers-funded

AFP that said, "'You gotta read this article!'" And this was part of the treasure trove of right-wing information he would post. Civitas, the conservative think tank that was number two behind the NC-AFP on the digital activist index, conducted trainings for activists, including media workshops. Remnants of these networks, such as Civitas pens and bags, were often found at grassroots groups' meetings.

Astroturf: Not Quite

"Now the thing with the Tea Party, which I'm convinced, and nobody could ever show different, is that it was totally spontaneous. People were just upset," Jon told me during our interview. "Now sure, a lot of people took advantage of that sentiment, like especially Americans for Prosperity. That was tailor-made for them to sort of jump on that band wagon." Describing what he had witnessed at that first big rally in Washington, DC, he added, "These were people who had probably never been involved politically, ever. You know, grandma and grandpas with their signs . . . there was nothing planned." This wasn't quite true. The 9–12 Project, FreedomWorks and other organizations did organize the event, as well as pay for the infrastructure to make it happen, but his view that the movement itself was grassroots does reflect my observations as well. One key component, though, as pointed out in Chapter 2, was that the local groups quickly became organized themselves and aligned with other institutions, like the NC-AFP, Civitas, or the *Carolina Journal,* which did provide in-kind resources.

Early in the Tea Party movement, pundits critiqued it as being like Astroturf, a brand of artificial grass that is used on some football fields or outdoor areas. The implication was that they were heavily funded and organized by existing institutions and not "grassroots."[62] But it was not so simple. The grass got a lot of fertilizer but had its own organic roots. Despite the well-funded and well-organized volumes of focused digital information on freedom that advocacy groups showered onto the Patriot groups, local digital participation was not simply manufactured.

PATRIOTS RESENTED THE ASTROTURF ACCUSATION, similar to the media's portrayal of them as paid activists or uneducated rednecks. Conserva-

tives often relayed stories such as this one about an interaction at a protest: "There was an older gentleman, about my age, and he said, 'The Tea Party is Astroturf,' and I said, 'Really?' He goes, 'Yeah.' 'So how do you know?' He says, 'I know the Koch brothers.' And I said . . . 'I put on major town hall events that we've even put on TV. . . . I funded those out of my pocket and eventually got money back selling T-shirts. . . . I never got a penny from anybody, other than donations and selling T-shirts. . . . We're here one on one . . . We never got any money from anybody.'"

Patriots often tried to distance themselves from outside funders, adamant that they were not puppets. They would often list all their out-of-pocket expenses, such as traveling to DC. "I know who AFP is," Randy told me. "I don't know how they're funded, don't wanna know, don't care. But I can honestly tell you with all my heart, everyone I've worked with, no one has ever had any type of funding. In fact, I can tell you, me myself, I know I probably spent over ten grand out of my own pocket. . . . I haven't gotten any sponsorship, nor would I want any, because I don't care who you are—money corrupts very easily." For many activists, accepting "establishment" money was counter to their anti-government rallying cry.

Nonetheless, as we saw in the previous chapters, right-wing groups with resources and infrastructure were able to take advantage of their ability to deliver their Truth to people. While many Americans might be familiar with the influential Koch brothers' enormous conservative war chest, in North Carolina, Art Pope was the right-wing rainmaker, funding an enormous amount of political work.[63] Still, it was not always professionalized advocacy groups' scripted and strategic messaging that enabled high levels of online information sharing. While Patriot groups did share and link to their content, they also wrote original posts. Like many movements, left or right, there are resource-rich groups—and those that are less so. But one thing that made this conservative movement unique was its political motivation. Although they coordinated with better-funded advocacy groups, the large number of people who attended their weekly meetings in small towns around the state were not being paid or coerced to come. According to respondents, the groups that did receive outside funding only got negligible amounts.

I observed small, local fundraising at Patriot meetings, often to pay for communication materials. Even though class and resources, or a group's capacity, made a difference in digital activism engagement, and even though most grassroots Patriot members were from middle/upper-class backgrounds,

ideology was an important factor in its own right. It is simply not the case that all conservative groups paid to promote their posts or even that they had their own classed resources. Their motivation to get the Truth out, at least by the Patriot groups, both offline and online, was genuine and grassroots.

Many of the elite right-wing institutions in this political arena worked synergistically to enable the local groups to have the online content, training, and other resources to broaden their digital engagement.[64] As Jon pointed out, the resourced right-wing groups—the three advocacy groups in this study—the NC-AFP, the *Carolina Journal,* and Civitas, all started before the Tea Party movement, and they were ready with the well-financed fertilizer for the emerging grassroots. They were ready with similar freedom ideas, evangelizing practices, and unified institutions—both online and offline.

Journalism Transformations and the Manufacturing of Digital Consent

It is critical, though, to make sense of this unified army of digital minutemen. Was their motivation to use the internet accurate? Undoubtedly, conservatives' foundational ideology of freedom—free markets, freedom from the state, and free speech—went hand in hand with the internet. Unable to control the government or the media, they could control the internet, or at least their piece of it. In turn, as we have seen, they believed that the mainstream media was not just run by liberals but also failed to cover the confiscation of their freedoms or their political movement. According to this account, liberal bias resulted in the withering of free speech and information. Conservative groups had higher digital activism scores at least in part because they valued the internet as a direct communication tool to disseminate what they repeatedly called the Truth about their freedoms being threatened. As a result, a key organizing focus for conservative groups was to become digital evangelists of the Truth.

In some ways, the Patriots were right. The news media have changed over the last 50 years. But had they turned into what these conservative critiques would eventually decry as fake news? Jon had certainly witnessed a transformation of newsrooms all over the country from 1972, when he started, until 2005, when he left mainstream news.

When Jon began his career, many reporters had learned journalism in an apprenticeship model and were from—and embedded in—the local community. Journalists who used to cover "cops" would hang out socially with the police. A "courts" reporter might go out drinking with courtroom staff. Slowly over the years, with an increase in the professionalization of journalism, reporters began increasingly to come from other regions of the country and from universities with journalism degrees. This professionalization shift was even more stark in southern or rural states.[65] And, in fact, only 7 percent of reporters are likely to be Republican, although researchers do not agree as to how that affects coverage.[66] Despite the dearth of women and people of color in journalism, the profession is still more diverse than when Jon started. Indeed, reporting had changed from what it was in the days of Randy's nostalgia for the "good old journalists."

IN CONTRAST TO THE CLAIM that traditional reporters now simply defend government, by most accounts, journalism has actually become *more* aggressive after Watergate, not less.[67] Professionalized investigative journalism took off in the 1970s.[68] The implicit assumption of this professionalization was that news media should be a watchdog of government wrongdoing, and, at the same time, solutions to this malfeasance should come from government itself, not individuals. Conservatives, though, see government as having a limited role in managing affairs. They critique journalists for going after the wrong bad guy, especially when it's their guy, like with Trump. For those on the left, the heroic vision of journalists might be *Washington Post* reporters Woodward and Bernstein, whose taking down of President Nixon was dramatized in the award-winning 1976 movie *All the President's Men*. It's possible that Watergate was a watershed moment in a right-wing vision of journalism because Nixon represented the "silent majority" of conservatives, and the media's investigation of Nixon was, in effect, an attack on this movement. However, Obama, many Patriot activists told me, did not receive the scrutiny that he deserved. As a result, they needed to do it themselves.

This right-wing story of journalists as villains or the left-wing one that sees them as heroes is incomplete—and inaccurate. Another, second, transformation in journalism that emerged after Watergate was the corporate consolidation of news organizations, particularly newspapers. For decades in the United States, influential families owned American daily papers, with

many cities having more than one newspaper, driving journalistic competition. Then, in the 1970s, family members who inherited a part of a newspaper were less enthusiastic about being publishers and more enthusiastic about making money by selling the newspaper to a growing array of Wall Street news corporations.[69] At the same time, left-leaning critiques of corporate influence on the news proliferated.[70] Most notably, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's *Manufacturing Consent* argued that the news media, the government, military, and corporations work in hegemonic cahoots, resulting in slanted coverage toward elites and conservatism.[71] Sources are more often people in power, rather than the powerless, let alone people of color. Labor unions, in particular, are covered in a way that favors consumers and corporations over working-class interests.[72]

The third transformation of journalism was supposed to have counterbalanced the first two changes of professionalization and corporatization. With the dawn of the Internet Age, there was a utopian belief that professional journalists were perhaps no longer needed. Citizen journalists could report and distribute news directly to the world. While grassroots and local news sites emerged throughout the United States, a more pernicious revolution was under way. News organizations' income had relied on subscriptions, classified ads, and other advertisements. With the advent of Craigslist and other online classifieds and marketing, this business model fell apart. At the same time, increasing pressure on Wall Street to make large profits forced newsrooms to cut drastically their newsroom staff and, in effect, many investigative reporters.[73] Fewer journalists meant less time for any type of reporting. For instance, the Raleigh-based *News & Observer* went from 250 newsroom staff in 2004 to 132 in 2009, and by 2018, only 65 were left.[74] The left began to shift its rallying cry from critiquing the mainstream media to defending it, especially as the initial euphoria over citizen journalism waned. Sustaining this type of local reporting required funding and infrastructure.[75] But it wasn't mainstream news media outlets that would provide it.

Underneath the radar, I had observed the result of a fourth transformation of journalism. The void that was created by the emptying of newsrooms had been slowly filled by a growing conservative media ecosystem. Political groups across the ideological spectrum have always communicated with their constituents with various media formats, from newsletters to e-mail. But on the conservative side, the previous few decades had seen the rise of a diverse array of right-leaning news organizations and think tanks.[76] The most fa-

miliar was Fox News, which did provide a release valve for conservatives frustrated with other mainstream media outlets.[77] It turned out, though, that Fox was just the tip of the iceberg. For one, the Sinclair Broadcast Group, for example, had been amassing television stations in the 1990s, with now almost 200 stations, more than any other owner, reaching close to 40 percent of American viewers.[78] In addition, the right-leaning CNSnews.com (formerly Cybercast News Service), a wire service for conservative news, is owned by the Media Research Center, whose aim is to prove liberal news bias. But unlike the left's scrappy equivalent, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, or other progressive news outlets, these conservative media institutions are well connected to high-powered funders, as well as to a massive conservative Christian media landscape—all of which oppose government intervention.[79] So when *Breitbart News* started in 2007, it was standing on the shoulders of giants who had already been focused on the freedom message. As a result, digital evangelists were able to spread their anti-government message in sync with the convergence and ascent of social media, conservative news, and the Christian right.

How do we reconcile this with my finding that *despite* this vast conservative media ocean of information, right-wing activists *still* felt the news media was working against them? They had this belief partially because they felt marginalized in the traditional press. But more importantly, conservative media were throwing fuel on this fire, which they turned into cries of fake news. This idea of an attack on freedom of speech was based on how they believed the news media had once represented them. Nostalgia ran deep for the simplicity of the TV nightly news that had brought America together in their eyes. A white male news anchor toeing the line that supported their worldview was what they wanted back.

While liberals were lamenting the demise of the printed press, conservatives had taken a much broader and deeper approach. Almost completely abandoning newspapers, they focused on electronic and digital media. They were eyeing the future with digital distribution methods, from TV and radio to the internet. So when social media accelerated in the mid-2000s, conservatives were ready. The Republican Party may have been behind the Democratic Party in terms of digital organizing, but the right was ready with a propaganda machine.

The rise of right-wing media in this fourth transformation of journalism was an undercurrent that few on the left or even in mainstream journalism,

for that matter, seemed to notice at first.[80] This was partially due to the silo effect, by which people tend to consume information with which they already agree.[81] But this was more than a simplistic Democrat versus Republican difference in who is sharing what type of news article on social media. While some media scholars were well aware of this phenomenon, the general public was not paying much attention to the filter bubble, which is kind of the point. The internet is particularly adept at this—and not just because people can actively choose what news sites to view. Social media algorithms give people what they want to see and hear. So while Trump's victory may have been a surprise for those on the left, it wasn't for those on the right, neither those within the conservative media machine nor activists on the ground. An analogy for the silo effect is often a bubble, but this metaphor misses the strength of the conservative media ecosystem.

After Trump's election, pundits tried desperately to figure out what had happened. A key line of thought was that it was due to this siloed new media—a potent mix of bots, fake news, and Russian influence. On the one hand, many were finally making sense of some conservative media outlets or the extent of the filter bubble. But most of the media explanations for his win went to chasing the latest top-down media outlets or data analytics firms, whether funded by the Koch brothers or Putin. And social media platforms, especially Facebook were on the defensive for their role in data mining scandals with the likes of Cambridge Analytica. It would be a mistake to assume that it was just news media—or even just social media—that generated this Trump effect, especially since most Americans still got their news from television at the time.[82] It would also be misguided to think that it was simply the vast consortium of right-wing media institutions and outlets that were effective at generating much of the linked content for this media ecosystem. In the Monday-morning quarterbacking of Trump's win, a common explanation was that conservative Americans had simply entered a false consciousness after being injected with fake news and then cast a drug-induced vote for Trump. Post-election news stories often featured Trump voters as a random assortment of individuals, absent any organizational affiliation. The presumption with Obama voters, though, was that they were part of a left-wing bottom-up organizational campaign. Grassroots organizing is presumed to be only for the left. At the same time, though, conservatives were more likely to visit fake news sites around the election, and Republican voters shared false news stories in 2016 more often than Democrats.[83]

But I did not observe people blindly believing anything they saw online. Most of what they read reinforced their conservative *ideas,* activist *practices,* and social movement *institutions.* Consumers of fake news were already partisan, and in this North Carolina case, a large swath of grassroots groups were already sharing information.[84] And what has been dubbed fake news was not always a question of accuracy for Patriots but one of representation of their beliefs, what they did, and the groups they belonged to. As a result, what has been missing in the Trump analysis has been a broader view of this highly networked, grassroots media ecosystem that was blossoming well before the 2016 election.[85]

After Trump's victory, I set out to dig back through my interviews, field notes, and the more than 90,000 online metrics that I had gathered from these groups to see if some of these broader forces of *Breitbart News* or Russian bots had made a difference in driving up the right-wing dominance in digital activity. While *Breitbart* articles started to be reposted in 2012, it was just one of many conservative outlets that were a source of links. It also was likely that Russian bots did not hit the scene—most notably on *Wikipedia*—until mid-2013, close to the end of my data collection, and were not often used in political campaigns until after that.[86] Even with the possibility of this influence, though, the reality is that Trump rode an information wave among conservatives that had been building for years. And nationally, political groups on both the left and right have been manufacturing their social media for a decade, including bots, so automation was not new.[87]

Likewise, just because a message is automated or ideological doesn't mean that it is fake news or misinformation.[88] These concepts overlap and blur, yet what was clear with the groups I was studying, both left and right, was that platform management took an incredible amount of digital labor, as I pointed out in Chapter 2. A viral post is not always spontaneous but often manufactured. At the same time, organic groups of activists may be motivated to recirculate and comment on this staged online content, resulting in grassroots digital engagement, however influenced by resourced elites.

Yet it still seems like we are now in a fifth transformation of journalism—a digital propaganda wave—what with social media platforms overtaking decisions on what news people see via their algorithms; the proliferation of other countries (especially Russia) polluting these news feeds; or the growth of trolls and clickbait farms across a variety of news and information sites. But while this digital distribution (and in some case production) may be

spreading news faster and in more different ways than ever before, it is also expanding on the second transformation of the corporate consolidation of news, the third digital wave that downsized investigative journalists, as well as on the fourth wave of conservative media buildup. And it turns out that fake news was actually a smaller share of news consumption than what we thought.[89] Perhaps what we are now seeing, then, is less pure propaganda, per se, and more of a consolidation of these other four journalism changes of professionalization, corporatization, digitalization, and, in effect, "conservatization."

When we think of such a loaded word as "propaganda," its derivation is illustrative. It comes from "propagate" or spread, which seems to be ideal for a decentralized network like the internet. But like the agricultural meaning of propagating one's crops, it takes more than spreading seeds and fertilizer to make plants grow. A farmer also needs fertile soil, water, and sunlight. In turn, the information that resource-rich conservative think tanks or news outlets were spreading only grew and flourished because there were grassroots groups on the ground, as well as the right political climate.

Thus, we return to Gramsci and his broader view of ideology.[90] It is almost as if conservatives used Gramsci's writings from 100 years ago as their playbook. He argued that cultural institutions, which could include media, are an intricate part of creating hegemonic consent. That is, different types of groups can coalesce around a unified message. For conservatives in North Carolina, this message was about freedom. The radical or reformist groups, for instance, did not have the same strategies. But the hegemony was powerful enough to overcome those divisions and create a strong network of mutual, digital support to focus on the idea of freedom. As this conservative media ecosystem has flourished, it has even begun to develop a system that Gramsci would recognize. Today, the Steve Bannons (former executive chairman of *Breitbart* and Trump's campaign manager) of the world are what Gramsci might call "traditional intellectuals"—people who are embedded in political institutions and are crafting and guiding ideological direction from a high level.[91] The Randys and Dees of the world (Patriot activists) are what Gramsci would call "organic intellectuals"—people on the ground who come from the grassroots and whose opinions the traditional intellectuals only claim to represent.

Yet in Gramsci's time, traditional intellectuals were more like the priesthood or the academy, groups left over from previous social formations. Still,

there is another Gramscian way to view how someone like Steve Bannon could deftly take advantage of this right-wing populist movement—just as Jon had suggested the AFP was in a strong position to capitalize on the Tea Party movement. Gramsci called this type of leadership the "Modern Prince." This was not an individual but a political party, yet a party not in the current electoral party sense in the United States, but a unified formation that could more actively lead, educate, and shape the "collective will."[92] A Gramscian "collective will" of these conservative groups and activists in North Carolina propelled them to high levels of digital activism, but not because they were paid or duped. Rather, a shared core ideology—which they defined as freedom—motivated them to share and spread messages via websites, Facebook, and Twitter.[93]

Therefore, it was not just the Koch brothers or North Carolina's homegrown equivalent Art Pope who created this ideological digital activism gap. This contemporary history shows that chasing one single factor to explain a cultural, economic, and political phenomenon is futile. In the same vein, trying to find answers to Trump's win is not about an individual politician, funder, or news outlet. One of the key weaknesses of focusing on an individual like Trump, a media outlet like *Breitbart News,* or outsiders like Russian hackers is that only central actors are considered—not what is on the ground locally that can interact with those visible players. In an analysis of the emergence of fascist governments in Europe in the 1930s, sociologist Dylan Riley suggests that it may not be the case that someone like Hitler was simply a puppet master. Authoritarian governments were *more* likely to occur in countries that had a strong civil society—grassroots groups—just like I found in North Carolina.[94] Even early in the 20th century, psychological research suggested that a key element in effective propaganda was to not just target individuals but groups as well.[95] As a result, this modern-day hegemonic ecosystem does not just explain conservative digital dominance, it also may help explain Trump's win, not the other way around. This right-wing system was decades in the making.

Yet this system was different from a purely top-down propaganda machine: the bottom-up grassroots were a critical part of this process. The bottom-up nature of the conservative dominance in this digital activism sphere was also not a random collection of libertarians voicing their individual

opinions. The institutional component of how digital activism favored conservatives was key, just as the internet itself developed because of military and other state institutions.

More broadly, we cannot merely look at the national or international producers of online content, or even just a platform like Facebook or Twitter. We must also examine the consumers, who were not passive but active in recycling and generating information in their own right.[96] As a result, this builds on active audience theory that suggests that an audience is not simply digesting information absent any critical analysis. Elite funds and right-wing populist energy are not incompatible. They build on each other and create, as Tina Fetner and Brayden King called this type of confluence, a "Three-Layer Movement."[97] This North Carolina political arena shows that what enabled the rampant spread of conservative digital media stories may also explain the growing right-wing populism worldwide: an ecosystem of ideological ideas, practices, and institutions.

The Right-Wing Digital Activism Puzzle

The shape and strength of this network of conservative individuals and groups allows us to explain the puzzle that I outlined at the beginning of the chapter: what is the role of political ideology with digital activism? Contrary to the first theory that tilts online collective action to the left, the scholarly focus on leftist digital movements has indeed been misplaced. What I saw, and the data I gathered, points to conservative ideologies as being far more potent drivers of digital activism. Rather than relying on an echo chamber of left-leaning hashtags and posts, a cross-section of political groups told a different story. And while the view of the internet as a model for leftist ideals of many-to-many communications has been widely celebrated, for conservatives it instead became a fast and furious tool for distributing information to those most receptive to hearing specific messages. As we saw in Chapter 2, the internet was not used by these groups as a collective tool for back-and-forth participatory discussion. It was used for information sharing, usually of news articles generated in a one-to-many fashion, and managed in a way to make them clickable and shareable—for *informationalizing* to a swath of conservative individuals.[98]

As a result, the second theory—that ideology is less important or meaningless in the digital era—was also not the case. Instead, institutional dogma can indeed play a pivotal role in the seemingly individualized social media space. In this case, digital activism favored conservatives because of this ideological mix of ideas, institutions, and practices. Therefore, then, I am proposing a new and fourth theory of ideology's relationship to digital activism, yet this historical moment in this one context begs us to revisit that thorny third theory.

What of the third theory—that the relationship of political orientation and internet use is dependent on the time period? This argument suggests that political groups use the internet more when their political party is out of power, or what communication scholar David Karpf called the "out-party effect."[99] In this case, North Carolina conservatives did view themselves as the out-party with Obama as their main foil, even though on a state level the scales were tipped in their favor. It was this national enemy that helped coalesce the right-leaning movement. In my online content analysis, most political memes and articles focused on national, rather than statewide, politics. The main message put forth by conservatives at all levels was that they were indeed the out-party. Communication historian Fred Turner argued that the anti-establishment leanings of the California counterculture movement from the 1960s and 1970s helped inspire the internet's networked communities. In turn, 40 years later, North Carolina conservatives were emphatically believing that they were anti-establishment digital minutemen, driving their own networked community.

This view of politics shaping activism is part of a larger theory in the field of social movement studies called "political opportunity theory" or "political process theory."[100] Yet some scholars suggest that this theory is too narrow in not taking other factors into account, such as culture or even ideology itself. Sociologist Andrew Walder argued that this approach rarely grappled with the *content* of the politics at hand or how political orientation interacted with other social structural dynamics, like class relations or a historical setting.[101] And it is this broader approach that fit the digital activism gap I was seeing on the ground. Given that conservatives were on the "outside" during Obama's presidency, the out-party theory is useful, yet insufficient. The ideological relationship of ideas, practices, and institutions does shift over time. In other words, ideology is constantly evolving, depending

not just on who is in political power but also on cultural and economic shifts and alignments.[102] For instance, in this case, the diffusion of digital technologies was taking place at the same time that a right-wing populist movement and a conservative media network were also on the rise. And with Obama's election to president, this was a potent recipe for high levels of digital activism, as well as the likelihood for someone like Trump to capitalize on it.

So if we don't call this simply the out-party or a political opportunity model, then what is this Gramscian mix? I found it useful to turn to cultural theorist Raymond Williams, who wrote in the 1970s that it was imperative to see cultural media forms—in his case language or literature—as part of the "wholeness of history." Building on Gramsci in many ways, Williams added media practices to the Marxist concept of historical materialism. The problem was that many interpretations of Marx suggested that the only thing that mattered in analyzing society was economic relationships, such that cultural expressions (or in my case the internet) were only a reflection of material conditions. Williams argued that media practices (like Gramsci's views on ideology) were not just dependent on economic factors, and that the "real processes" of cultural content, whether verbal, in print, or in this case online, are literally a "means of production."[103] Rather than just economic structure on the one hand and cultural ideas on the other as two separate objects of study, their integration through these real processes must be taken into account, according to Williams. Calling this evolution "cultural materialism," Williams added that new cultural and media formats that develop are all part of a social and structural process that is changing.[104] In this vein, digital practices are also constantly evolving, such as Tea Party activists retweeting memes against what they called an Obama-controlled media, or during the rise of Trump against fake news. As a result, tracking and explaining these practices in a broader context requires incorporating what I refer to as *digital materialism*.[105]

Digital materialism explains how this one North Carolina case can be extended to other contexts and time periods. One lesson is that ideological ideas about freedom did align with the motivation to use the internet, so right-wing movements elsewhere need further study. And certainly, right-wing groups are a strong hegemonic force because they are resourced by the wealthy and powerful. Another lesson, though, is that ideological factors

should be considered together, rather than looking at one in isolation, such as the political orientation of who is using the internet, who was just elected president, or even if one group views its power as devalued. Put simply, context matters.

WHILE COMMUNICATION TOOLS and various populist movements do change and evolve, does that mean that general tendencies are irrelevant? Digital activist materialism doesn't mean that the answer as to who sits on the digital activist throne is always "it depends." And certainly, it is not a zero-sum game. Instead, conservatives are inclined to dominate the digital activism sphere regardless of the historical moment because of multipronged factors: they tend to have more classed resources and power, more organizational infrastructure by the nature of their philosophies against horizontalism, and their freedom-oriented ideology fits into the digital activism project. On top of that, in capitalist societies, their efforts align well with the corporate owners of online social media platforms. While some have suggested that these platforms like Facebook and Twitter are incongruent with the aim of social movements, when one removes one's leftist glasses, one can see that in the case of conservatives, the corporatization of social media strengthens their cause.[106] So the upshot is that ideology matters with digital activism. The first leftist digital activist theory is increasingly irrelevant; the second theory of ideology itself as irrelevant does not hold-up; the third "it depends" theory is partially correct but needs a broader hegemonic context; and the fourth theory that I'm introducing is the most relevant—digital activism tends to favor conservatism.

Years later, this robust, tightly linked network would evolve into the fertile terrain that would stimulate the spreading of the information, the Truth, the messages, that would all propel Trump's campaign. But while many saw this as a phenomenon that seemed to come out of nowhere in 2016, in reality it was under construction for years. Close to the ground in North Carolina a few years earlier, one could see it forming. And so rather than being an anomaly, the state was a bellwether for the tidal shifts that would shock the nation a few years later.

But back in 2012, the populist right movement in North Carolina was still under the radar for many, including those on the left, who had been

buoyed by populist left movements the previous year. Despite the statewide sweep by conservatives in 2010, in which Republicans took over both houses of the legislature, progressives were not prepared for what would happen next. Still, the fate of neither the looming election nor the prospects for repealing the ban on collective bargaining had been sealed. Labor activists on the left were hoping for a Hail Mary pass. Chapter 4 will show how their efforts ultimately fumbled in the election, as well as with digital activism.

Chapter Four

The Left's Radical Fairness and Its Muted Online Bullhorn

IN EARLY SEPTEMBER 2012, THE CITY of Charlotte, North Carolina, hosted the Democratic National Committee (DNC)'s convention. The DNC had selected the city because the state had barely slipped into Democratic hands on election day in 2008 when Obama carried it. North Carolina was now officially a swing state, and the party didn't want to lose this foothold in the South after watching for decades as conservative southern Democrats shifted to the Republican Party.

But the DNC's optimism about the future of North Carolina's political tilt revealed that the party and the Obama campaign were oblivious to the reality of what was happening on the ground in the state. In 2008, and now again in 2012, the Obama campaign was winning plaudits on a national level for its pioneering use of social media, mobile technologies, and big data. But this prowess wasn't filtering down to left-leaning and progressive groups in North Carolina. Instead, as we've seen in previous chapters, a groundswell of conservative groups and media were knitting together a coherent message united around themes of freedom and turbocharged by a grassroots zeal to spread that gospel—a combination that drove their digital strength and allowed them to seize power on the state level. While things like class and organization were bending in favor of the right, their unified embrace of the

conservative ideology of freedom further amplified the impact of these factors to widen the digital activism gap.

Meanwhile, groups on the left, already at a disadvantage, were failing to coalesce around a unified message or strategy to convey their ideology of fairness online, further weakening their digital presence. This points to an important, fundamental difference in this case about the notion of fairness versus freedom. The latter offered a powerful simplicity in how conservatives had harnessed this ideology. Fairness, however, was a far more complex and vague notion that was open to broader interpretation. Where freedom was a unifying catalyst, fairness as an ideology proved to be an inhibitor. The different ways groups on the left interpreted fairness led to a fracturing of both messages and strategies on how to achieve their goals. And with the activism of some groups on the left more focused on organizing than on proselytizing, their message of fairness wasn't being transmitted as widely across social networks as the right's message of freedom. The left was slowly falling behind in a larger battle of public ideas, a fight it didn't seem to know it was even fighting. This growing digital weakness of the left in North Carolina should have been a red flag to the nation, but instead it went mostly unnoticed until the presidential election of 2016 made it far more apparent.

The DNC convention is a good place to start to better understand how fairness as an ideology divided the left in North Carolina and dampened their digital activism, and possibly its effectiveness.[1] The arrival that summer of the entire DNC party structure in North Carolina, and the president himself, would seem like a grand opportunity to rally the spirits of the state's unions and broader progressive movement that had been badly battered in the 2010 state election, with Republicans seizing control of the state legislature. With a close governor's race brewing in 2012, and the Republican majority in the legislature, a unified effort would be needed if the groups dreaming of a repeal of the anti-labor General Statute 95–98 wanted to regain lost ground. But it didn't happen. Instead, the differences among these groups seeking fairness burst into full view in the weeks leading up to the convention.

As political parties do, the DNC carefully orchestrated the agenda for each day of the convention. Obama's team had once again managed a digital media campaign that put Democrats ahead of their political rivals at the national level. Speaker after speaker emphasized themes of "leveling the playing field" or everyone paying their "fair share." The president of the

United Auto Workers, Bob King, a featured DNC speaker, thundered at the podium: "Strong unions and collective bargaining have lifted millions of people out of poverty."

Outside the convention hall, however, some activists weren't buying this fairness message. Instead, they were struck by the irony of the DNC holding its convention in the country's least unionized state. They didn't believe that Obama or the DNC had done enough in the past four years to help workers. Many of them were hoping that the convention could be pressured into embracing the push to repeal GS 95–98, and in doing so, give their fight more national visibility and perhaps shift the debate over public sector unions in North Carolina.

Those activists included Marty, an African American in his 40s, and a Charlotte firefighter for over 20 years. Six decades earlier, the Queen City was home to a police officer and firefighter union dispute that culminated in the passing of GS 95–98, banning collective bargaining for all public workers.[2] And so now, like other civil servants in the state, Marty could join a union, but even as vice president of the Charlotte Fire Fighters Association, he had no legal way to get the city of Charlotte to the bargaining table. "We don't have a lot of the basic rights that other people have. . . . I don't have collective bargaining rights. I don't have dues check-off . . . [nor] grievance protection and civil service protection or any of that kind of stuff," Marty told me.

During the convention, I spoke with Marty in his union hall, a historic brick building on the outskirts of the city. Wearing a blue union shirt and white shorts, he showed me around their offices before we sat down to talk. Behind Marty was a big poster on the wall with a picture of firefighters that read "City Council said, 'We're lucky to have a job.' Charlotte Firefighters say, 'You're lucky to have us.'"

Marty told me that they were experimenting with ways to livestream their union meetings, and I knew they had a lively Twitter feed, rare for a public sector union. Indeed, their digital activism scores were among the highest on the left. But that turns out to be a bit misleading. The firefighters' social media content did not reflect any of their union political battles, let alone the national politics of the DNC in their own backyard. Instead, they remained steadfastly nonpolitical online, focused on highlighting the role members played in fighting a fire or saving someone's life.

It wasn't the case that Marty or the firefighters lacked strong political convictions. He was more than willing to talk politics offline and outside the

public digital space. Marty didn't hesitate to express his disgust that the city was going to expend resources to host a national event that would make public employees like him work harder. He was particularly frustrated because as the convention was set to begin, the firefighters were locked in a bitter dispute with the city. Marty's union had made a series of proposals that city leaders were resisting.[3] These included a request to allow a union representative to attend any meeting where an employee was being reprimanded. They also wanted a system called "meet and confer" in which elected union leaders could meet with city officials to discuss working conditions, though legally this could not be a binding contract. And, to fund union activities, they wanted to have union dues automatically deducted from members' paychecks, just like charity groups such as the United Way did. Marty's union simply wanted a system that they considered fair and equitable. Instead, they were being asked to do more work protecting the city with the DNC's arrival. Rather than lift spirits, the Charlotte convention was deepening resentments among local public sector workers.

But Marty and the firefighters' union did not see digital platforms as a place to spread their message about fairness, or as a tool for garnering public support to gain political advantage with the city council. Marty and his union preferred to do whatever they could behind closed doors so as not to alienate the mayor or city council. They had no interest in being in the spotlight, involving the media, or shaming the city. They simply didn't want to rock the boat. "In a negotiation if you feel like you got something out of it, and I feel like I got something out of it, we're happy," Marty said. "But if you feel like you're over a barrel and I'm sticking it to you, the next time you got me over a barrel you're going to get your pound of flesh. It doesn't make for good working relationships."

The firefighters' union had one of the higher digital activism scores for the pro-labor groups in my analysis of the 34 organizations that either supported or opposed collective bargaining rights in the state.[4] But it also had several factors in its favor that should have driven these scores even higher. The union had more resources than some other unions, including technologically skilled volunteers, and they had an organizational infrastructure that could harness digital media. But their online engagement was only robust when compared to left-leaning groups of both unions and other pro-labor organizations. The firefighters' digital activism score, which consisted of both an online presence and online participation, was lower than many

of the right-wing groups who had taken a stand against labor rights, even other grassroots organizations like local Tea Parties. By comparison to conservatives' prolific political posts, the firefighters did not want their confrontation with the city to be public. Rather, the union wanted to work it out behind closed doors and not damage either their own reputation or that of local politicians. Their digital engagement reflected that behind-the-scenes approach with the city. Their active Twitter feed in the lead-up to the convention did not mention this contentious issue or the city council. They wanted to look good in the community while not damaging the image of the mayor and the city council. So while the city and union were antagonistic by nature, this type of confrontation was not something that the firefighters wanted to project, as they preferred inside lobbying rather than outside agitation. "We try to do everything behind closed doors," Marty added.

Negotiations with the city failed. The firefighters got nothing. So they shifted tactics. Marty contacted his national union, the International Association of Fire Fighters, to encourage them to pull out of the convention financially, as a sign of protest for the city's refusal to negotiate with them. Following the decision that Charlotte would host the convention, 12 unions across the country announced they would also boycott the convention and withdraw money. The boycott arose not only from the firefighters' struggle but also due to the state's anti-union policies, including the ban on collective bargaining rights for public employees.[5] Eventually, all the unions came around and supported the DNC except one: the national firefighters' union.

Just days before the convention, Democratic officials met with the local firefighters' union. It got down to crunch time. The national firefighters' union's not supporting the DNC would look bad for the convention. According to Marty, the DNC finally came to the table and said: "What can we do to get you back in?" Neither the city, the firefighters, nor the DNC disclosed what agreements were made, but Marty seemed satisfied with the outcome for his union.

On the surface, the boycott was a very public protest that did receive some press. But closer to home, the Charlotte firefighters stayed silent when it came to social and digital media. They preferred to let the national unions carry the ball. I didn't see this story unfolding online. The local union still did not tweet or post on social media about the boycott. Marty's union believed

in workers getting a fair shake, yet that message was not conveyed or transmitted to a larger audience via their digital footprint. Instead, in the lead-up to the convention, they posted a reminder of an upcoming meeting and tweeted updates about their emergency calls. Most of their social media posts before and during the convention were about fires rather than politics. Their public digital face was upbeat. At the end of the convention, the firefighters' union retweeted a local TV station's tweet, "DNC emergency crews get a huge 'thank you' . . ."

Despite their members making more money than some other types of public workers, they still faced challenges in their efforts to unionize. Without a doubt, the fact that the firefighters were a union shaped what they did as a group, having different objectives than a Tea Party, for instance. But just being a different type of organization—union versus Patriot or membership versus advocacy—was not the full story. The root of the firefighters' digital limitation lies in how the various groups who supported collective bargaining pursued their goal of fairness: in drastically different ways. The left-leaning groups were focused on ideas of fairness, but their ideology went beyond a union's set of demands or, in the example of a political party, its platform. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, ideology also included their practices, the everyday work that people did to carry out those ideas. And it also encompassed institutions, which, in this case, were the individual political, labor, or social movement groups themselves, as well as how (and how much) these groups were connected to each other. Altogether, I used this broader Gramscian lens when I put these groups under the ideology microscope.

This chapter shows why groups on the left could not—and would not—keep up online: their ideas, strategies, and institutions were not as united as those on the right. Fairness meant very different things to the various left-leaning groups, inspiring multiple and differing ideas, practices, and institutions rather than one unified notion of fairness, or the hegemony we saw with the right-wing groups. This wide variation in the interpretation of fairness led to fragmentation, compromising practices, and ultimately to lower levels of digital engagement. In comparison to their freedom-focused conservative counterparts, the internet was not as well suited to developing a clear message for these groups fighting for fairness.

I delved into the inner workings of conservative groups in Chapter 3 to explain their high levels of digital activism. This chapter uncovers why and how left-leaning groups had lower levels, particularly those whose strategies

differed the most from those of the conservative groups at the top of the digital activism index.

In fact, the pro-labor groups least likely to use the internet were those who cared the most about equity and inclusion. That is, those who took the widest definition of fairness—radical left groups who strived to involve people at every level of their organization and who worked toward transforming society to be more egalitarian—had the lowest digital activism levels. To find out why, let's first take a look at the various messages of other left-leaning groups who were challenging the DNC.

DNC Challengers with Different Ideas

Charlotte sanitation workers, members of the UE 150 union, staged a solidarity rally during the convention. Like the firefighters, the sanitation workers were taking advantage of the DNC's presence to petition the city for "meet and confer" and "payroll deduction." Standing across the street from the entrance to the Charlotte Solid Waste Services Department building, workers and other union supporters held banners that read "Collective Bargaining Now!" and "Workers' Rights Are Human Rights." The chants that morning often tied their struggle to a broader movement for systematic change, making them more radical than reformist. In this barren area on the outskirts of the city, the small group chanted, "Living wage for city workers!"

"I'm hoping that since we're protesting, and the Democrats are coming, I hope they'll look at our conditions in the South . . . and they will speak out at them," said Al, an African American Charlotte sanitation worker for 27 years and union leader. He had to work overtime to clean up the DNC trash. "We get out and keep the city clean. They should look out for the workers." But only one of the hundreds of news outlets in town covering the DNC showed up at the picket: Qatar-based Al Jazeera. One DNC protester livestreamed the event.

About 45 minutes later, after workers coming onto their shift had seen the signs and heard the chants, Al and his co-workers had to walk across the street to clock in for the day. Immediately afterward, the police arrived, but the protest had already broken up. But they weren't the only labor activists whose radical views of fairness propelled them to take a confrontational approach at the DNC.

The day before the convention opened, and one year after the Occupy Wall Street movement had started, some of the pro-labor groups in North Carolina helped organize a March on Wall Street South, as Charlotte was known, thanks to its growth as a financial center. As the host of the DNC, Charlotte was the ideal target for a movement challenging the bank bailouts and growing inequality. As the banking capital of the South, the city is home to Bank of America and the East Coast offices of Wells Fargo, both of which bankrolled the convention.[6] Mimicking Occupy slogans, protesters chanted, "They got bailed out, we got sold out!" One labor activist said to the crowd of an estimated 1,000 people at a rally before the march began, "The city of [Charlotte] got 50 million dollars in order to prepare for the undemocratic convention . . . when you can't find money for education, when you can't find money for jobs, when you can't find money for raises." This injustice was a common theme among activists at the protest—people were suffering in low-wage jobs while banks were being bailed out by the very president the convention was celebrating. "People over Profit," proclaimed one banner. The raucous march wove through the city, but protesters were not able to get close to the convention because of police in riot gear and heavy barricades.

In contrast to the radical message of the March on Wall Street South to eliminate the capitalist system, the next day, a calm and calculated "parade," rather than protest, was organized by Democratic Party officials and the NC-AFL-CIO, the labor federation. The parade organizers' concept of fairness led them to be more compromising in their ideas and actions that day. This was an annual event that just happened to coincide with the DNC, yet they did not appear to take advantage of it for political demands. The contingents, which consisted mostly of unions and union locals from around the country, wore brightly colored T-shirts with their union names emblazoned on the front. Before the parade started, each organization stood by a numbered post that matched the number of the group, waiting patiently until it was their turn to walk in the preorganized numeric order. Local politicians, political candidates, and participants waved Obama signs during the parade.

Meanwhile, seven miles from the convention center, over 300 labor and community activists held what they called a Southern Workers Assembly (SWA). The message at the packed and overheated Wedgewood Baptist Church was reminiscent of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 DNC convention. At that time, civil rights activists led by Fannie Lou

Hamer confronted the racist Democratic Party. In 2012, at the SWA, mostly Black activists were challenging what they deemed a classist Democratic Party.

"Once the decision was made to hold the DNC here in Charlotte, I think labor should have converged here to bring attention to the labor issues that North Carolina represents, and the role that Charlotte has played to prevent collective bargaining in this state for public employees," said Ashaki, one of the event's conveners, as well as an organizer with UE 150 and Black Workers for Justice.

The SWA groups were not simply upset with the Democratic Party for holding the DNC at a non-unionized convention center in their state. Unlike the Charlotte firefighters who were working with Democrats behind the scenes, SWA groups had been slowly and openly building a public and radical grassroots labor movement in North Carolina and much of the Black Belt South for the previous 30 years. To better represent their interests, some at the SWA called for a labor party separate from the Democrats.

Organizers of the SWA had invited the DNC and the Obama administration to their alternative event, but they never heard back. As a result, they believed that their own organization was warranted to topple the current system.

"Our view is that the working class has to maintain independence from either political party and has to represent its own interests," Ashaki said. "I think it's clear that both the Republican and Democratic Parties in this country . . . are corporate-controlled parties, and they really represent the interests of the upper elite."

The SWA was not simply a onetime event but part of a broader organizing strategy, so activists wanted to follow up with attendees to build their movement. A paper sign-up sheet went around to the participants sitting in the church pews. Those who had e-mail accounts wrote them down, but not everyone did. In fact, no website or e-mail address was given to participants, let alone a Facebook page or Twitter name. Eventually, a few months later, I received my first e-mail.

All these groups—the firefighters, sanitation workers, the SWA, Occupy protesters, the DNC labor coalition insiders—shared the broad goal of fairness. But their various conceptions of the concept led them to organize and act in very different ways, and sometimes with strategies that were often counter to the work of other pro-labor groups. They did have one thing in

common, however: relatively low digital activism scores compared to the anti-labor groups.[7]

Unlike the sophisticated digital deluge from Obama's team across town or even the modest firefighters' social media, the SWA had virtually no public digital footprint. And just like the Greenville sanitation workers from Chapter 1, none of the sanitation employees in Charlotte were tweeting or showing up for the event because of digital technology. Even the groups organizing the March on Wall Street South had relatively low levels of digital engagement. What these particular pro-labor groups did have, though, was a message of radical social change. In contrast, the firefighters and Labor Day parade participant groups had a reformist message of working within the established political system—and they did just that. And they also used the internet more than their radical left counterparts.

And as we saw in the Chapter 3, across the 34 groups on both sides of the collective bargaining issue, reformist organizations had higher digital activism scores than radical ones.[8] Yet neither this radical-reformist gap nor the right-left gap on its own was as wide as when political strategy (radical-reformist) and political orientation (left-right) were analyzed together. More dramatic was the difference between reformist right groups, which dominated this political arena, and radical left groups, which were at the very bottom of the scale.[9] Even radical right groups' scores were, on average, about the same level as reformist left-wing groups—even though the radical right's scores also paled in comparison to the reformist right.

So what was it with the left's ideology that generated such low scores in comparison to the right's? We saw that a fragmented set of *ideas* around fairness toward the DNC was associated with digital variation between radical and reformist groups, but to further understand why that was, let's take a look at the one *institution* that was supposed to unite many of these groups agitating for change in Charlotte. Conservatives were able to come together for high levels of digital activism, so why couldn't the left?

Fragile HOPE and Fragmented Institutions

Also challenging the DNC's presence in Charlotte was HOPE, the coalition of labor groups that had brought unions and supporting organizations together years earlier to repeal the collective bargaining ban. But coalition

activists didn't present a united front at meetings with the mayor. HOPE found itself battling not only the DNC but also the rising tensions among its various member organizations. Some wanted the city to reject outright hosting the convention without any negotiations. Marty's firefighters' union preferred to get some concessions out of the city, even if the event did end up taking place in Charlotte.

"We got a different philosophy," Marty simply said about some of the other HOPE groups' ideas for political change. He also pointed out how his union's reformist strategy of behind-the-scenes maneuvering differed from some of the other labor groups' in the coalition. "You're not going to see us on the streets. You're not going to see us picketing. You're not going to see us in print."

As an early leader of the HOPE Coalition chapter in Charlotte, Marty recalled how these differences emerged when they first formed a decade earlier: "Everybody's got a different idea. . . . Everybody wants to go a different way. How do you bring everybody together? Some people want to march, some people don't want to march, some people want to do this, some people want to do that, so how do you build a cohesive working body?"

On the surface, it may have appeared that the left-wing groups, all of whom were part of the HOPE Coalition, would find it easy to unify in Charlotte. After all, they were all working toward the repeal of GS 95–98. And HOPE's entire existence was based on one fairness goal—collective bargaining rights for public employees in the state. Marty's ideas seemed similar to other pro-labor groups: they did not think it was fair that the city would host the DNC and expend resources while treating public workers unjustly. Yet the way each of these groups interpreted this issue served to splinter them apart. And these conflicts may have led to their wildly uneven digital activism scores. HOPE itself had one of the lowest scores, landing in the bottom quartile. The coalition had a website and occasionally used Facebook but never Twitter, even though it was a mixed-class group with staff (albeit quite small). This low score can be partially explained by HOPE's history.

The fact that HOPE had come together in the first place was a surprise to many at the time. The nature of HOPE, a broad-based coalition, and its origins, led to the birth of an organization that took the widest possible view of fairness: everyone's voice should be heard; everyone should be allowed to participate in decisions; and those decisions should be made by consensus rather than fiat. But a few things happened that made this coalition possible.

A sympathetic Democratic labor commissioner was in office at the time. More importantly, a few groups managed to put aside their differences to work on this one goal of repealing the collective bargaining ban.

The key group that had come around was the State Employees Association of North Carolina (SEANC). A union of statewide workers, it had spent its first 70 years insisting it was not a union at all. SEANC aspired to be an independent professional association focused on lobbying, not collective bargaining. It had successfully won pay raises for employees, educated members about state government issues, and provided discounts at various business establishments.

In 2001, SEANC broke with its past and publicly announced its support for collective bargaining. This decision stunned other union activists in the state. "Everybody outside North Carolina would've said, 'Well, big deal.' But . . . in North Carolina, that was like the heavens opened up," said David, a white activist with the North Carolina American Association of University Professors who, after hearing the news, immediately contacted other labor activists.[10] They convened a broad meeting of different public sector unions and supporters, resulting in a turnout that David described as "beyond my wildest dreams," not simply because of the numbers, roughly 50 people, but because it brought folks together from organizations that had "rarely sat in the same room and often had a lot of bad blood between them."

This began an alliance that eventually became the HOPE Coalition. It was created around collective bargaining, a cornerstone of unions, but at the founding meeting of HOPE in 2001, there was a debate about whether to project their work as that of unions or not. SEANC was still against using the word "union" and was emphatic that it was an "association," not a "union," even after it subsequently affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).[11]

Further limiting HOPE'S power, the coalition decided it would not work on anything other than overturning the legislation that had banned contract negotiations for public workers. Another critical rule of HOPE was that all major decisions had to be made with the consent of the core member groups, lest any group leave in protest over a resolution it didn't like. By 2002, representatives of both rank-and-file and professional unions formed statements of principle and structure with the goal of overturning GS 95–98.

The only way they could stay together was to make sure that they did not veer from the task at hand. The requirement of this one narrow goal, as well

as unanimous consensus, was a way to contend with the vast differences in political ideas and strategies across the member unions. Not only were all these groups fighting for their own version of fairness, but fairness itself required that they either include everyone's agenda—which was impossible—or, in this case, focus on the one thing that brought them together.

For HOPE, labor rights were about equality and the collective working together, and inherent in that definition was that everyone's voice needs to be taken into account. Because there was such a variety of viewpoints across the member organizations HOPE only posted very narrow items to their Facebook page, such as "Please join the Orange Chatham HOPE Committee at the Chapel Hill Library tonight at 5pm to talk about our next steps to defend public jobs and services and regain public employees' right to bargain collectively!" The irony was that because of the breadth of organizational ideas around fairness, they had to minimize their messages, so as to not offend. This, in turn, lowered their digital engagement levels.

What about some of the groups in HOPE that had higher scores, like the firefighters or the teachers' union—couldn't they compensate and circulate information for the other groups, as some of the conservative groups did? This happened occasionally, but I found few functioning links on websites across groups, and although one NC-AFL-CIO staff member did help many labor groups with website design, this was more of an effort to provide logistical support to other progressives, rather than a consistent digital distribution and circulation plan.

In truth, HOPE was a fragile coalition. Unlike the right's unity across the organizations in this political arena, the left was fragmented. And they recognized it. "We're more eclectic," said one HOPE activist. "That's a nice way of putting it, I guess—we're more fractured." He was onto something, adding that their side doesn't "have the Stalinist party discipline of the Republicans." The right-wing opposition had what they lacked: a clear message without the messiness and distraction of constantly changing multiple points of view.

Compromising, Not Informationalizing

HOPE—and other left-wing groups—had to gather everyone's opinion, constantly negotiating with the various members as to what was acceptable to project and publish. This mirrors what scholars Natalie Fenton and Veronica

Barassi described as a "collective ritual" of compromise when generating activist groups' communications. Simply pumping out random individual social media posts doesn't work in this dance of collectivity. Yet I found this collective ritual much more often in the left-leaning organizations than in the right-leaning ones.[12]

Collective, though, does not always mean unified.[13] The left displayed little of the ideological discipline of the right. Conservatives may have also had differences when it came to strategies, but they generally had the same anti-government message of freedom. Groups on the left were less united than conservatives, not only with each other, but also with their messages. In this case, right-leaning groups had laser-focused and united ideas of freedom, including consistency of phrases, while those on the left had many competing ideas and interpretations. Rather than conservatives' digital evangelizing, progressives were compromising.

Sure, groups on the left also provided printed educational materials at their meetings and events, as well as online, but these pamphlets or posts often highlighted member activities, not a barrage of political information around fairness. They were simply not as focused on getting information out to anyone and everyone about their ideas, like the groups on the right were in communicating their "Truth." As we saw in the Chapter 3, right-wing groups posted more links to articles than those on the left.[14] There were certainly left-leaning, independent media and bloggers generating pro-labor and other progressive content that could have been shared widely.[15] Rather than dominating digital streams with news like the right, the left was more likely to post photos of members gathered at events or other information about their past actions. It was not just that groups on the left were posting less; they were posting different kinds of things. The digital-evangelizing motivation was just not there. The radical left, in particular, wanted to gather multiple perspectives rather than tell people any type of singular Truth.

A key difference was that for many progressive activists at the time, information was just a small part of their political practices. For conservatives, it was part of everything. *Informationalizing* fit into the ideology of right-wing groups' ideas about their freedoms having been taken away, which then flowed into their digital-evangelizing practices in response to their perception of a liberal bias in the news media, all of which was buoyed by conservative media institutions.

The right had a tight-knit ecosystem of grassroots groups, conservative media, and other resourced advocacy organizations that all (re)circulated information. The left, however, was siloed online, and each silo shared little with other silos. Even though the HOPE Coalition was focused, it was not focused on a message of fairness that could resonate across many other left-leaning groups, but rather on a very narrow state bill.[16]

In the same vein, the digital campaigning that Obama's team had stamped on American politics was not highly integrated into the grassroots groups and activists who would be likely to support him like Marty, Ashaki, or Al. Democratic Party social media prowess was effective for a political campaign but not for the type of vast news media and institutional ecosystem that I saw with the conservatives. While the firefighters' union had a relatively strong digital presence, they were not reposting stories and memes against Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate, in contrast to the rampant anti-Obama linked articles found on Patriot group sites.

Ultimately, many left-leaning activists viewed a technological focus as less politically useful for a collective ideology. As a result, their digital practices were not unified. The internet was simply more useful to conservatives who could broadcast propaganda and less effective for progressives who wanted to organize people.[17]

That the pro-labor left in North Carolina lacked a unified message would not be a surprise to theorists like George Lakoff. A linguist and political strategist, Lakoff has long argued that conservatives have been more effective than liberals at framing values. In fact, he goes further and says that Democrats, in particular, have been particularly bad at political messaging. At the same time, social movement scholars have an entire subfield dedicated to how "framing" a movement can lead to its success. We also know that digital technology has only accelerated the way that advocacy groups can determine whether messages are effective. These beta-testing experiments offer different phrasings of an organizational pitch to determine which version people are more likely to click on.[18]

All these theories on the role of messaging within movements are relevant and understandably focus on the message itself and what leads to its success—measured in votes, wins, or clicks. But what I found was that it was not just a unified message that savvy conservative media institutions were able to beta test and spread. They also had grassroots groups who

were reposting, commenting, and actively involved in (re)generating the propaganda.

This is where a wholistic approach from theorists like Gramsci is useful in understanding how ideology factors into the digital activism gap—the source of power is not simply from the likes of the Koch brothers who fund the beta testers but a hegemony linked with people on the ground who participate in the process. Those on the left tended to lack not only that material influence but also a unified grassroots base.

But perhaps a particular turn of events could unify these fractured institutions enough to drive their digital activism scores higher. Despite the friction among the labor groups and their digital differences, the energy from the organizing around the DNC could put some lifeblood back into pro-labor groups. After all, 2012 was the first major election year after the Occupy movement, leading to some optimism that a more progressive wave of voters was getting energized. Could this perceived opening, this political opportunity, tip the balance both with labor issues and digital engagement?

Hope Dims for HOPE

November 2012 swept in the biggest electoral change in North Carolina in more than a century. Democratic candidate Walter Dalton lost the gubernatorial race to Republican Pat McCrory, and the state legislature tilted toward a Republican supermajority. Republicans, further swept in by the Tea Party movement, could now pass legislation with Democrats powerless to block it. Those hoping to see GS 95–98 erased were more dispirited than ever.[19]

"The political environment is so adverse that the chances of actually getting this law repealed are worse-than-zero," one labor leader told me after the results had come in. "It's much more likely that a more repressive law will be passed than we'll get this one repealed."

Which is exactly what happened. Republicans immediately put public sector collective bargaining on the legislative agenda, but not to repeal GS 95–98. Instead, conservative legislators, including House Speaker Thom Tillis, introduced a bill to strengthen it by enshrining it in the state constitution. Not only that, they introduced constitutional amendments that would punish unions: "Right-to-Work" and the abolishment of dues deduction for public employee unions.

"It's an insurance issue," explained a conservative staffer, feeling emboldened by the Republican legislature's efforts to initiate a constitutional amendment on collective bargaining for public employees. "It's much easier to change a law with the legislature than it is to change a constitutional amendment, which requires a vote of the entire population."

One labor activist compared these types of actions to another constitutional amendment that year: "It's the same thing as gay marriage, really. I mean you take something that was illegal and you're gonna make it super-illegal. You're just trying to rile up your base." Brian, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) staff member, added with a sound of despair in his voice: "We've lost control of the governor's mansion, lost control of the General Assembly. And to be honest with you, we are seen as a labor union—therefore we are seen as irrelevant to these guys."

By the end of 2012, this assessment was universal among HOPE members. Everyone believed that in the foreseeable future, repeal of GS 95–98 was dead. And so, it seemed, was HOPE itself. One leader summed it up this way: "HOPE is now more of an idea than a functioning coalition." While the new political climate played a role in the demise of HOPE, so did the persistent infighting. The staggering electoral losses would reveal just how divided those on the left were, as fundamental disagreements over strategy caused a new split. And this ideological schism would expose the digital activism gap even more.

A Tale of Two Unions in 2013: One Step Forward

On Monday, April 29, 2013, police arrested 17 protesters at the North Carolina General Assembly building in Raleigh. Their act of nonviolent civil disobedience against legislative attacks on voting rights and worker rights would soon develop into weekly "Moral Monday" protests at the state capitol building, leading to hundreds of arrests of union activists, university professors, and religious leaders.

Led by the NC-NAACP and many affiliated organizations, this grassroots movement energized many on the left, including some organizations in HOPE.[20] But Moral Monday was not universally welcomed by coalition members. In fact, members of SEANC were seething inside the halls of the state legislature at the same time the protests were happening.

The Moral Monday protests took place on the bottom floor of the state capitol rotunda. An open circular walkway wound up two flights. From the top floor, journalists and supporters were able to take pictures of the civil disobedience arrests below.

One Monday evening in June, three SEANC activists made their way downstairs from the top floor—not to participate in the protests at the bottom but to lobby on the second floor at the legislative offices. They wore blue T-shirts proclaiming their national affiliation with SEIU Local 2008.

One member, Brenda, worked in accounting at North Carolina State University. Asked whether she had ever been involved in a protest like Moral Monday, she responded that she was too busy. She worked full time, was a mother, and attended night school. She asked, "Think I have time for a nap?"

For years, Brenda's association had lobbied on Mondays when the General Assembly was in session. That June evening, SEANC lobbyists strained to speak to their legislators over the noise of hundreds of Moral Monday protesters in the echoing rotunda. The Moral Monday movement had been under way for months by then and had made local and national news, but SEANC was frustrated that the protest was disrupting their ability to lobby.

One of the members lobbying that day, Andrew, split off from the group and returned with John Szoka, a Republican legislator. The group then headed to the senate chamber, where other SEANC activists in the same blue T-shirts were talking to senators and taking photos together. An elderly member, Rose, said, "We want to put the faces of state employees onto the issues that we're lobbying for."

That week's lobbying was aimed against House Bill 834, which would allow state managers to fire state employees for any reason, not just performance. SEANC's head lobbyist, Ardis, who was dressed in business attire, rather than a T-shirt, said that this would put "more politics into the management of state employees. . . . If this passes, anyone can be fired for any personal reason, including the best employees."

Ardis said they were not there "for unions. We are not interested in unions. We are interested in the issues and rightfully so." Her goal was to protect state employees. She added that the last few months of Moral Monday had been a confusing time. Other SEANC members chimed in that they felt lost in the Moral Monday crowd and that the protests made it more difficult to do their lobbying. They said that the Moral Monday protesters meant well, but SEANC was the group making real change.

Another prominent public sector union in the HOPE Coalition was UE 150. While they had the same goal of reversing the collective bargaining ban, UE 150 was often at odds with SEANC. The same evening that SEANC members were attempting to lobby legislators, UE 150 was in the center of the Moral Monday protests. UE 150 staff and members loudly chanted, "We are united! We want justice! We'll never be defeated!" They held up a big red banner that said "Organize the South!" They also handed out florescent green flyers inviting people to come to a SWA forum the following Saturday in Raleigh.

During that evening's protest, one UE 150 member disclosed that his wife had lost her job at a local university because she was not in a union. He had heard about the Moral Monday protests through an organizer who was standing nearby and taking pictures of the first group of over 80 arrestees that evening, which included UE 150 activists. As the state capitol police loaded the civil disobedience protesters onto a bus to haul them off to the city jail, union members chanted, "Thank you! We love you!" A local minister who was leading the chants over a bullhorn then started another aimed at the Republican speaker of the House: "Hey Thom Tillis, we won't fail, you should be the one in jail!"

Angaza, a state worker and the UE 150 president, said that although he was a leader in the organization, "I have a regular job like most workers." His union was also against House Bill 834—the same bill that SEANC was lobbying against—as well as legislative efforts that limited union payroll deductions from state employees. But to oppose these bills, UE 150 chose to protest rather than lobby. Members of UE 150 viewed Moral Monday as part of a larger political struggle in the non-union South, and in fact the union had helped lay the groundwork for public sector worker participation.

Though both groups had been advocating on behalf of public workers in the state for decades, UE 150 had a different history from SEANC. The statewide local grew out of a broader political movement in the early 1990s to mobilize around class, race, and gender inequalities among university housekeepers in Chapel Hill, school bus drivers in Greenville, and sanitation workers in Raleigh. UE 150 called itself "a rank-and-file union" that defied what it considered to be the more conservative "business unionism" of some other unions, like SEANC.

These difference between their histories, and the difference between their definitions of fairness, were exacerbated as the groups sought to respond to

the new Republican-dominated reality in the state. As UE 150 members eagerly joined Moral Monday, SEANC's white middle-aged executive director, Dana, tweeted that the protest strategy was detrimental to public sector unions. This incendiary tweet epitomized SEANC's reformist approach to unionism and created a heated social media exchange during the height of the Moral Monday summer weekly protests:

> SEANC not part of #MoralMonday we think it unwise to break the law & overburden fellow public employees. Prefer to sit down / talk policy! #ncga

A barrage of tweets came in response, criticizing SEANC for their noninvolvement in Moral Monday. Dana replied:

> Your [*sic*] so wrong and you with two other democrat hack wannabes don't speak for SEANC. SEANC is nonpartisan.

One response to this tweet reflected the social movement unionism that was more typical of UE 150:

> You might be talking to #NCGA [North Carolina General Assembly], but they're not listening. #MoralMondays voices heard all across country! We need union solidarity.

While this last tweet reflected UE 150's political views, it did not come from the organization or its members. UE 150 did not take to social media at all to promote its position. This type of digital practice was not part of its organizing strategy. No opposing tweets came from UE 150, which preferred protest strategies and had virtually no social media presence. Meanwhile, SEANC practiced reform-minded lobbying and had a relatively high level of digital engagement.[21]

Digital Engagement Differences: To Be and Not to Be Online

SEANC was a heavy user of the internet. It had a complex and sophisticated website with many layers of content for viewers to learn about the organization and respond to calls for participation. The site provided an interface

for people to sign up with the organization and an updated calendar of events. It also served as a main communication portal.

SEANC's social media presence was also broad and deep. Its Facebook page was updated many times per day with posts highlighting legislative news or the personal stories of public employees. SEANC opened its Facebook account in early 2011, and by June 2013 it had more than 1,100 posts, 1,200 comments and 4,300 likes. They also started an organizational Twitter account in 2011, tweeting more than 500 times during the same time period. Three leading staff members—the executive director, the chief lobbyist, and the communications director—also had active Twitter accounts that were integrated into the public face of the organization.

In addition to these three platforms, e-mail blasts and print publications were among the organization's communication arsenal. Jill, SEANC's communications director, described their strategy to integrate multiple media formats to get members involved in legislative issues: "It's our goal to have a seamless integration of old and new media. We want to have our news go across the entire enterprise in a variety of platforms. So if you look up on my whiteboard [*she points to a flowchart*], I want it to first be generated on our website, to push it to Twitter, then to Facebook, then to our weekly e-newsletter, *The Scoop,* and finally to our printed publication, *The Reporter,* to make sure that we hit all of those mediums."

In contrast to SEANC's high online engagement, UE 150's online engagement was sparse, as we saw in Chapter 1. It had one static web page that simply said "under construction." An affiliated organization occasionally hosted some content for UE 150, but no staff member was dedicated to updating this site. Their social media presence was also less robust than SEANC's. UE 150 had created a Facebook page in April 2012, but in the following year it had only 40 posts, 20 comments, and 180 likes. Most of the posts were posed photos of participants during events. A few organizers used their personal Facebook accounts to occasionally post information about the union and other political activities.

Twitter, however, was nonexistent. Nor did the union have formal e-mail software, electronic mailing lists, or texting systems. They did use e-mail and texts to communicate between individuals or with a basic reply-all method. A lead organizer and staff member commented about this approach to digital engagement, "There's no updating, there's no real coherency to it, either subject-wise or organization-wise." Instead, the organization produced

occasional print publications such as newsletters and flyers, and also made buttons. In other words, UE 150's entire media production was minimalist and infrequent.

Digital differences between UE 150 and SEANC mirrored the strategy gap across the political arena of collective bargaining. Reformist groups were twice as likely to update websites and have interactive features. On Facebook they posted twice as much as radical groups did. Encouraging Twitter engagement was also more common among reformist organizations like SEANC, using mentions in their tweets five times as often.[22]

I had originally thought that maybe UE 150, and other working-class groups, could surmount the resource and class constraints that limited their digital engagement. Would a political motivation, like a large-scale protest in the face of a conservative government, overcome these limitations and generate higher internet use? Moral Monday seemed to be an ideal stimulus for digital activism. But even well into the first month of the movement, the opposite rang true: SEANC—outside the protest movement—had a strong digital presence while UE 150—immersed in the civil disobedience—had virtually none. This was a puzzle. For one, the political out-party theory may have played a role in the formation of Moral Monday, but it didn't seem to be the case with digital engagement, at least for a group like UE 150. In addition, this digital invisibility seemed to fly in the face of the so-called Facebook or Twitter Revolutions that were splashing headline news at the time. Simply put, digital technology and protest mobilization seemed to go hand-in-hand, according to media and academic reports.

But by combining a group's political orientation (left / right) with political strategy (radical / reformist), I found that the radical left protesters, who were so often the focus of research and news coverage at the time, were at the bottom of the digital activist rankings.[23] Certainly, reformist efforts of left-wing groups made the news in the early internet years because they finessed digital technology to great effect, such as MoveOn.org or even the Obama campaign. But the protest movements that followed, from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter, were more typical of the picture being painted of digital activism in the early 2010s. In terms of who was harnessing hashtags and any subsequent activism, common wisdom privileged radical left protesters. It wouldn't be until Trump's election that these stereotypes faced mounting skepticism, as more attention was being paid to the far right, as

well as to trolls and hacking, yet it was still these extremes that were associated with digital politics—protesters or chatbots, not run-of-the mill groups.

And that's what I had been after—how political groups were using the internet on an everyday level. Since the left in this case was not *informationalizing,* and they had such a diverse set of digital practices, how can we understand these differences between SEANC and UE 150 in the context of a large-scale protest movement? Both were public sector unions for state employees, but each had a very different approach to unionizing—and digitizing. One was radical, the other reformist. We have already seen how fractured ideas and fragmented institutions shape low levels of digital engagement; now it's time to take an in-depth look at these differences in their strategies.

Lobbying Unionism: Using Bottom-Up Technology in a Top-Down Way

SEANC managed both politics and technology with an eye toward persuading elected officials, not toward empowering their membership. SEANC believed that organizations could make a difference politically by changing the hearts and minds of people in power, such as legislators and the media. This incremental reform ended up shaping the union's top-down internet use.

Their vision did not include traditional union organizing. Dana, the union's executive director, described another model. In his youth, he was inspired by the book *Showdown at Gucci Gulch,* a nonfiction narrative of corporate lobbyists who shaped tax policy in the 1980s. "I thought when I was in high school I wanted to be a lobbyist," Dana explained. "So I read *Gucci Gulch* and fell in love with it—and the alligator shoes—and I said, 'That's me.'" His inspiration was reflected in SEANC's lobbyist approach to social change. Dana prided himself on being an ace lobbyist who engaged in "good old-fashioned shoe leather, one-on-one independent conversations" with legislators.

The union's primary goal was to win financial benefits for its members. They were not always successful because raises for public employees required the vote of the state's General Assembly since there was no collective

bargaining. SEANC had decided that the best way to do this was to follow events in the state legislature, lobby state-level politicians, and educate members on how to contact representatives for upcoming bills.

Most labor unions had strong ties to Democrats, but SEANC also formed affiliations with Republicans if the union believed those candidates might win an election. At their annual convention in 2012, SEANC hosted both the Democratic and Republican gubernatorial candidates and ultimately endorsed Pat McCrory, the Republican candidate, who went on to win the election.

SEANC's chief lobbyist, Ardis, had foreseen the 2012 Republican sweep of North Carolina politics, so she worked to build relationships with Republican candidates before they entered office. The union also used their political action committee to raise money for state-level political candidates, regardless of party affiliation. This was a major part of their work—flexing their lobbyist muscle with donations.

SEANC had a very practical definition of fairness. It meant getting whatever it could, whenever it could, for its members. It wasn't concerned about appeasing all members or having long-winded debates about policy or strategy. No, it wanted to get stuff done. SEANC had mechanisms for member involvement, but it was primarily run as a top-down organization, which worked well with its reformist strategy. Most of the everyday power was with top staff leadership, especially Dana, who had been in his position for over ten years. This was not purely a reflection of SEANC's hierarchical structure or multiple levels of decision making, but due to its centralized practices by those at the top.[24] As one member confided in me, "Every effort I tried to make it more democratic was met with extreme resistance and usually failed. Prior to Dana it was definitely an oligarchy, and after Dana arrived, transitioned to dictatorship." As we saw in Chapter 2, hierarchical organizations were not necessarily more or less democratic. It was more a question of what groups *do* with those tiers of decision making.

And what SEANC did clearly antagonized allies on the left. Other prolabor groups were furious that SEANC had not only endorsed the Republican candidate for governor but had also sided with Republicans against the NCAE over a health plan cut for teachers. These tensions were the final wedge that drove HOPE apart. As one teachers' union leader put it: "I think the last straw for all of us . . . the legislators that voted to take away our dues deduction rights—[SEANC] honored those legislators with their legislator

of the year award . . . our last HOPE meeting addressed that very issue. It was 'What the hell have you done?' It's one thing to cozy up . . . it's another thing to give those people your damn legislator of the year award. . . . They've really become cheerleaders for the Republican Party."

These disagreements did not sway SEANC from focusing on their lobbying efforts. When members and staff were caught off guard by Moral Monday that evening, they were initially forthright in their critiques of the protest as getting in their way, but as soon as Ardis heard these derisive comments, she interrupted them and policed the conversation to stay "on message."

Despite this top-down focus on lobbying, SEANC did provide some ways to get members involved in the organization, including in the 69 districts across the state. For instance, members at one local meeting were active in electing officers, planning social events, fundraising for charity, and educating each another about the legislative information the statewide office had distributed. Each district had some autonomy, but top union leadership made all major political and policy decisions outside of the yearly convention, even the choosing of recipients for local fundraising.[25] Local districts tended to follow the script from "Raleigh" regarding programs and projects. Members often conflated "Raleigh" with top SEANC leadership in their conversations, and they would describe it in deferential terms.

Some local members tried unsuccessfully to convince SEANC to address on-the-job grievances that might erupt throughout the year. But rather than responding to the concerns of members from below, SEANC focused on following the legislative lead from above. Still, the leadership did lobby for raises and benefits for state employees through legislation and statewide channels, priorities that were approved at the annual conventions. The tasks of the local districts often centered more on social events than on addressing workplace issues. Member voices were restricted to certain types of topics that were not central to the mission of the organization. Throughout the year, SEANC leadership shaped the union's conversations at the statewide and district levels.

I witnessed this top-down process during a SEANC annual convention, which took place in a large hotel ballroom the size of a football field. Delegates sat at round tables. Adorning the front of the room were a stage, podium, and large video screens. Most of the agenda consisted of inspirational videos, awards for service, acknowledgments of past presidents and

opportunities to eat. However, some moments were set aside for delegates to speak at special microphones dotted around the room for open comment. During one such moment, there was a long delay before any member would come up to speak. Finally, one woman did. She approached the microphone to talk about how difficult it was to pay her bills as a cancer survivor. She then talked about another member in her district whose son had leukemia and who also struggled with paying bills. Soon the lines to speak grew, but instead of demands for better health insurance or other political points, questions, or proposals, delegates used their entire time on the microphone to say how much money their district would donate to the member whose son had cancer. Just like at the chapter meeting, debate and discussion among the membership tended to focus on charity work rather than the political direction of the union. Simply, the organizational norm was that decisions and political power rested with top leadership and politicians, not the rank and file.

In the same vein, SEANC's leaders and staff used the internet to educate members and keep them up to date about events in the General Assembly, not elicit feedback from them. SEANC's e-mail communication and use of social media were often unidirectional, delivering information from the central organization to members and districts. Some districts had their own electronic mailing lists or Facebook pages, but the communications staff in the Raleigh office was careful to keep these discussions on topic. Jill, the communications director, said, "We actually have staff involvement that monitors [districts' social media]. And it rises to our level if there's a problem." In other words, they would intervene in online discussions that were not consistent with the union's message.

Jill showed me her bank of computer screens. She was eager to show me her TweetDeck, a platform to monitor and manage Twitter. "So we have our constant feed running throughout the day. . . . I also have my own handle in addition to the Twitter handle here," she said. "And so we're monitoring my own personal account, which mostly media is following me because of what I do here. . . . And then we also run our campaigns from here . . . both in terms of Facebook and Twitter. And so here, we can click across all of them, plus keep track of who's mentioning us, so we're fully aware of who's talking about us."

As Jill described it, they had a bird's eye view of any digital communication they produced or that others did about them. SEANC took a careful,

organized approach designed to convey a clear message. This consistency carried through to messages to their members. Dana reported that he wielded his digital communication power very judiciously: "The way I control my voice in this whole process is that I use [the internet] sparingly," he said. "So I'm not on there 24/7—I don't use it all the time. But when they get a tweet in my name, even though it's not me doing it, or they get a Facebook or a special e-mail with my picture on it, they know, 'Oh, oh, something is going on because [the director] has now did this.' So I will do that maybe once a month or less. . . . So communication for me is read more than anything else we send because there's meaning for it because it's used sparingly." To keep his posts' click rate high, then, Dana only posted occasionally so that his impact was not diluted. As the head of the union, the executive director's position was one of profound influence—even more than that of the elected union president.

SEANC was thorough with its member education, informing members on how to respond to relevant political developments or union activity. Though SEANC's leadership monitored social media to find out what was happening on the ground with its members, what the statewide group posted on social media was not in response to any member issues they posted but to target lobbyists. As Dana explained: "[The internet] has radically changed the benefits of us using it as a tool to educate our members and spur . . . them to instant action exactly when it's needed. . . . So in the lobbying world, because of this instantaneous communication . . . we can mobilize a group of people [to swamp legislators] with calls and letters. . . . It will affect how they vote and how they deliberate, even though it's manufactured."

Some members appreciated this up-to-date legislative news and information. At one local meeting, members said they were glad that the union leadership let them know how to communicate with legislators, and some even utilized this information while a local meeting was in progress, stepping out to make phone calls to legislators.

In addition to internal communication practices, SEANC used the internet to keep track of relevant legislation as it moved through the General Assembly. Jill said that SEANC monitored all the bills and upcoming votes online: "Mainly because of Twitter, we know precisely what's happening in the General Assembly, even if we're not there." She followed their own lobbyist, as well as legislators and journalists on Twitter.

Social media was also a critical vehicle to reach legislators. "[Digital technology has] revolutionized [lobbying]. . . . There used to be a physical barrier between a lobbyist and a legislator, so when an item of discussion was on the debate, when I was over there lobbying, if you really had to get somebody, you had to go in and send a note and wait," Dana said. "Now they're on the floor of the House or Senate, and you can actually text them and tell them what's on your mind. And the ramifications of that are enormous. . . . If there's an issue on the floor, you can actually influence the actual . . . words coming out of their mouth . . . because you can text them exactly what to say. . . . And now we have immediate access to them to give them the words to use in the debate."

Dana saw the internet as providing a direct link to politicians, and lobbying them was central to the union's approach to social change. But it was not just legislators that SEANC believed digital technology could reach. Staff lit up with excitement when they talked about how new media connected them to another powerful group—the mainstream news media. Jill, the communications director, told me: "Twitter is the best way to talk to the media, hands-down." This enthusiasm for digital media as a conduit to those in power defined SEANC's internet practices.

Social Movement Unionism—Organizing by Any Means Necessary

Over time, SEANC had become a savvy, digital media player. However, the statements and stories SEANC generated online did not get picked up or redistributed by a chain of allies in the same way that similar content from the right would cascade across the social media feeds of a large swath of groups. Ultimately, the fractured nature of the pro-labor groups blunted the impact of SEANC's work.

Take UE 150, for instance. They were a grassroots union that viewed social change as a bottom-up process, and they also viewed unions like SEANC with suspicion. UE 150's goal was to overhaul what it viewed as an unjust political system. These ideas about social change matched well with the union's bottom-up and participatory organizing practices. They also led UE 150 to reject the internet as a primary organizing tool.

"We're not just union organizers. We're revolutionaries because we're organizing in the South, and we're not doing this just to build a trade union. We're doing this to change a society," said a labor activist while handing out leaflets.

UE 150 had a similar number of decision-making levels to SEANC, but it approached that decision making differently. They solicited feedback and votes from members throughout the year to adjust the political direction of the union. As one member put it, "In this union, the UE, we are rank-and-file. We run the show. It's not a top-down thing. It's the bottom up. Without us, it does not exist."

One flyer handed out to potential members summed up this process which I had observed. Entitled, "Union Democracy," the first line stated, "UE 150 is a member-run organization." With 11 chapters around the state, they also had delegates to a biannual statewide convention, and each chapter elected a representative to serve on UE 150's state executive board. These were comparable structures to that of SEANC. However, the similarities stopped there. The flyer explained, "In each workplace our union builds chapters and holds meetings where workers discuss problems and develop action plans to solve them."

Since the union encouraged members to voice their workplace grievances, every interaction allowed workers to direct and refine the focus laid out at their convention. For instance, Shirley, an African American woman, was fired from her job at the sanitation department in Raleigh. Her husband had beaten her up, and he ended up in jail. Shirley was treated for her wounds and went back to work, where she said she was sexually harassed and then fired. UE 150 organized a campaign to try and reinstate the ten-year veteran.

This strategy of encouraging workers to "speak out" about their working conditions and participate in the union was easier said than done. It took effort on the part of organizers. Larsene, the public hospital employee and union member we met in Chapter 1, told me that before she got involved with UE 150, she didn't know what a union was. "I didn't even realize that my rights were being violated, I had no idea. I really didn't even know I was in a 'Right-to-Work' state. All of the things that I've learned have come from being in the union, being a part of the union."

Larsene, though, was not a passive consumer of union information spoon-fed to her by organizers. She had become the vice president of the statewide

UE 150 and spent time recruiting other workers to participate. Larsene would ask other workers about their issues and concerns, not just tell them why they should join the union. This participatory process has directed the union's organizing campaigns over the years. For UE 150, soliciting participation was a key part of their long-term organizing practices.

UE 150 organizers did have their own political agenda. They were not asking for member input to fill a blank slate. They encouraged members to participate in their broader strategy of agitation, protest, and ultimately transformation of the current political system. Still, one organizer, Ashaki, who had spoken at the SWA, summed up how she saw UE 150 fitting into this radical practice: "Social movement unionism means that the rank-and-file leadership is developed . . . and directly involved in making decisions and leading the building of the trade union movement. It means that the issues being taken up by the trade union encompass the total conditions of the working class and not just of a few members in this or that workplace, and it . . . directly attempts to address questions of racism and sexism, patriarchal social relations, and conditions that impact immigrant workers, and tries to unite workers. . . . So that's social movement unionism, . . . rank-and-file democracy, rank-and-file leadership, as opposed to business unionism."

More than raising one's hand at a yearly meeting, this type of deep participation was not always easy because of the time commitment and the reluctance to speak out in an anti-union state, all of which contrasted with SEANC's narrower professionalized practices. In fact, these radical North Carolina activists chose to affiliate with UE because it was one of the few unions that had this social movement approach.

Larsene had experienced both SEANC and UE 150 as a state worker, and neatly summed up their differences in strategy: "I'm proud to be a part of UE. We are for the workers. We're not giving you a coupon at a hotel. . . . If you get in a crisis, [SEANC] don't got your back, they won't help you fill out a grievance, work on a grievance, they're not going to do that, you know, 'cause they're all about the big bucks and all that kind of stuff. . . . We've had campaigns that work for workers' rights. We've had protests and marches, and we've dealt with the state doing political actions. . . . All that, we've learned how to do [by] being in the union, having the stewards' training, having leadership training, things that the union has done to make us be better at what we're trying to do."

The stewards' trainings and the other organizing tactics that Larsene described were replicated across the union to address common problems in the workplace, such as sexual or racial harassment. For instance, the firing of the Raleigh sanitation worker not only led to a union grievance procedure but also to organizing more "speakouts" about working conditions and protesting at a Raleigh city council meeting.

This radical strategy for social change went beyond calling or visiting a member of the state legislature, requiring a deeper participation among its members. Such a level of participation required a collective effort to try to transform the political system. As a result, UE 150's participation in Moral Monday was a natural extension of this ideology. The union had been involved in similar coalitions and protests since its founding, including other marches led by the NC-NAACP. So it was no surprise that UE 150's input and collaboration inspired the third Moral Monday, which was dedicated to labor issues with a particular focus on public sector unions and collective bargaining.

But SEANC's "business unionism," as Ashaki put it, had prevailed in the state for almost 60 years: "Instead of raising the political consciousness of the working class, [business unions] have limited any kind of political action, except for the most basic electoral kind of politics to some degree." But UE 150's "social movement unionism" was pushing these political limits, particularly with their civil disobedience and multiple arrests as part of the Moral Monday coalition.[26] In fact, the first protester who was prosecuted and tried in court was an experienced UE 150 organizer and former Black Liberation movement activist. Union leaders believed the state intentionally targeted such a prominent union activist as an intimidation tactic because such radical labor resistance had not been seen in North Carolina in decades.[27]

Reaching the Powerful Not Mobilizing the Powerless

Was it possible that social class differences, and not an ideological fissure, drove the digital activism variation between radical groups like UE 150 and reformist groups like SEANC? Resources were certainly a factor. SEANC had a much bigger budget, and it could dedicate four staff members to

communication tasks out of a total of 40 employees, whereas UE 150 had only five total staff members, none focused exclusively on communication.

While both unions represented working-class members, such as groundskeepers, UE 150's members were overwhelmingly working-class. In the case of SEANC, white-collar administrative employees and managers were not only members but were more likely to be union leaders. Indeed, the class composition of each union's membership was connected to its strategies. Class and strategy worked together to drive differences in digital participation.[28] One active SEANC member who supported the work of UE 150 explained how the two unions' strategies related to their class positions: "I've always felt that UE was somewhat better—actually, perhaps a lot better—in educating members around issues of race and gender and class, and providing a little bit more of a theoretical framework regarding capitalism and the role of public workers in a capitalist society. SEANC still retains a stronger management orientation. And, of course, UE has just the opposite—you can't be a member if you're a manager."

Throughout this book, I have pointed out how each digital activism gap factor—class, organization, and ideology—amplifies the others. They do not work in isolation. In this instance, class and an element of ideology (strategy) worked together. In other words, social class is an important but incomplete explanation of internet use.

Still, since SEANC was a hierarchical top-down union, perhaps it was just digital bureaucracy driving this digital activism gap. This was certainly a factor, and digital activism scores were even higher across reformist groups that were also hierarchical. But it was not always that simplistic, as half of the radical groups were hierarchical with multiple levels of decision making, including UE 150. In the case of SEANC, its hierarchy, as well as its large bureaucratic staff, worked in sync with *how* these decisions were made: top-down to motivate lobbying. These factors became advantages that together drove higher digital activism scores.

What about the sizes of the groups? SEANC had about 55,000 members, and UE 150 had approximately 5,000. But even with Facebook posts, for instance, in proportion to the number of members, stark differences persisted, and 5,000 members is still a sizable number for UE 150 to have no functioning website or Twitter feed, especially in the midst of a large protest movement. Certainly, size differences were also related to resources, as SEANC had more dues-paying members, so they had more funding for

equipment and staff. Still, UE 150 could have dedicated one of their staff members to communication if they had prioritized it. They didn't.

"Online work should be sort of like your icing on the cake, and not your core organizing strategy," summed up one UE 150 activist. Labor organizing for a radical union like UE 150 was a slow process of getting people involved for the long haul, and the internet was just one of many tools the union used in this process. As Ashaki explained, "As an organizer I'm very much in favor of using technology to the advantage of oppressed and exploited people and their struggles for justice, but we can't limit our organizing to just technology. We're old-fashioned in the sense that we got to do legwork. We still have to produce leaflets and get them in the hands of people. We still have to hold meetings with workers in their various workplaces and departments, and hold meetings in communities and build organization, so that takes legwork, strategy—just the hard work, person-to-person contact. So I think that technology and the internet and all helps with that, but it can't substitute for it." As we saw in Chapter 1, UE 150 organizers often used in-person communication practices, including printed leaflets, to recruit new members, disseminate information, and involve members in decision making. While they certainly used digital communication as a tool, it was just one of many in their organizing toolbox.

Many radical left organizers were concerned with "starting where people are at," which is an old mantra developed by community organizer Saul Alinsky, who wrote *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*.[29] A key part of this philosophy is getting people to "speak out" or talk about their workplace or other political problems. Raising these concerns is a critical part of people getting (and staying) involved—a first step in organizing collectively.

As I would talk to radical left organizers in North Carolina about how this organizing philosophy might tie into internet use, they would often relate a story from years earlier that had nothing to do with technology per se but demonstrated the weakness of relying on outsiders, which is how they often described the internet. One day, workers at a turkey-processing plant in the town of Fayetteville walked off their job in an unprecedented wildcat strike to protest harsh working conditions. In response to the strike, a union from Washington, DC, sent organizers down to sign up the workers for an eventual union election.[30] The workers, predominantly African American women, had walked off the job because they were not able to take a break

to go to the bathroom, even those who were pregnant. At the same time, the line speeds on the factory floor were rapidly increasing. But the organizers, who were all white men, talked up higher wages as a motivation for the Black women to vote for the union. But because unfair treatment, not money, led them to the one-day strike, the union lost the election. This outcome was shocking given the initial solidarity at the factory. The moral of the story, as it was told to me, was that the union failed to organize in a way that understood the needs of the workers.

For radical left groups like UE 150, the internet was not the best way to organize. It was partially a question of privileging face-to-face communication, which we have seen in other chapters, but it was also that digital technology was deemed a sterile individualized medium that did not always work well for collective organizing strategies. One activist explained, "In terms of organizing, it's always better when you're in a group, and you can organize more people to do things collectively." This type of collectivity for them happened at meetings, workplaces, churches, or community centers—not on the internet. Even union organizers who were active internet enthusiasts did not believe the internet was a good substitute for face-to-face interaction when they wanted to have meaningful conversations about high-risk organizing.

"I have problems with folks overrelying so much on technology," said Dennis, a seasoned UE 150 organizer. "Everything is through tweeting and Twittering and that kind of stuff, and for me, that helps really accomplish one of the goals of our class enemy and the people's enemy: the *atomization* of folks. It leads to a certain amount of fragmentation. Even though people can quickly see struggles, whether it's in Egypt or . . . the Occupy movement and all of that, but you still got to . . . have some sense of a coherent development of strategy and strategic thinking and folks being able to at least collaborate . . . to maximize the impact of fighting back." For Dennis, individual gadgets could be isolating, rather than empowering. It was simply not the go-to medium to connect workers with UE 150's social movement unionism.

Rather than handing people concrete ways to contact legislators, such as SEANC did, radical left groups like UE 150 believed that fairness meant including as many opinions and experiences as possible. Certainly, organizers knew that even if they wanted to, it would be difficult to get everyone's input online because of classed inequality and the fear of repression we saw in Chapter 1. So the high costs of using the internet for a group like UE 150

were not overcome by a strong desire to use it. Instead, they used a variety of communication practices, with digital technology playing only a small role.

While the internet was just one of many ways to reach the powerless, it was a *primary* way to reach the powerful. SEANC's enthusiasm for digital media as a conduit to those in power defined their internet practices. They prized digital technology as a pipeline to powerful individuals and as an efficient means to communicate with and monitor members. They used what many consider bottom-up social media platforms in a top-down manner. As a result, the internet was less of a disruptive weapon for radicals as it was a lobbying tool for reformers.[31]

In very broad ideological strokes, SEANC was a *representative* union, advocating for incremental change with a top-down approach of lobbyist unionism. In contrast, UE 150 was a *participatory* union: the ideas of rank-and-file organizing for systematic political change connected with their social movement unionism practices, neither of which motivated high levels of digital engagement. Even though both unions strove for fairness, how they defined and worked toward this goal clashed, even to the point of animosity. This also led to divergent ideologies of democracy itself—participatory versus representative. Is it in the hands of the people or in the hands of legislators? They each answered this question with distinct digital practices.

How these two unions' strategies shaped their digital use extended to other groups in North Carolina. Of course, this is not the case with every radical group across the country, or the world—that protest strategies equal grassroots organizing equals participatory democracy. Many groups are complex and evolve with changing ideological characteristics. Yet it's useful here to evaluate the everyday *ideal types,* a term that Max Weber used to categorize social groups.[32] In this case, the alignment of protest, organizing, and participation all pointed toward lower digital activism levels. If the union that cared more about participatory democracy cared less about the internet, what does that say about digital technology and its role in democratic movements, especially those that are radical?

Of course, there are counterfactuals to this finding, such as the Mexican revolutionary Zapatistas, who were pioneers in harnessing the power of the internet.[33] Yet even for them, their core organizing strategy on the ground had less to do with the internet than what their supporters were broadcasting in electronic newsgroups around the world. Their famous communiqué was issued in 1994, yet they did not have their own website until

2001. Instead, they were focused on grassroots organizing on the ground—they recognized that organizing the masses, so to speak, was their core strategy and their primary source of power. In turn, so did the radical groups in North Carolina.

This case also goes against the tide of more recent arguments that connect the expansion of social media with collective participation and egalitarian movements, such as arguments made about Occupy Wall Street.[34] With the fuel of digital technology, this type of horizontal and informal movement is supposedly more democratic than more structured ones. But in the political arena I was researching, the digital dominance of more hierarchical over less hierarchical groups that we saw in Chapter 2 was further increased if they were also reformist and conservative. Adding organizational and ideological factors together exacerbated digital engagement differences. Radical *and* left-wing horizontal groups were dramatically less likely to use the internet than their reformist *and* right-wing hierarchical counterparts.[35]

The types of groups that are assumed to be more democratic were actually using the internet *less* in this case. I am not arguing that the left-leaning groups were inherently more democratic, despite right-leaning groups despising the word "democracy." While I did not seek to measure how democratic the groups in my study were, one way that the internet supposedly enables groups to be more democratic is with the power that it brings—by connecting people together. People organizing together as a unit can topple oppressive regimes or systems, or in the case of reformist groups, affect policy change.

While there are debates as to whether the internet is a source of power, there is a general consensus that technology is seen as an active instrument of political power.[36] Scholars rarely make the direct cause-and-effect claim of technology shaping society, such as the internet initiating social movements or throwing elections. Such a "technological-deterministic" claim is frowned on in the academic world, so scholars often use the term "affordances" instead.[37] This nuanced concept suggests that technology has the architectural *possibility* to shape various outcomes. Yet it still tends to privilege the tool over the broader toolbox, let alone the entire construction site. In other words, rather than compare the internet with other communication mediums, or place it in a broader societal context, internet theorists have tended to focus squarely on digital technology itself.[38] This was particularly the case in the utopian internet era up until the early 2010s. Yet it is also the

case more recently with the reverse pendulum swing of a dystopian internet scare. The pressing question may shift but still tends to zoom in to the technology—does the internet drive democracy or destroy it?

This begs an answer to a famous technology article entitled, "Do artifacts have politics?"[39] The author, Langdon Winner, responded that yes, architecture matters, but only insofar as other societal factors are accounted for. When we only focus on the novel tool, it is easy to attribute to it everything that has changed with social movements. I am not denying the innovative and creative organizing that digital activism has brought, and it has been able to connect people at great speeds and depths. Social media, in particular, can be a boon for the spreading of information outside established journalistic outlets, as well as an efficient way to spread details of mobilization efforts. But we need to put any possible changes to social movements in context. By doing this, I found that the internet did *not* wipe out barriers to activism; it just reflected them, and even at times exacerbated existing power differences. These existing inequalities often drove the digital activism gap. For instance, resource-rich conservative organizations that wanted to solidify and expand the power of corporations had higher levels of digital engagement, while working-class left-wing groups that wanted to topple this system had dramatically less.

As theorist Raymond Williams argued, "A main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms."[40] That society shapes what we do, regardless of technology, is not news to sociologists, who have been leaders in analyzing these old social forms. At the same time, communication scholars have been the trailblazers with regard to research on new technology formats. What we need is more of an integration of the two approaches. In my attempt to do so, I found that digital differences arose from powerful social forces in this North Carolina case. Still, countless protests and revolutions have shaken up this type of system. So how does technology use play a role when power does arise from marginalized people coming together in protest?

Moral Monday Mobilization

If UE 150 was not active online when Moral Monday began, then certainly other left-wing groups were. Or so I thought. I wanted to explore the

possibility that a radical working-class organization like UE 150 could rely on another group as a digital intermediary. Especially with the Moral Monday movement, one would expect that other participants would post frequently about the launch of such a high-profile mobilization.

Groups on both sides of the collective bargaining issue would frequently mobilize activists—whether getting people to lobby for a specific bill or getting people to show up at an event.[41] Under the spotlight of large mobilizations is where the internet seems to shine, especially protest movements or hashtag activism. A consensus has developed that digital technology now fuels, spreads, and facilitates the fast diffusion of major protests and that its largest contribution is in a protest's early formative period. When protests emerge, digital technology can play a role in the networked distribution of protest information, logistics planning and coordination, and how participants hear about a protest movement.[42]

It would make sense, then, to focus on the origin period of Moral Monday to determine how groups besides UE 150 were online and how they may have digitally networked with organizations who did not have as big a digital footprint. For practical reasons, researchers often examine a movement after it has started, reducing what we know about social media practices in the early stages of social movements and overlooking how technology might have played a role in their origin. Analyses of digital activism often use hashtags and other online data as prime data sources, which has brought efficiency to research but has limited our understanding of what happens offline, particularly the role that organizations might play.[43]

In this regard, I simply got lucky. I happened to be studying the online and offline practices of many of the key groups that ended up organizing Moral Monday before, during, and after the movement's launch. While protests do not always have one central node or organization, in this case the obvious contender for this role of digital intermediary was the NC-NAACP, the statewide civil rights organization and lead organizer of Moral Monday.

To mark the end of the origin period of Moral Monday, I used the fifth protest, or what organizers called "Mega Moral Monday," because it represented the first apex of the movement, due to a jump in arrests and participants. After this protest, conservatives finally began to take notice. For instance, Civitas, the prominent right-wing think tank, published an interactive database filled with mugshot photos and contact information for all

the Moral Monday civil disobedience arrestees, including those from the HOPE Coalition.

Moral Monday's Initial Digital Invisibility

A few months before Moral Monday launched, on February 9, 2013, the Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ) march and rally wound through African American neighborhoods in Raleigh and continued until it reached the General Assembly building. This annual march for social justice was organized by a coalition of progressive organizations, many of which would also organize and lead the Moral Monday protests. Throughout HKonJ, I observed only a handful of people using mobile devices. Although I did not survey protest participants, my observations of minimal use were mirrored in the initial Moral Monday protests in April. It was not until the June 3 Mega Moral Monday protest that people seemed to use mobile devices en masse.

In the early stages of the Moral Monday movement, neither key organizers nor participants harnessed the power of Twitter. As of the first protest, there was only one tweet about it, with a slow increase in tweets sent over the next month. I had searched for and archived a variety of hashtags, such as #MoralMonday, #MoralMondays, #ForwardTogether, as well as these key words without the hashtags. By Mega Moral Monday itself, Twitter use finally picked up with over 500 tweets that mentioned the event. Yet, as of late June 2013, the NC-NAACP still had no functioning Twitter feed. A year earlier in 2012, they had opened a Twitter account but had tweeted only 11 times—none of which were posted during the first two months of the protest movement. It was a month into the protests before they had a discussion and solicited advice as to what hashtag to use. On June 10, after the movement's emergence period, the NC-NAACP launched a new Twitter account, and it soon gained traction with thousands of retweets and mentions of the group by the end of the summer's legislative session, when the protests wound down for the year.

When I asked Rob, a young white NC-NAACP communications staff person and field organizer, how he had gotten involved, he quipped with a laugh, "I didn't find out about it on Twitter." That seemed to be a standard reaction from many key organizers who didn't deem Twitter as important

to their primary organizing tactics. Twitter usage was minimal for other key groups involved in the movement, as well. For instance, Democracy North Carolina, an advocacy group challenging money in politics, was very active in the movement, yet in the lead-up to Moral Monday, they sent no tweets about it, and during the course of the first five protests they tweeted only a dozen times.

The use of Facebook to encourage participation in the early mobilization of Moral Monday was also slight, although greater than Twitter. The NC-NAACP initially had an open Facebook group where anyone could post, comment, and like. But the proliferation of racist trolls led the group to shut it down. They then encouraged people to move to their Facebook page, where they could moderate posts and control the feed. No Facebook posts encouraged people to come to the first four Moral Mondays, though they posted volunteer-produced videos afterward. Two posts were about an offline organizing tour to encourage people to participate in Mega Moral Monday, and one post announced a location change for a pre-rally. Other Facebook pages began to emerge, for instance a "Forward Together" page named after a common NC-NAACP slogan, but it had a marginal role in the initial mobilization of Moral Monday. For instance, nine days after the first protest, there was one post of a video showing clergy members being arrested, and it had only one share and two likes. Rob explained his role in updating their Facebook page and posting for events: "I do some of that. It's not done systematically either. [A volunteer] puts pictures up there. . . . We don't have the robust social media as you can see."

Rather than a dedicated website for the launch of the protest, the NC-NAACP copied and pasted the same content it used for flyers and e-mails onto their own website, a relic of early 1990s HTML technology. "Our website is an interesting thing," said Rob. "I don't even say we have a website—we have someone who puts things up there. It's a mess." The site had multiple fonts and a cluttered appearance. Still, the group did update it during the origin period, including some video clips and information about the protests.

The NC-NAACP did use other digital communication tools. For instance, they sent out regular e-mail communications to their members and supporters, as well as reaching out to a few local listservs, and they used a texting system to send out information. But what they emphasized more were what they called "different modes of communication," which were

more traditional and less digital. They incorporated "robocalls" as a major part of their communication strategy, as well as postcards. Faxes were also in their communication tool kit, as some rural NAACP chapters still relied on this technology.

As the protests expanded after the origin period, social media grew in sync. The NC-NAACP eventually launched more sophisticated internet platforms, such as a streamlined website and a revamped Twitter feed. Facebook pages began to emerge, sometimes for specific Moral Monday protests or issue-related groups supporting Moral Monday, as well as for other regions around the state and country that had organized their own Moral Monday actions. But it took months before social media was integrated into everyday communication around Moral Monday. As the protests diffused and built momentum, an increasing number of individuals not tied to organizations participated and posted to social media. As the summer wore on, more and more people began to tweet while at the protests, including selfies or political commentary. However, these individual posts reflected, rather than started, the protest.[44]

It wasn't that social media was completely absent during the origin period. A few of the early arrestees wrote about their experiences on Facebook, and some local NC-NAACP chapters had posted content. But by and large, Moral Monday did not spread and grow into a large movement that captured national attention because of digital technology. As a result, the NC-NAACP was not a digital intermediary for UE 150 or other working-class and radical groups, as they were not networking and connecting through social media.

Internet time transpires quickly, and it may be easy to dismiss these findings as part of a bygone era. At the time, however, other groups I was studying were much more active online—even without a major protest movement. This movement also launched a full two years after the Wisconsin, Arab Spring, and Occupy Wall Street movements, which had triggered many of the claims that digital technology was indispensable to diffusing protest movements.

Other explanations for this low digital use could be in play. It's conceivable that because the NC-NAACP is an older, traditional membership organization, its staff and members were less willing to embrace newer technology. Other celebrated digital protests have skewed young, so older activists may not have yet adopted the technology. While this may partially be true, many

college students were involved at the outset of the protests, and the communication staff were young.

Another expectation might be that because Moral Monday was started by organizations, those structures might hinder the networked individualism of digital activism. In turn, given that I did not capture all the digital traces of every individual who may have posted online about Moral Monday, it is possible that high levels of digital engagement around the event were reflected in personal, rather than organizational, networks. Yet if this were a vast undiscovered trove, many would have ended up on the NC-NAACP Facebook page liking posts or on Twitter tweeting with Moral Monday keywords or hashtags, which was not the case in the early stages.

But if social media was not critical to the initial five Moral Monday mobilizations, then what explains their popularity such that thousands attended and over 300 people of a variety of ages, races, and occupations faced arrest during this origin period—all deep in the digital protest era? Of course, countless protests had happened worldwide before the advent of the internet, but since online tools were available, and since the NC-NAACP had the resources as a mixed-class group as well as the infrastructure and a modicum of staff, why didn't they maximize the digital technology available to them?

Southern Crisis

A crisis is often the match that ignites a protest movement. The most glaring and urgent political crisis for Moral Monday organizers was the recent election that put Republicans in complete control of the state legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. Conservatives were proposing—and passing—a deluge of legislation that curtailed voting rights, refused federal Medicaid and unemployment funds, and restricted reproductive health services.

The NC-NAACP responded to the election by petitioning the governor, attending legislative committee meetings, and engaging in other forms of political activism. Without getting any results, they did what they called spiritual and moral self-meditation and prayer for moral grounding. Along with their allies, they decided to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, viewing it as a last resort. They first focused on protesting voter ID laws,

which they believed threatened voting eligibility for African Americans, the elderly, and college students. On Sunday, April 28, 2013, the NC-NAACP held a mass meeting at a church, where they decided to organize what they called a "Pray-In" the next day at the General Assembly, which regularly conducted legislative sessions on Monday evenings.

On the first day of the protests, Rev. William J. Barber, NC-NAACP president, said: "[W]e have no other choice but to assemble in the people's House where these bills are being presented, argued, and voted upon, in hopes that God will move in the hearts of our legislators, as he moved in the heart of Pharaoh to let His people go. Some ask the question, 'Why don't they be quiet?' . . . It has been our collective silence that has quietly opened the city gates to these undemocratic violators of our rights."

Moral Monday was anything but silent in the wake of this political transformation. Yet crises do not appear out of thin air and are often embedded into established injustices. As we saw in Chapter 1, economic and racial inequalities have plagued the state for years. In addition to having the lowest level of unionization in the country, the legacy of the state's slaveholding system continued to hold people in poverty, particularly African Americans. Furthermore, the Great Recession just five years earlier had only increased disparities, with unemployment and poverty on the rise.[45] This turning point of the supermajority Republican legislature, coupled with growing inequality, was an ideal window of opportunity for this social movement to emerge.

Yet when Rev. Barber said they had no other choice, that may not have been the full story. As scholars have pointed out, crises like these are happening around the world, but movements do not always emerge.[46] Another factor may have been in play. Risking arrest may not have been unusual in this southern state that birthed the civil rights sit-in-movement, but since the 1979 Greensboro Massacre, when the KKK opened fire and killed five anti-racist and pro-labor protesters, mass civil disobedience had rarely been seen outside of universities.[47] Then, in 2011, the Occupy movement in the state, and an increasing number of local civil disobedience protests, paved the way for an even bolder and bigger stand.

But the Moral Monday movement was not quite like Occupy. Not only did it lack the digital focus, it also had established leaders and organization—so much so that some activists later questioned the old-fashioned bureaucracy and tactics of the movement. At the same time, what made Moral

Monday possible, outside of the political and economic climate, was that it *did* have these strong ties.

The Strength of Strong Ties

With a membership of approximately 20,000 people, the century-old NC-NAACP had chapters across the state, including student chapters at historically Black colleges and universities. Cultivating these connections over the years consisted of banquets and other social events, often in churches. But they had also used this infrastructure to mobilize members for legislative and protest actions. All these strong ties were in place before Moral Monday launched.

While the public face, as well as the primary organizer, of Moral Monday was the NC-NAACP, they were not alone in mobilizing. They coordinated with long-standing allied groups like UE 150 to organize a different theme each week for the protests. And these groups, then, often rallied their own base to participate in civil disobedience. Over the course of the Moral Monday movement, all the arrestees weren't orchestrated or preselected, but during this origin stage, organizational networks were critical for the people who participated in the planned civil disobedience.

These strong ties didn't happen overnight. In the past, many of the groups had coalesced around the HOPE Coalition or HKonJ and tackled other projects together, such as efforts to defeat a statewide gay marriage ban or fight a Tea Party takeover of a school board. A common sentiment among group leaders, as well as participants in Moral Monday, was that these organizational ties were foundational. One staffer explained that people assume that the HKonJ or Moral Monday actions "just happen," but, he added, it "is unbelievable how much goes on behind the scenes" to coordinate with all the groups.

Early Moral Monday protesters were surprised when asked if they had heard about the events on Facebook, Twitter, or other digital formats. Regardless of the communication channel, whether at churches, at union meetings, or listservs, most said they got involved through local organizations' preexisting communication networks.[48] One participant said, "Oh, we're word-of-mouthers." Another, a teacher and community activist, simply said, "We've always been here." In other words, participation in Moral Monday

was part of a long organizing struggle. These broad-ranging organizational affiliations ranged from environmental and student groups to LGBTQ and reproductive justice groups, all of which were reflected in the signs, T-shirts, buttons, and banners that people wore and carried at the Moral Monday protests.

These networks did not build Moral Monday simply with digital communication tools. Rather than relying on social media to spread the word, organizers launched a 25-county statewide "Forward Together, Not One Step Back" tour in the early stages of the protest movement. Between the fourth and fifth Moral Monday protests, a Monday fell on May 27, Memorial Day, when the General Assembly was not in session. In this two-week period, organizers traveled across the state to set up public meetings, mostly in churches. When they could get the technology to work, they showed some videos at these meetings, but most of the activities were in-person. Speakers included local NAACP chapter leaders, ministers, coalition group leaders, as well as people who had already been arrested. Organizers encouraged people to sign up for Moral Monday activities, and Democracy North Carolina often handed out voting report cards listing upcoming legislation. Yet this was not the first statewide tour that the NC-NAACP organized in 2013. Earlier that year, leaders had toured the poorest counties of the Black Belt region to spotlight socioeconomic inequality. Called the "Truth and Hope Tour of Poverty in North Carolina: Putting a Face on Poverty," it involved meetings in local communities and churches. It was one of many organizing projects that lay the groundwork for the Moral Monday movement.

The charismatic leadership of Rev. Barber was also critical to the movement, but it was his organizing style, rather than him as an individual, that was most significant. A minister from Goldsboro, a town in the Black Belt, Barber came up through the NC-NAACP ranks. When he ran for president, it was a revolutionary turn for the group that had become moribund and apolitical, and his victory helped revitalize the organization. It was his radical community and coalition strategies that enabled this movement to coalesce with other movement-building organizing cadres in the state. For instance, anyone could participate in the civil disobedience, but organizers first encouraged activists from the particular issue that was the theme for that Monday's protest to get arrested, and these volunteers along with anyone else interested were all urged to attend a civil disobedience training before the

protest. Activists talked about organizing as a dedicated skill and outlook, not a spontaneous act, just like UE 150 had.

This organizing didn't just target people who were easier to organize, such as white college students who had less to lose. It focused on a broad cross-section of the population, which took a concerted effort. This cadre organizing was critical in recruiting a diverse set of people to participate in terms of race, class, and age. Just as crucial was to make sure arrestees felt supported when engaging in such a high-risk act, especially at the early stage, when it was unclear how the state would react in terms of punishment. In fact, many respondents interviewed at the initial protests talked about who was there to support which arrestee.

In addition to their network of participating organizations, the NC-NAACP also had another ally: the mainstream media, which would regularly come to their press conferences. In the time leading up to and during the origin period, every time they put out a press release about an event, the media seemed to come. Local TV and newspapers generally covered the 25-county tour events, whether in rural towns or metropolitan areas. They also reported on the early Moral Monday events before social media coverage began to grow. Some national press even covered the civil disobedience.[49] At the same time, neither news journalists nor digital gadgets of any kind were allowed at the civil disobedience trainings before each Moral Monday protest, so this relationship with the news media was strong yet distant.

All the groups involved in Moral Monday—estimated at over 150—focused on different issues, but they blended their disparate ideas around fairness to come together for the protest movement. The Moral Monday movement tethered these groups together with what speakers at the rallies often called "fusion politics." This was a reference to the first Reconstruction period at the end of the 19th century when populists and anti-slavery Republicans came together. Fusion politics was a call to unite against conservatism. The second Reconstruction period was the civil rights movement era, and Moral Monday organizers often called their movement the "Third Reconstruction."

Moral Monday brought together groups with a broad progressive agenda based on their common reaction to the conservative legislation coming out of the General Assembly, which was deemed "immoral." Moral Monday, therefore, was for many participants the "just" and "democratic" response. Rev.

Barber explained this at an organizing meeting, when he said the movement was the "soul of the state." Common chants at rallies were "This is our house!" and "We built that house!" In other words, the state's General Assembly should belong to the people, not only those from corporate or conservative interests. Another common chant was "Forward Together, Not One Step Back!" In order to effect social change, the messages of Moral Monday were designed to fuse together the various causes taking part.

This fused ideology incorporated a religious element, and leaders from a variety of faiths were some of the first arrestees. Ministers often opened up organizing events, and one said at a Greenville church in eastern North Carolina, "These mean and bitter legislators are against God. We unite across color [and] class and are talking sense, [while they're] driving us into hell. . . . We are ready to stand up for God and justice!" In Taylortown, in the central part of the state, another minister said, "[They] act like they are Christian, but we will not allow the war machine to act as if they had God on their side. Jesus asked the rich man to redistribute wealth and love your neighbor." These Christian overtones were part of some of the fused messages at Moral Monday, yet the protest still attracted a broad audience, from student anarchists to Jewish groups for peace. This liberation theology appeared at every event, yet one minister quipped, "Harriet Tubman found the faith book . . . despite not having a Facebook . . . or an iPhone or Twitter. She saved a thousand and could have saved ten thousand if they only knew they were slaves."[50]

"MOVEMENTS [ARE NOW] SPREAD BY CONTAGION in a world networked by the wireless Internet and marked by fast, viral diffusion of images and ideas," remarked Manuel Castells in 2012.[51] He was echoing the general argument that "weak" digital ties now enable information to be spread quickly and further to a more heterogeneous group of people.[52] The euphoria surrounding leaderless and organization-free protest has since diminished a bit, and the traditional theory that "strong" organizational ties are crucial for collective action has not been completely superseded.[53] For instance, one argument is that digitally propelled movements won't advance without generating some type of organization after the height of a protest.[54] Nonetheless, the common view is that an unstoppable digital evolution is underway, enabling the rapid diffusion of any new movement.

Despite what I found in Chapter 2, that highly structured organizations led to more online participation, I had thought that perhaps a large protest movement would buck this trend. And in some ways, Moral Monday did. I am not arguing that weak ties failed to be mobilized in this or other movements. The ability to bring together many individuals through weak ties is what defines many large protest movements. Examining the robust Twitter feeds from both Moral Monday organizations and individuals at the summer's end in 2013, one might conclude that technology *was* an integral part of the protests, yet this participatory movement did not emerge online, and social media played only a minor role in its origin. The NC-NAACP and related organizations used digital technologies to communicate, yet they did so more to reinforce existing strong ties than create new weak ones. Relational communication was mostly on the ground and expanded on existing social ties and organizational structures. Eventually, Moral Monday did spread through weaker ties and social media, but only after it had established a base from strong ties. Rather than strong ties hindering quick diffusion, they can pre-date weak ones. As a result, accounts of what seem like social media-centric protests may not always capture what happens behind the scenes before a big protest event goes viral, not to mention how smaller protests, actions, or other events that are *not* viral may be happening without our noticing.

Another explanation for the discrepancy between my findings and existing literature is that Moral Monday was unlike other movements in its strategy and demographics. It diverged from Occupy, for instance, in that it likely was more diverse in terms of class and race, which could have made a difference in digital activism levels. Also, Moral Monday organizers wanted to reach more than the digitally plugged-in. But if that were the *only* issue, they could have used more social media tools for their membership that *was* plugged in. They didn't.

Strategically, Moral Monday had a similar spirit of civil disobedience and revolt against some of the same forces that the Occupy Wall Street movement did. These two factors of demographics and strategy were most likely working in sync. For the Moral Monday arrestees, their high-risk activism mirrored much of what sociologist Doug McAdam found in his study of civil rights activists who participated in Freedom Summer in 1964—that participation was associated with strong ties to existing movement networks.[55] While McAdam's study did not focus on emergence per

se, it does parallel my findings of how organizational strong ties supported a similarly diverse group of high-risk activists. In other words, working-class participants were at risk of losing their jobs for their civil disobedience yet had the support of their church, union, or civic group in the process. The NC-NAACP knew that risky activism required more than a click could provide.

Simply put, Moral Monday organizers lacked the ideological motivation to focus on digital recruitment in the early stages. The goal of fairness went hand in hand with equity in participation, and strong ties helped Moral Monday to achieve that. If they had put their limited resources toward digital activism, they may not have yielded a broad section of participants. Their ideas, practices, and institutions of fairness propelled them to put their efforts into taking advantage of the strong institutional ties they already had, not the individualized digital weak ties they neither had nor believed they needed.

If the Moral Monday movement had strong-tie organizations working together, how is it that conservatives' unity drove higher levels of digital activism? Didn't both sides have strong ties? This is where ideology comes in. Unlike the digital evangelizing of one Truth, the Moral Monday activists came with a variety of messages—and all were welcomed. But that meant they had more difficulty in condensing those messages into bite-size pieces, and they did not have a massive media ecosystem feeding them. Moral Monday fairness issues were all over the map, from abortion to unions, rather than fundamental economic and political freedoms with pithy phrasing against Obamacare. The list of Moral Monday issues was enormous. Nonetheless, they were able to come together and use fusion politics to bring a wide-ranging set of ideas under the Moral Monday banner. All participants believed that the bills winding their way through the North Carolina state legislature attacked their broad coalition's sense of democracy and equality.[56]

At the same time, though, not all groups on the left were participating in Moral Monday, such as SEANC, whose approach toward fairness could not fuse together with the other groups'. Certainly, strategy differences were prevalent among right-wing groups too, such as between the radical Preppers or reformist think-tankers, but what they all had in common was *information-alizing,* which gave a boost to all conservatives' digital activism scores. On the left, groups tended to fall into either the organizing-and-protesting or

lobbying-and-electoral camps.[57] They did not have an additional unifying strategy of digital evangelizing like conservatives.

Digital Materialism over Disruption

Of all the factors that turned out to shape the digital activism gap, strategy is the one that is most likely to change over time, depending on what's happening politically or shifts in group membership or leadership. This happened with the NC-NAACP when the radical Rev. Barber revitalized the group to focus on protest strategies. This brings us back to the out-party question I discussed in Chapter 3 of how the political climate might change digital use. That may have been a partial explanation for the right, which was obsessed with ousting Obama, but what about the online engagement of the left in 2013 during Moral Monday? Nationally, the Democrats were still in power, but statewide the Republicans dominated. As a result, both sides were somewhat the out-party, yet even with the rise of a large protest movement that was openly defying the party in power, digital matches were not crucial to igniting this progressive protest movement.

But if Moral Monday was able to launch a strong, powerful movement without digital prowess, did they lose anything in the process? As a sociologist, I can't rewrite history nor predict the future, but what I can do is pose another question: What more could Moral Monday have been? Conservatives not only had a strong grassroots base, they also had a full-fledged media ecosystem on their side—one that included unifying messages and institutions. This Gramscian hegemony is instructive for any movement trying to figure out which piece of the puzzle is missing. Historically, the U.S. left has certainly had this type of unification of institutions and ideology, as well as laser-focused messages, especially during the union movement in the 1930s or the civil rights movement. Of course, there was in-fighting, and resources are always a struggle for the left, which tends to include fewer elites and more marginalized people. Still, informationalizing has been a part of these and other left-leaning movements, whether with socialist newspapers or Mao's *Little Red Book.* In fact, these efforts have often been spearheaded, whether publicly or not, by a cadre or a political party that both captures and leads the popular "collective will," and as pointed out in Chapter 3, Gramsci called

this type of political party a "modern prince."[58] Perhaps the merging of digital evangelizing and grassroots organizing is key for those who will never have the Koch brothers on their side.

But to fully explain activism in this era, we need to take off our digital-tinted glasses. As scholars, we cannot help but be influenced by what is going on around us, and, in fact, social movement theories have followed an historical arc.[59] For instance, in the 1960s, with anti-Soviet sentiment running high, collective action scholars came from a rationalist perspective and focused on the *individual*. Explanations often centered on collective action as having a psychological basis, bordering on negative behavior and isolation.[60] Then, at the apex of left-wing activism against the "system" in the United States and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars focused on strong-tie *structural* reasons, such as inequality in the face of capitalism, to explain why social movements emerge, and they emphasized resources to explain how they organize.[61] Next, in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars were trying to make sense of another wave of social movements that had changed the political landscape. Activists were increasingly stressing *cultural* and identity goals, such as LGBTQ rights. Theorists dubbed them "new social movements."[62] The 21st century brought another wave of social movement theory centered on the *digital*.[63] An explosion of scholarship has researched everything from the use of sophisticated digital technologies to how the technology is reshaping social movements as we know them. Digital activism arguments abound in references to pluralism, participation, and personalization.

Certainly, not everyone researching social movements in these distinct time periods was focusing on just the latest theory. And they often built on each other and overlapped. But if I had only looked at Moral Monday through the lens of Twitter hashtags, for instance, I would have missed how strong ties played a role or assumed that it was a spontaneous movement fueled by social media. Yet this is not a binary bashing of online versus offline. The digital is not to be discounted in this or any other contemporary study as it was a part, albeit small, of the movement's origins. And the digital has played a larger role in other movements. Nonetheless, it may not play as big a role as some scholars insist it does in social movements of this era. Social media has *not* changed everything; nor is all contemporary activism social media-centric.

Instead, the digital is the latest wave of social movement explanations—none of which have turned out to work on their own. Rather than viewing social movement theory as chasing the latest model or explanatory variable, we need to look more broadly at what is beyond, around, inside, above, and before social movement protests. No digital activism theorist has claimed that the first three waves are irrelevant, and this study clearly shows that the digital wave is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain contemporary collective action. The lesson here is that rather than an anomaly, the case of North Carolina may be one of many that has a different digital activism footprint than seemingly hashtag-centric protests.

That's not to say that a political climate or the digital revolution is irrelevant to explaining digital use. In fact, this is a way to reconcile Williams's argument about connecting new technologies with old social structural forms. By acknowledging the evolving nature of what is happening politically—and the ideological ideas, practices, and institutions that accompany that evolution—my theoretical approach of digital materialism explains what was happening in North Carolina. This is not simply an "it depends" answer to the question of how digital technology plays a role in activism. The lens of digital materialism provides the antidote to chasing after the latest election or news outlet or platform to diagnose or explain digital technology's impact on politics. While a key part of digital materialism is to track the political weather, it's important to zoom out just as much as to zoom in.

DESPITE ITS WEAK DIGITAL ORIGINS, Moral Monday grew not only in protesters and arrestees but also on social media. As I was tracking the movement over the summer of 2013, it was clear that the left in North Carolina was picking up social media steam. But so was the right, across the country. And as the rise of media institutions like *Breitbart News* demonstrated, this growth had epic political consequences. In North Carolina, strong ties enabled the Moral Monday movement to not just engage in high-risk social movement participation but also to sustain it over the long term.

The Moral Monday movement waxed strong in Raleigh that first summer, and continued over the next few years, unlike less structured movements like Occupy. Its strong social ties were also critical in the spreading of the movement to other areas of the state and country. It did not, however, stop much of the legislation they were opposing.[64]

It would not be until 2016 when movements like Moral Monday finally broke through and helped score the first significant political victory for pro-labor groups in years when a less hostile Democrat was narrowly elected governor. That victory was tempered by the rest of the country discovering just how powerful and influential conservative digital activists had become when they propelled the unlikeliest of candidates to victory in the presidential election.

Conclusion

The Digital Activism Gap's Threat to Democracy

THE NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS IN November 2012 delivered a devastating blow not just to Democrats, but to anyone who had been fighting in some corner of the state for public workers. Republicans won a stunning, historic victory, gaining complete control over state government for the first time in the post-Civil War era.

Republican Pat McCrory was elected governor by almost ten percentage points. The GOP achieved two-thirds supermajorities in both the House and the Senate of the state legislature, allowing them to override any veto. The *New York Times* noted, "North Carolina, long a politically moderate player in the South, will soon have its most conservative government in a century."[1] That would prove to be an understatement. The legislation passed over the next four years would drive the push for public workers' bargaining power back decades.

Nationally, North Carolina's legislature would gain attention in the coming years for bills such as the one on transgender bathroom discrimination and attempts to declare a state religion. But these were just highlights among an endless rightward march to curtail abortion, pass rules to limit ballot access, and gerrymander voting districts to maintain power. The gerrymandering was so radical that the U.S. Supreme Court would later declare it illegal. The student activists fighting for housekeeper rights on

campus must have watched in dismay as the new legislature packed the state university system's governing board with Republicans who would vote to close such liberal institutes as the Center on Work, Poverty and Opportunity at UNC Chapel Hill and replace the university system president with President Bush's former education secretary. The state's agenda moved so far to the right that even Governor McCrory would veto six bills passed by his own party. At least four vetoes were overridden.

As the extent and brutal reality of these changes became painfully apparent, the state's public worker advocates were forced to grapple with just how much terrain had been lost and how it had happened. What had begun a decade earlier as an effort to repeal the ban on collective bargaining ended up facing proposals that would insert the prohibition into the state's constitution. How had this wave swept across a state that had previously turned so moderate? This epic shift, of course, should have sounded alarm bells for progressives across the country that something was afoot. And indeed, while my study focused on one state, it's not hard to imagine similar conditions gelling in many other states, and even countries, that would fuel the rising influence of conservative digital activism. During Obama's eight years in office, Democrats saw their control of state legislatures fall from 59 percent to 31 percent as Republicans gained 1,000 seats, and the number of Democratic governors fall from 29 to 16. North Carolina's rightward turn only stood out for the extreme policies it unleashed. Nationally, the state's abrupt turn seemed to be dismissed as a legacy of the South's conservative politics. Rather than triggering introspection, Democrats, perhaps blinded by the halo surrounding the reelection of President Obama and his well-oiled digital campaign machine, remained convinced that they retained the advantage when it came to politics in this new age of digital activism.

It would take the epic shock of the 2016 presidential election result to make the left truly understand how mistaken they were. And having so badly misjudged things, the left began to search for an easy culprit to blame for how they ended up on the wrong side of the digital disparity.

THE DAWN OF THE INTERNET age almost 25 years ago unleashed a kind of revolutionary giddiness. Those most bullish about the potential impact of this massive global network believed it would fundamentally reorder nearly every corner of civilization, inevitably for the better. The overarching ideology

of this digital utopianism was a kind of strange brew of hyper-capitalism mixed with 1960s socialist idealism.[2] The ultimate free market of ideas and commerce would create a new balance of power that favored citizens over giant organizations, companies, and governments.

In the wake of the Soviet Union collapsing and the tearing down of its bureaucratic symbols, from the Berlin Wall to statues of Stalin, the internet was the phoenix rising from the ashes. It could unite where the Cold War had divided. Technology would disrupt, flatten, and revolutionize hierarchies. In the place of Orwellian propaganda and old-school communication tools would be new technologies in the hands of the people. Personalization, participation, and pluralism would bring digital democracy.

As newspapers' finances began to crumble, internet boosters assured us that the growing army of citizen journalists would pick up the reporting slack in the wake of mass layoffs of journalists. This would be married to a radical transparency in which everything was online all the time and accessible to all. One could envision a planetary citizenship endlessly scouring the exploding volumes of digital documents and data for verifiable facts that deliver an immutable truth. Humans were fundamentally the same at the core, after all: wanting the best for everyone in hopes of leaving the world a better place for their children. The Information Age promised a new unity as this marvelous medium offered the prospect that enough of the right data would create a consensus that transcended race, economics, and ideology.

Information has played an underappreciated role in our sense of community.[3] Studies have shown that people who read newspapers tend to be more civically active.[4] And while newspapers were far from perfect, with limited views of what constituted news and obligated to advertising business models, they nonetheless furnished a common set of information and knowledge about local events that helped bind together neighborhoods and citizens in a bygone era when newspaper circulation was nearly ubiquitous.

As the reach of newspapers was eroded, first by TV news and then by the internet, utopians believed that this sprawling digital network would become the new town commons. Sharing. Collaborating. The final, perfect realization of the marketplace of ideas; jousting with persuasion until there was general agreement. The rise of social networks a decade ago seemed to be the full flowering of this promise. Facebook and Twitter were free and relatively easy to use, compared to setting up blogging software or a website. Popular media dubbed the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa

the "Arab Spring" and talked of a "Facebook Revolution." The *New York Times*, for example, explored "How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook."[5] The internet had finally made the world flat and egalitarian. Speaking at a Brookings Institution event in June 2013, then Twitter CEO Dick Costolo explained: "We think of it as the global town square, right, this notion of a very, again, public, live, in the moment conversational platform. . . . The town square happens to be a particularly good place to aggregate and protest, right, and so you can have these direct conversations with everybody in the moment, real time, that feel similarly about some issue, or certainly want to debate some issue. So that town square aspect of it is, I think, why people take to it as a platform for organizing things like protests."[6] Costolo was being interviewed on stage by Strobe Talbott, the famed journalist and former deputy secretary of state under President Bill Clinton, who echoed this growing mythology by saying: "Everybody here is, of course, aware of the role that Twitter played in the protests after the phony elections in Iran in 2009, and during the Arab awakening, not to mention its importance in the 2012 presidential election in this country."

But this euphoria around the internet's democratizing potential instead became the revolution that wasn't. The erosion of this digital utopianism began not long after Costolo's triumphant appearance. This foundational philosophy was slowly eaten away from numerous directions. Twitter itself the following year became the center of the "Gamergate" controversy in which the hashtag #GamerGate became the rallying cry of a much darker protest, a campaign of harassment against women working in the video game industry. Twitter, in particular, faced growing criticism over its lack of control over tweets that were racist and misogynistic. But it wasn't just social media platforms facing a crisis of confidence.

In general, the trade-offs people had made to live in a hyper-networked society became increasingly apparent. Cybercrime was spiking thanks to the growing treasure trove of data that people and companies had stored in the cloud to leverage new services. That convenience had made online targets far more valuable, drawing greater investments from crime syndicates as well as state-sponsored hackers. Whether it was people's credit card information, naked celebrity photos that had been stored on their iPhones, or sensitive creative material stored by Sony Pictures, spectacular hacks began to dominate headlines, revealing just how vulnerable everyone had become.

On the e-commerce front, a prophecy made during the original dot-com bubble came true as malls and brick-and-mortar retailers began to close in record numbers while people shifted their buying habits online. Retail bankruptcies soared, throwing thousands out of work and cutting deeply into the tax bases of local governments that depended on the sales of physical goods like clothing and books. Pictures of abandoned malls passed around social networks, ghostly reminders that the availability of cheap goods from Amazon exacted another kind of price. Permanent jobs were dwindling while automation and gig work were on the upswing. Throw in mounting nervousness about advances in things like artificial intelligence and self-driving cars, and there were plenty of reasons to be questioning the impact of technology.

But for all the growing anxiety around the internet's transformative impact, it was the political developments of 2016 that finally seemed to drive a dagger in the heart of digital utopianism.

ONE COULD ALMOST FEEL the nation's blood pressure reaching the bursting point as the 2016 American presidential campaign culminated. People across the political spectrum were making political posts on social media with notes expressing anger, fatigue, and desire for it to all be over. But Trump's surprising victory triggered endless speculation and second-guessing. Hot takes by bloggers. Deeper analysis by political pundits. Thumb-sucking by digital elites. "How did we get here?" they wondered. "How did the dream turn ugly?" A search for culprits and insight began. Fake news. Russian meddling. Bots. Poor education. Bad strategy. Carelessly constructed social networking platforms. If a single failure could be found, if the bad guy could just be identified, then surely a course correction could be made.

Questions began to be raised about the role that the hacking of Democratic Party e-mails had played in Hillary Clinton's defeat. These grew amid suspicions that it had been orchestrated by the Russian government via *Wikileaks.* Executives at Twitter, Facebook, and Google found themselves on the defensive, as they slowly revealed data about the number of posts and ads that appeared on their platforms that had been purchased by phony accounts created by Russians. "Why has it taken Facebook 11 months to come forward and help us understand the scope of this problem, see it clearly for the problem it is and begin to work in a responsible legislative way to address it?"[7] asked Senator Chris Coons, Democrat of Delaware, at a congressional hearing convened to demand answers from the leading social media

platforms. In response, all three companies insisted they were instituting new rules, hiring more humans to police their content, and fine-tuning artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools to weed out fake news, eliminate violent terrorist-related content, and clamp down on hate speech. "The abuse of our platform to attempt state-sponsored manipulation of elections is a new challenge for us—and one that we are determined to meet," said Twitter's acting general counsel, Sean Edgett.

By the close of 2017, this had led to a remarkably grim assessment about the toll that the internet had taken on society. *Wired,* the onetime beacon of techno-optimism, remarked on the deepening cynicism toward the tech industry: "In 2008, it was Wall Street bankers. In 2017, tech workers are the world's villain."[8] Famed venture capital investor Fred Wilson wrote a year-end blog post listing the "tech backlash" as one of his big three trends of 2017: "I think we are seeing the start of something that has a lot of legs. Human beings don't want to be controlled by machines. And we are increasingly being controlled by machines. We are addicted to our phones, fed information by algorithms we don't understand, at risk of losing our jobs to robots. This is likely to be the narrative of the next thirty years."[9] It was the kind of review reflected in the wildly popular Netflix show *Black Mirror,* an anthology of near-future dystopian stories about the unintended negative consequences of technology.

But the grimmest assessment perhaps came from Rick Webb, a well-known digital marketer and someone who defined himself as an early internet utopian. Webb wrote a post on the online publishing platform *Medium* that quickly went viral: "My Internet Mea Culpa."[10] Webb addressed head-on the notion that so many early internet boosters had been naive: "For the last twenty years, I believed the internet prophets of old. . . . I believed that the world would be a better place if everyone had a voice. I believed that the world would be a better place if we all had no secrets. But so far, the evidence points to an inescapable conclusion: we were all wrong. Or, to be generous, if we weren't wrong, we were so far off on time scale that those who bought into the vision were misled into thinking that the benefits would come in their lifetime. They aren't going to."

THE PENDULUM HAD SWUNG unmistakably toward the darkest possible view of technology. But while the idealistic ideas of technology and its potential to reinvent politics, protest, and activism were too extreme, a case

can be made that the subsequent backlash also represents an overcorrection. It simply replaces one misguided view of reality with another. This is not to say that some of these issues aren't real and alarming. The potential hacking of a U.S. election by a foreign government is distressing to people across the political spectrum. Internet platforms that incentivize the creation of fake news to generate advertising revenue is something the tech giants will have to address, or risk seeing their credibility with users, and whatever trust remains with advertisers, wither away.

But it's important to genuinely acknowledge that many of the conservatives that appear in this book would tell you that the internet had indeed fulfilled many of those utopian promises. It has helped a retired school teacher living in rural North Carolina to become a passionate advocate for political change and be part of a movement that turned state politics upside down. Whether their analysis is true or not, for conservatives who felt mocked or ignored or misunderstood, the internet had created a new channel for expressing and finding news, for spreading the "Truth" as they saw it.

"It's a great source of education," explained Mary, of the Moccasin Creek Minutemen (MCMM), about how she saw the role of the internet. "I don't know where we'd be without it." And recall James, from the Caldwell County Tea Party, who said that Facebook "defines who the Tea Party is." For these Patriot group activists, online platforms were both a source and a vehicle for their digital evangelizing.

Indeed, a fair bit of the angst and hand-wringing we saw and heard was from the left, having belatedly awoken to the notion that they were on the wrong side of a digital political divide that they weren't even aware existed. The instinct then is to lash out and identify an easy scapegoat, place the blame elsewhere, and identify the simplest and quickest way to remedy the problem and close that gap. But there is rarely just one explanation for a political outcome. By searching for a scapegoat, the left ironically wants to remove average users from the list of variables. Surely there must have been a devious plot, or perhaps a lack of education, or some manipulation that allowed these unwitting grassroots conservatives to become simple marionettes in some grand political theater. This approach refuses to entertain the notion that average conservatives are owed some due or used the internet in ways that fulfilled their own goals.

The other problem with this instinct is one that goes to the heart of the argument I've made in this book. If one strips away Russian bots, state-sponsored hacking, and fake news farms, one is still left with the core

dynamics that are generating the digital activism gap. It is this complex, multifaceted dynamic that I have tried to identify, analyze, and place in stark relief over the course of this book. While the likes of Cambridge Analytica and *Breitbart News* may exacerbate the confluence of factors I found here, it is the core societal dynamics themselves that have generated a decided advantage toward conservatives in this age of digital activism.

FOR THOSE FINDING THEMSELVES on the wrong side of the digital activism gap, it's critical to fully understand the factors that created it. First and foremost, the internet is a tool that favors people with more money and power, often leaving those without resources in the dust. Next, organization drives the digital activism gap. Rather than horizontal groups of volunteers generating high levels of digital participation, hierarchical organizations with teams of savvy social media staff are more likely to. Online participation takes work, the more specialized and expert the better. Finally, activists require more than the capacity to engage online at high rates. They also need the political motivation to do so. Not only did conservatives dominate in the digital domain thanks to a focused message of freedom rather than a fractured one of fairness, but reformist right-leaning groups working within the legislative system also had much higher digital participation than their radical left counterparts. As a result, the prototypical digital activist was more likely to be a Tea Party member or conservative think-tank staffer than a left-wing student or worker activist.

But those factors don't act in isolation. What I saw in North Carolina was that when combined, they served to reinforce and accelerate the advantage conservatives had. By the same measure, they served to mute and depress whatever activities groups on the left could muster.

In North Carolina the conditions were ripe for conservative messages to spread like wildfire long *before* talk of bots, fake news, or Russian meddling. There was a highly motivated foundation of well-educated and well-resourced conservative activists who already held a distinct advantage. And at times, these voices all but drowned out whatever messages were coming from the left online.

ACTIVISM AND PROTEST are actions that remain fundamental to the history and the culture of the United States. Many Americans take great pride

in the idea of a country born of revolution, that protests like the Boston Tea Party lie at the heart of the principles that created this nation. Americans are not a people who wait for the tides of history to change. They organize; they take action; they make their voices heard.

Obviously, all these things happened well before the internet came into existence. Finding means to communicate is an essential part of any uprising or movement. Illiterate slaves found ways to transmit information across states in the 19th century. The Populist movement spread its ideology late in the same century without the benefit of telephones. Suffragettes organized with printed material to win the vote for women. And the civil rights movement didn't need any smartphone apps to organize marches and rallies across the South or in the nation's capital during the 1960s. That initial instinct to attribute magical revolutionary powers to the internet was always a bit silly and shallow in retrospect.

A more interesting question is just how does the internet change that communication dynamic? A few years ago, this became the subject of a heated debate. After the initial reports of a "Twitter Revolution" in Iran's Green movement, a war of words ensued between Malcolm Gladwell, the *New Yorker* writer and bestselling author, and Clay Shirky, a prominent author, lawyer, and early internet utopian. Gladwell wrote that claims of revolutionary protest arising out of Twitter's weak ties failed to acknowledge the role of strong organizational ties in the history of protest, particularly from the civil rights movement.[11] Shirky responded that social media and technology were critical tools for expanding political participation in the digital era.[12]

This was not simply a tiff between two Manhattan intellectuals. Activists, new media pundits and techno-enthusiasts of all stripes dove into this debate over whether formal strong-tie organizations are passé and individualized weak-tie digital networks are the new movement prototype. If you believe the blogs and the tweets, Gladwell was taken down in this tête-á-tête as an old-school movement analyst. His name brought derision at tech and academic conferences, as well as in blogs and journals. Much of this debate derives from sociologist Mark Granovetter's 1973 article "The Strength of Weak Ties."[13] The crux of the Gladwell and Shirky debate continues to resonate in current popular and intellectual conversations about the role and relevancy of organization(s) for digital activism, with the general assumption that organization in and of itself is now less important.

Naturally, as things tend to play out in internet debates, it was seen as a zero-sum game. There had to be a winner, and there had to be a loser. But in reality, the answer is more complex. And we have seen that throughout my analysis of the North Carolina groups I followed.

Patriot activists from Tea Party and Prepper groups embraced the internet as it represented the individualized anti-establishment freedom they were fighting for, so it seems that its weak ties were vital. At the same time, conservatives were more likely to either belong to structured groups themselves or recirculate digital information being pumped out from strong-tie organizations. And despite the internet's hallmark as a promoter of personalized posts rather than institutional ones, what was posted, liked, and retweeted the most in conservative circles appeared to be prefabricated memes and articles, not individually created posts. Those on the right believed in the individualism of weak ties and often had their own resources to use the internet, yet their high digital activism levels were anchored by strong-tie bureaucracies. Simply, organization mattered.

When many of the groups on the left, such as UE 150 and Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), were online, they often posted personalized posts, but they were group photos, not selfies. And they were very focused on building strong ties and lasting bonds, ones best constructed in person, one recruit at a time. There were many other reasons we saw why their internet presence was so low, including resources and skills. But a key factor was fear, and weak-tie individualized online participation didn't offer up enough collective support for workers fearful of repercussions for speaking up online about their working conditions.

But it's reasonable to wonder: Does the lack of internet activity really matter in terms of what UE 150 wanted to accomplish? If in-person meetings and handing out pamphlets are better avenues for reaching their targets, then maybe their lack of posting to Facebook or their inability to maintain a basic website are meaningless footnotes to their real work. The findings of this study suggest that yes, lack of internet activity really does matter in this case. Believing that it doesn't is problematic for two reasons. First, such logic rests on a self-defeating cycle. The targets of UE 150's recruiting are not online, both by economic disadvantage and by choice, therefore it doesn't matter if UE 150 is itself online. But that reasoning, in essence, condemns UE 150 to a kind of second-class status in terms of digital activism, one where it is obligated to remain removed from whatever

efficiencies and enhancements the internet might offer to its core organization strategy because its targets also lay outside the correct demographic circle. And it gives the rest of us permission not to care because, hey, that's just the way it is.

Second, in an era of collapsing newspapers and TV business models, the trend for more people getting their news and information online is clear.[14] In that case, by not having a stronger online presence, such left-wing, worker-friendly groups are rendered practically invisible. They are missing the chance to do what civil rights groups in the 1960s did to great effect. By having their stories told in the pages of newspapers like the *New York Times,* and later on national TV news shows, civil rights workers enlarged the circle of interest in their struggles, drawing in more external and sympathetic supporters who would help recast the balance of power. Whatever their ultimate impact, movements like Occupy Wall Street certainly succeeded in bringing their issues to a broader audience while at the same time convincing people to become active participants in real-world, physical protests.

Believing that internet activity did not matter also meant that those groups fighting for public workers in North Carolina missed a huge opportunity to further their cause. But even when left-wing groups were able to get their message online, as the North Carolina Association of Educators was, it was not being heard across the state anywhere near as much as conservative groups'. Those messages on the left were simply not being amplified in the same way as those on the right were. It was those right-wing groups who had turned the internet into a digital bullhorn which projected information favorable to their cause across a web of sympathetic organizations.

In the scope of my study, I stopped short of exploring the direct link between these levels of usage and the actual impacts. I can't say absolutely that the rise of these conservative groups and their ferocious embrace of digital media was the definitive factor that led to the Republican takeover of state government. But the correlation is a strong one, and it's certainly an area that warrants further study. That same study could be proposed for the later era of bots and fake news. We know they existed, and we know their reach. The harder question to answer is whether and to what degree they changed people's minds, or whether they simply reinforced existing biases.

IN THE EARLY DAYS of the internet age, people began to discuss the concept of the "digital divide." In the 1990s, this was a relatively straightfor-

ward description of a relatively straightforward problem. Some people were online. Some people were not online. This was seen in large measure as a function of who owned a PC and who was able to afford the sometimes pricey rates for a dial-up connection in an era when some internet service providers still charged by the minute. Post-2000, this shifted. The divide was increasingly about broadband. Where were superfast networks available? How much did they cost? Who had the equipment to sign up? This became a question of access but also literacy, and issues such as whether certain populations simply believed such connections were meaningful or useful.

Beyond this, a new divide emerged, one around participation. In 2006, *Time* magazine named "You" as Person of the Year for posting content to the myriad of new digital platforms, like YouTube, which had just launched. To include thinking about the digital divide beyond consumption of online content, I began to study inequality in this emerging domain of online content creation, or what I called the *digital production gap*.[15] By analyzing activities such as blogging or posting video content, I found unswerving inequality across nearly a decade, most profoundly with social class differences. Many lacked the access, education, or time to post online 24/7. But many observers continued to cling to the belief that the digital divide was nominal, would be over soon, or was just a problem in developing countries. It wasn't, and it isn't.

When it comes to the digital activism divide, all these factors come into play, but on top of them are layered many of the issues I've explored here and saw in action in North Carolina. That means closing the digital activism gap goes far beyond simply handing a laptop to union members in North Carolina, or anywhere else for that matter. Even if you gave every member of BWFJ an iPhone, training to use it, and unlimited access, it's not obvious that it would put even a small dent in the multitude of factors driving the chasm. For one thing, the internet does not eliminate the class and race power relations that prevent some activists from speaking up out of fear of retaliation. For another, other activists with more privilege, such as Tea Party members, posted with abandon. Despite the stereotype of right-wing populism as working-class, in this and many cases around the country, the Patriot activists I interviewed leaned toward middle-class or even higher.

If we agree that the digital activism gap matters, then it's important to understand the deeply complex array of factors that contribute to it, factors that lie at the most fundamental levels of economic, social, and racial demographics.

Understanding the core dynamics that have propelled conservatives' digital activism is a starting point, but it's not necessarily a blueprint that can be copied and e-mailed to every student, union, or community organizing group that supports an issue, such as public workers' right to collectively bargain. As we saw in Chapter 2, for instance, a bureaucratic organization allows for a specialization of digital labor to manage the complexity of social media. Add in hierarchy, and it becomes even more powerful. But this stands in direct opposition to notions of equality and democracy held by some progressive groups. Convincing a student leader that their horizontal group needs to be top-down to make their digital activism efforts more effective would be a tough sell for a number of reasons, and not just because such groups lack time and resources. It violates the spirit of what they set out to do.

Likewise, even if the left had powerful and well-funded organizations, like the right had the Koch brothers–funded Americans for Prosperity (AFP), for example, it would not necessarily level the playing field. Yes, the AFP could afford savvy social media experts who distributed information for digital circulation. They understood the algorithms of social media platforms, so they could manipulate what their audience saw and what captured their attention. And certainly North Carolina conservatives were able to join virtual forces with other wealthy institutions outside of the state. The AFP, for one, was a national organization. But those in Silicon Valley were also helping. Corporate platforms like Facebook could help them game the system with their payment options for greater digital visibility. They could also connect with a slew of growing conservative media outlets, like *Breitbart News.* But they had something else too. They did not just develop and implement their digital weapons with a giant war chest. As we saw in Chapter 3, they also had willing and able boots on the ground in the form of organic grassroots groups, such as Moore TEA or the MCMM. Their online posts cannot be simply dismissed as propaganda from outsiders injected into passive users.

Conservatives not only had the resources and infrastructure for high levels of digital activism, they also had a media ecosystem united around a narrow message of freedom. While mainstream media had been downsizing, conservative media were investing heavily in digital technology, and they were integrating digital strategies and content with grassroots groups on the ground who were sharing it, as well as commenting on it. All of this created a perfect storm.

When most observers talk about political ideology and online content, a common portrayal is that of a filter bubble, in which the left just looks at progressive media and the right at conservative content. While this may be true, each bubble is very different. The left not only lacked the funding, they also lacked news media outlets that were hyper-focused on a unified definition of fairness, like the right was around freedom. The left had multiple agendas. There were bubbles within bubbles. While 2017 ushered in a unity against Trump on the left, similar to that against Obama on the right, the left's issues were varied and broad, rather than the unifying rallying cry to dismantle Obamacare.

By the same measure, while conservatives seem to have the advantage at the moment, it's not clear that they themselves understand why that might be. Indeed, as we heard from conservatives in this book, many believed they were still far behind their progressive counterparts. This underdog mentality is one part of what fuels them. But it poses less obvious risks as well.

Their extraordinary motivation to share, for instance, might be making conservatives more susceptible to fake news. There have been several post-election studies that have found that pro-Trump / anti-Clinton stories identified as fake news were read and shared on social media at a rate almost three time as much as stories whose veracity could be verified.[16] Such statistics have been seized on by progressives as evidence that conservatives are easier to dupe, or just plain dumb. However, given the rates of digital activism I found in North Carolina, it is more plausible that this gap is the result of conservatives being more motivated to share their "Truth," or at least content that fits their view of the truth. This at times involves an almost religious imperative to spread the conservative gospel. The problem is that such uncritical messaging and sharing threatens to ultimately undermine their credibility with the broader public they're hoping to educate and persuade.

In addition, whatever the short-term effectiveness, there is some evidence that conservatives' success has opened the door to even greater extremism, in some cases actions and politics that perhaps go beyond what some on the right had envisioned. As we saw in North Carolina, the legislature went further to the right than what anyone had predicted during the 2012 campaign, surprising even the Republican governor. On a national level, it began to be increasingly clear that right-wing hate groups had more publicly than ever before seized on the internet to recruit, spread information, and organize

public marches. Many of these gatherings would be condemned even by conservative mainstream politicians.

Yet for many observers, and progressives in particular, the lines seemed blurred between conservatives who simply advocated for lower taxes and limited government, and groups that preached white supremacy. Having created a powerful digital activism machine, it was no longer clear that conservatives themselves knew how to control it. As such, conservatives were in danger of being tainted by association, fairly or not, and of provoking a backlash.

IN NORTH CAROLINA, it was the extremism of the Republican-dominated legislature that would help give rise to Moral Monday. My study was just winding down as Moral Monday was gaining momentum, and so my data only cover its first year. At the time of writing, the organizers had become much more sophisticated in their use of digital tools. The website of the NC-NAACP, the lead organization in the Moral Monday movement, now contains rich amounts of information about issues. It also has a fairly advanced page for recruiting and organizing volunteers who want to participate in marches: how to register to go, how to be a crowd manager, how to get and give a ride. Rev. Barber has written posts on *Medium* and organized livestreams of Moral Monday and the new Poor People's Campaign gatherings. He has also become a particularly savvy Twitter user, having joined in March 2014 and amassing over 150,000 followers by the fall of 2018, when he won a MacArthur "genius" grant. Yet even at that point, his Twitter account still was not "verified," common for opinion leaders with even just 5,000 followers.

In November 2016, while the world was being shocked by Trump's victory, something almost as remarkable happened in North Carolina: a Democrat was elected governor by the narrowest of margins. The expansion of digital technology use with the Moral Monday movement and its evolving digital activism represents a critical opportunity for future research: Has Moral Monday managed to narrow at all the digital activism gap in North Carolina? If so, how were they able to overcome the various barriers I have outlined?

For one, the NC-NAACP did have bureaucratic structures and classed resources, which I found to be key for digital activism. But as they advanced

digitally, it appears as if conservatives have also expanded their digital presence. Moral Monday may have taken a few steps forward, but the Patriot movement's online presence has been advancing too. The left should not be complacent just because one organization has gotten their digital act together, whether or not their digital messages resonate.

Politically, the North Carolina election result was still limited, as Republicans maintained their majority in the legislature. Still, its success would be followed by a remarkable year for digital activism across the world. In response to Trump's inauguration, the Women's March exploded across the globe. Naturally, the popular media was crediting Facebook as being the linchpin. "The Women's March Defines Protest in the Facebook Age," ran a *Wired* headline above a story whose celebration of the power of digital activism is as familiar as it is simplistic: "It was, in other words, a protest as sprawling, diverse, and ubiquitous as the platform that spawned it: Facebook. The social media platform of more than a billion people is stunning in both its scale and specificity. It's the world's town square, a venue far-reaching enough to connect people of all races, religions, and nationalities and targeted enough to elevate the petty squabbles of the local PTA meeting. All of it was there at the Women's March and at marches around the world: a massive outpouring of highly distributed opposition to the new most powerful person in the world, all under an umbrella that felt wide enough to shelter the divergent passions of millions."[17]

Later in 2017, the #MeToo movement gained global recognition in the wake of reports detailing sexual harassment by Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. While this movement may have appeared to have started with a hashtag that then spread like wildfire, what we know about the North Carolina case could be applied to this and other movements. It was eventually revealed that a "Me Too" campaign against sexual harassment was actually started in 2006 by Tarana Burke, which gained little recognition at the time. But who would be able to take the risk and has the time and resources to post their #MeToo story? Tarana Burke has pointed out that while her group did post to social media networks, most of their focus was offline, encouraging women of color to talk and share their stories, building strong ties with other women, and helping them heal by showing them that they were not alone. It was never a "gotcha" campaign.[18] Based on what we saw with working-class groups in North Carolina, low-wage women or those from developing countries may not have the same level of empowerment,

resources, or even motivation to post at the same rate as other women about their harassment or assault. In many ways, that is the point of this book—that we need to explore who may be behind—or not behind—a hashtag.

So just chasing hashtags gives an incomplete and unbalanced story. Facebook revolutions and hashtag activism don't really exist as such. This is not to minimize the analysis of hashtags, but examining only high levels of digital activism, spectacular visible protests, or Trump's Twitter account may leave out populations or skew results. But this digital-first approach may also fail to account for the labor behind the hashtag—not just for an individual's online post but also for automated ones, even bots. In fact, rather than an illegitimate form of political participation or misinformation, automation may simply be an extension of digital labor from powerful and wealthy institutions.[19] So often what may seem like a simple hashtag, even ones that go viral, is likely to have some type of work behind it, sometimes staged, sometimes spontaneous.

And if we peel back that social media post, what we are most likely to see is not simply an individual activist but the interconnected elements of power that I have presented here: inequality, institutions, and ideology. These factors together shape not only digital activism but also its end goal. And it is this broader power analysis that is essential when studying the role of the internet in political movements. In the case of North Carolina, right-wing populist groups aligned with powerful media and other resource-rich institutions to create a digital hegemony. That is why looking at the power of and behind social media requires going beyond targeting an individual platform. Certainly, tweaks to corporate giants like Facebook with regard to security and news accuracy are important. So is creating or supporting nonprofit platforms that could serve a more diverse array of activists. But without broader structural changes in the way that hegemony—and societies—operate, the digital activism gap may never disappear.[20]

As movements and platforms continue to evolve, so must our ways of analyzing them in order to keep track of the digital activism gap—both online and offline. Keeping a close watch to see if the internet is living up to its pluralist, personalized, and participatory ideals is imperative. It has become the most essential communication medium of our times and its hold on us will only grow in the coming years. Its promise is extraordinary, but we stand at moment where it's no longer clear whether that is a promise to be a unifying force, or a promise to divide us irreparably.

The age of digital utopianism seems to be in its twilight. In the long night ahead, activists of all stripes will try to seize the internet's potential for their cause. If the digital activism gap continues to widen, the dawn will bring an age where only some citizens can make their voices heard. That would not just snuff out the dream that technology can be a force for progress; it would extinguish the possibility of a truly democratic society.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Reflexivity

In the Preface I outlined how my background motivated the research for this book. Here I will zoom into my experiences, particularly in North Carolina. While I am an academic trained in a variety of research methods, my experience in North Carolina provides context to the data collection and analysis for this book—this information is what we sociologists like to call reflexivity.

I have strong ties in North Carolina, which helped with securing interviews with groups from both sides. On the one hand, my berkeley.edu e-mail address at the time was a clear signal to many groups on the far-right that I was coming from an institution that had a far-left reputation, the University of California, Berkeley (although the veracity of this is debatable). As one of the Patriot activists told me, "You're from Berkeley, and right off, when you hear Berkeley, there's a stereotype, Berkeley, red flag." They were also wary of academics. And after I had been arrested in Raleigh in 2011 while observing an Occupy protest as part of my research, this information was easily available online, which made some Tea Party activists understandably even more cautious of me. This sometimes made it difficult to gain access to them. On the other hand, when I talked about having lived in North Carolina before, that usually broke the ice. I also was frank in telling them that I had experience with groups on the left in the state but wanted to learn more from those on the right.

My experience in North Carolina politics with some of the groups on the left in this study lasted for about ten years after I graduated from Duke University, in Durham, with a BA in Public Policy in 1989. Right out of college, I became a community and student organizer for the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition, where I helped majority African American communities in the eastern part of the state organize their own People's Health Clinics. I also taught medical and other student volunteers at Duke University, UNC Chapel Hill, and East Carolina University about the poor health conditions in the Black Belt South.

At this time, I became aware of the issue of collective bargaining rights for public employees through a number of channels. As an independent filmmaker, I had produced and directed a segment that aired on NC Public Television on the working conditions of housekeepers at UNC Chapel Hill. I also was a public employee myself for almost three years with the North Carolina Agency for Public Telecommunications, where I was a producer / director for other public agencies who wanted to use video to communicate a message.

As a state employee, I learned firsthand what it was like to work in the public sector and met people from a variety of different agencies. The governor's office was just upstairs from my own office, and I often ran camera or teleprompter for the then-governor Jim Hunt.

When I received the information packet from the State Employees Association of North Carolina, one of the groups in the study, I became a member. But I also became involved in what turned out to be their rival—the North Carolina Public Workers Association, which eventually became UE 150, another group in the study. I also did volunteer video work with Black Workers for Justice, often videotaping their events, as well as producing and directing some videos, such as one about the fire in Hamlet, North Carolina, that killed 25 poultry workers.

To earn extra money, I sat through hours of Chapel Hill town council and school board meetings, as well as Orange County Board of Commissioners meetings to cablecast them to public access stations, which at the time was a key way that public officials and activists alike were able to get their message across, as the internet was in its infancy.

I also experimented with digital technology when it emerged on the scene in the mid-1990s, teaching my North Carolina state employee co-workers, as well as other activists, how to use Windows, word processing programs, and the World Wide Web. I also jumped on the digital video bandwagon early on, not just in my job, but in making an independent documentary film with one of the first high-quality "prosumer" digital cameras. At the time, other filmmakers (aka film snobs) were hesitant to embrace this new technology.

With all of my film work, I engaged in what was called at the time "DIY film distribution," working with local community groups and universities to distribute a

film—all before the internet enabled digital distribution. For instance, I screened one of my films at a venue that was supposed to be a tipping point for DIY digital broadcasting. As part of the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, activists still worked tirelessly to publicize an overcapacity showing of one of my films. I also worked with more traditional institutions, such as film festivals, public television, and art house theaters. I even taught a course on grassroots distribution of social issue documentaries using both online and offline tools.

I moved to San Francisco at the height of the dot-com boom and settled in the Bay Area for much of the next 15 years, where I witnessed the politics, culture, and activism around the tech economy's crash and then its colossal rise. Whether it was attending lavish dot-com launch parties with vodka ice luges or Occupy Oakland encampments protesting the tech-driven gentrification of the area, I was well aware of both the utopian and dystopian views of technology before starting out with this project in North Carolina. These multiple roles in North Carolina, as well as my time in the Silicon Valley area, have helped me to see many "sides" of the digital world, albeit mostly from the perspective of the progressive left and even in a job with the government. So I am fortunate that I had the opportunity to spend so much time with conservative activists for this research project to learn about their point of view on the role of digital media in their organizing.

Case Selection and a Political Field-Level Approach

Much of the digital activism scholarship treats the internet as an independent variable and social movements as a dependent variable. Research questions tend to focus on how the internet shapes social movements rather than how different types of social movements may shape internet use. This study turns the tables to examine how various societal factors may shape groups' use of digital technology and their online activism levels. It takes digital engagement as the dependent variable and examines the everyday practices of digital use to identify the mechanisms of any differences.

Instead of just examining one event or protest, this book offers a field-level approach to compare digital activism and democratic practices across different types of social movement organizations. While there are limitations in examining one case, such as findings not being generalizable to other locations and time periods, this approach offered benefits that others lack. For instance, if I had sampled from various censuses of organizational populations, such as the *Encyclopedia of Associations* or the various IRS 501(c)(3) organization databases, it would have been difficult to see how groups interacted in relationship to each other. In addition, part of my argument is that context matters, so the McAdam and Boudet

approach that I used enabled both a deep and broad understanding of digital activism.[1]

When I was searching for a political field that displayed wide variation, I needed to go beyond my northern California home where far-left groups were plentiful but far-right groups were rare. Conservative politics are entrenched in North Carolina, but the state also has a strong history of leftist politics. Simply, its political context was ideal for research on digital activism.

The research design began with a single issue that was of interest to a broad spectrum of groups: the hotly contested debate over collective bargaining among public sector employees in North Carolina. I examined all the political, labor, and social movement organizations that constituted the political field on both sides of this contentious issue: collective bargaining rights for public employees in North Carolina. This was an ideal case because the groups in this field varied greatly, ranging from newer Tea Party groups and student organizations to older rank-and-file unions and conservative advocacy groups. This variation in political opinions on unions in general and collective bargaining in particular also provided fertile ground for comparison in a swing state like North Carolina. To those outside the U.S. South, a union issue may seem isolated to labor, but in the southern context, where unions are marginalized, they operate with a broad range of community and civic groups. When I began my research, North Carolina was one of only three states where public workers did not have collective bargaining rights.[2]

North Carolina was additionally a robust site for research on digital activism because it had wide variation in internet access rates, with a mix of high internet connectivity in technology hubs and extremely low internet access in high-poverty areas, which enabled me to avoid bias based on over- or under-connectivity. As a result, the findings of this study could be applied to other areas outside big city hubs of both digital and protest activity around the country—and around the world.

I included all groups that had participated actively in the issue of collective bargaining in North Carolina for at least a year before the start of my research in 2011; most had been active for much longer. Based on online and offline research, I mapped the political field of organizations (see Table 1). Instead of selecting on the dependent variable of high levels of internet use, I did not start or limit the research to online sources, such as hashtags, to make sure I incorporated groups without any searchable web presence. This systematic approach, then, did not target groups that were uncommonly savvy at social media or those that had a more pronounced profile on the internet.

The groups had all exhibited active participation on the issue of collective bargaining, including legislative work, public protests, and information and media campaigns. I developed the list of organizations under study from in-depth interviews,

site visits, news media reports, and online searches. Each group had a presence as a local or statewide organization, and some had ties to national organizations. I asked each group I contacted for a list of other groups in the field to make sure I captured all active organizations advocating on the issue. I did not exclude any group that fit these criteria from the study, so the sampling frame includes the entire field of organizations involved in this issue. All had open participation. The political field also involved newer groups with looser organizational structures, such as student and some Patriot groups, as well as more firmly established legacy organizations. Some of the groups had organized around the issue for two decades while others were relatively new on the scene. This variation in the groups' organizational age and structure provided a way to capture the digital activism literature's emphasis on newer groups with less formal and more networked infrastructure. Yet the use of well-defined groups as a unit of analysis made it possible to identify class membership.

As a result, the units of analysis for this multimethod field-level study were the 34 social, political, and labor organizations that actively supported or opposed these labor rights during the period of data collection (2011–2014). Eight groups were labor unions. Activities within these groups, even the unions, was all voluntary. Public sector workers can join unions, but North Carolina is a "Right-to-Work" state in that membership is not compulsory, making membership and participation voluntary and similar to joining a social movement group. The other 26 groups were variously political, labor, and social movement groups.

For groups supporting this labor issue, the nexus was the HOPE Coalition, which was founded on the premise of repealing the ban on collective bargaining rights. The unions in the sample were the core members of the HOPE Coalition. The American Federation of Teachers and a police officers' union had been initial core members but were not active at the point of sampling. HOPE also included key support groups that were not unions. Many groups were officially support groups for HOPE, but only those that fit the criteria were included in the sample. Another group, the Triangle Labor Group, had been instrumental in forming the HOPE Coalition, but its leaders were actively involved in other groups, including HOPE or the American Association of University Professors. The same was true for the North Carolina Justice Center.

The groups opposing the labor issue included professional think tanks and advocacy groups like Civitas or the North Carolina chapter of Americans for Prosperity. The anti-labor groups in this political field also included associations of public officials that were signatories of the North Carolina Coalition for Jobs, such as the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, the North Carolina League of Municipalities, the North Carolina School Board Association, the North Carolina Board of Governors, and the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce, another

umbrella organization. Most of these institutions had existed for decades before the study period and had opposed collective bargaining rights throughout their history. While many of these groups were not overtly right-wing, when it came down to it, the boards of these organizations came firmly down against collective bargaining. There were also the grassroots Patriot groups. I spent a substantial amount of time gathering information from this type of organization since I was initially less familiar with them. The groups that ended up in the sample were those that publicly opposed public employee unions and had educated their members about public sector unionism at their meetings, in their publicity materials, and / or participated in protest events. These groups that existed in North Carolina in 2011 included both Tea Party groups and "Preppers"—those preparing for government or economic collapse. To ensure that I was not missing a network of self-directed, rather than organization-directed, activism, I searched for individuals involved in this issue who were outside of an organization. I could not find anyone active, even online, who fit this description (I did not include politicians in this framework). Despite this due diligence, it is always possible that I missed some individuals or groups that were active around this issue.

Operationalization of Organizational Factors

The variable descriptions below are derived from a three-step process to improve any superficial operationalization: interviews, observations, and online analysis.

Social Class

I categorized groups on the basis of their members' social class: working-class, mixed-class, and middle / upper-class. I operationalized class by the types of jobs held by members using Wright and colleagues' classification of employees' control over their work environment.[3] This operationalization aligned with the social movement and inequality scholarship's focus on empowerment as a participation mechanism. However, because of the digital inequality literature's focus on socioeconomic levels rather than class power relations, I also used members' educational level.[4] If more than three-fourths of an organization's members had working-class jobs and a high school education or less, I categorized the organization as working-class. If three-fourths of the members had middle / upper-class jobs and had a college education or more, the organization was categorized as middle / upper-class. As a result, unionized teachers, social workers, and university faculty are categorized as middle / upper-class. However, as a robustness check, I also conducted a separate

quantitative analysis incorporating these groups as working-class, rather than only highlighting intraclass differences of privilege.[5] The class gap remained. If a group met neither threshold, I considered it as mixed-class. This mixed-class categorization of groups that were not uniform in class composition enabled me to determine if having a substantial portion of both classes tipped the balance in digital activism levels in either direction. This coding was based on interviews and queries during observations. For groups comprising public employees, this information was readily accessible publicly. For other organizations, I gathered data from staff and respondents regarding their members' employment status and used interviews to verify my initial classifications. Some organizations had working-class members and middle / upper-class staff or leaders; I categorized these groups as working-class. (College-educated staff / volunteers do not counteract class effects on digital activist scores.) Five groups were working-class, 13 were mixed, and 16 were middle / upper-class. Eight of the pro-labor groups were labor unions, two of which were working-class, three mixed-class, and three middle / upper-class. Three of the five working-class groups were not unions.

Hierarchy

The measure of hierarchy adopted was the organizations' levels of decision making. My operationalization of this variable is based on Gamson's definition of bureaucracy in *The Strategy of Social Protest,* in which he analyzed 54 social movement organizations and categorized them in a variety of ways.[6] Gamson defined bureaucracy as having three characteristics: a written document that states the purpose of the organization; maintaining a formal list of members (for membership groups); and having three or more levels of internal hierarchy. The first two characteristics were displayed by nearly every organization under study, so I used the last—three or more levels of internal hierarchy—as a dummy variable indicating whether an organization was more or less hierarchical.

I also drew on Gamson's idea of centralization and tied it to this measure, so that a dominant leader accounts for one decision-making level. To explain how these levels worked in practice, it was useful to examine both membership and advocacy groups. For more hierarchical membership groups, the levels of decision making included a mechanism for members' involvement. These groups thus included levels such as a board of directors or even chapters, in addition to key staff and / or an executive committee that wielded decision-making power. Advocacy groups often had similar levels of decision making to other hierarchical groups, including a board of directors, but staff were a more important layer for these groups, which did not include a membership level in their decision making. In short, I measured

hierarchy by the number of decision-making levels in an organization, which can shape members' ability to contest and debate decisions in an organization. Twenty-six groups were more hierarchical, with three or more levels of decision making, and eight groups were less hierarchical with one or two levels.

Staff

Another organizational measure adopted was bureaucratic staff. Going beyond Gamson, I harnessed Weber's broad definition of bureaucracy, which includes the number of specific roles necessary to carry out tasks in organizations. Therefore, I constructed a measure of bureaucracy based on the number of staff in an organization. Having more middle / upper-class members often translated into more funding. Funding per se was not a variable in this analysis, but the number of staff can reflect financial resources. Only one working-class group had more than five staff members, while the average number of staff for middle / upper-class groups was 28. The staff variable was measured continuously, with a range of 0 to 130. This variable was also a measure of organizational resources and was considered in the analysis of class composition as well. Because of a clear division in the data, I categorized groups with more than three paid staff members as having "more staff" (18 groups) and those with three or fewer (16 groups) as "less staff."

Political Orientation (as Part of Ideology)

Next, I measured each organization's political orientation. Groups that supported public employee collective bargaining were operationalized as "left." On the left were 17 groups, which included student, worker-center, labor, think-tank, and other progressive organizations. Supporting these labor rights, the groups in this field also included the NC-NAACP and other social movement groups that I categorized as left for reasons of parsimony. Those that opposed public employee collective bargaining were coded as "right," which applied to the remaining groups in the sample. The organizations that opposed collective bargaining included conservative advocacy think tanks, government, and business associations, as well as Patriot groups, which consisted of Tea Parties and other far-right organizations such as "Preppers" (those preparing for government and financial collapse).

Strategy (as Part of Ideology)

I also measured each organization's strategy in relation to its ideology. I coded an organization as "radical" if it mostly focused on organizing its membership and engaging in contested activities—such as protest and picketing, or in the case of

some Patriot groups, prepping—in anticipation of, or to effect, change in the political landscape. A group was coded as "reformist" if it sought incremental systemic reform, primarily through lobbying. The strategy variable was based on Gamson's "unruly" categorization of protest groups. He categorized groups as unruly if they resorted to violence, but given the nonviolent nature of all of my groups, I instead used the terms "radical" and "reformist." I used this binary variable as a way to compare different organizational strategies and their organizing theory. Twenty-one groups were reformist and 13 radical. I did not incorporate or differentiate between the targets of this strategy. Of course, some groups incorporated both reformist or radical strategies, which may change over time, but I used the operationalization based on the 2011 context and only coded a group as radical if it sought more than legislative change through protest tactics. All of the reformist groups focused on legislative reform. This operationalization does not speak to the size of the change being sought.

Year of Founding

I coded each organization based on the year it was formed within the following time periods: a) *pre-web era:* before 1995, the year that Netscape (built on the Mosaic platform), the first dominant World Wide Web browser, went public; b) *web era:* between 1995 and 2006, the period when websites dominated the internet; and c) *social media era:* after 2006, the year that Facebook became available to the general public, Twitter was launched, Google purchased YouTube, and overall social media mass diffusion.

Statewide versus Local

I coded for whether a group was statewide or local as a proxy for size because statewide groups were larger, which could explain higher levels of internet use. I also controlled for size by including the number of group members or likes on Facebook in the digital activist scores. I also considered using frequent commenters or likers on Facebook, but this would only capture the "loud" people. Overall, though, the repeated standardization and accounting for averages per day of social media measures accounts for this approximation for size.

Other Factors

In addition, I considered a number of other factors that could shape digital engagement. Because chapters of national organizations could have the ability to provide structural support to North Carolina groups in the form of digital tools, I coded for whether groups belonged to a national organization. I also categorized groups

as "membership" or "advocacy" organizations,[7] and I indicated whether groups were explicitly labor unions or not. Finally, I noted when a group was majority African American.

Online and Offline Data Collection and Analysis

From 2011 to 2014, I gathered and coded data on the organizations included in this study with a multistep, iterative process, involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, I conducted interviews and ethnographic observations to analyze the political field and to examine mechanisms of digital differences. I also created a score of online activity for each organization to measure internet engagement levels on websites, Facebook, and Twitter for comparison. In addition, a research team and I coded online content, and I also conducted a more grounded qualitative analysis of groups' digital engagement. Finally, when the Moral Monday movement emerged, I captured its related Twitter data as well. This study advances Laura Stein's suggestion that multimethod research can help illuminate the various social movement organizational dynamics that shape internet use.[8] I explain each of the data collection steps below.

Qualitative Data

To understand internet use among the various groups as well as the mechanisms driving any differences in online participation, I interviewed 65 expert informants—leaders and members from most of the organizations. These were semistructured interviews that generally lasted from 30 to 120 minutes. From most of the interviewees I received permission to audio-record, and from many to video-record, their interviews. Some of the respondents also allowed me to use their real names; for the others I used pseudonyms and changed identifying information.

With the occasional assistance of graduate student assistants, I also conducted ethnographic observations of meetings, protests, other events, and observations of personal internet use in 12 cities and towns. This also included ethnographic observations and interviews at the initial Moral Monday protests in the spring and summer of 2013. A research team and I read and viewed each group's website, Facebook, and Twitter posts (for groups that used these platforms), taking fieldnotes on our observations. For the coding of all this data, I used a combination of emergent themes[9] and those derived from a theoretical basis, such as debate, participation, inequality, hierarchy, labor, and ideology.[10]

Online Quantitative Data

To triangulate the qualitative findings, a research team and I gathered original data from tweets, Facebook posts, and website metrics from the organizations under study. These platforms dominated the literature and were the most commonly used public interfaces at the time of the study. I did not quantify e-mail because it is not part of the literature on social media affordances, was not publicly available, and was difficult to obtain or use because of privacy considerations.

Websites

A research team of undergraduates and I surveyed websites over a period of 18 months to note any changes across six-month intervals (or more often), and we gave each group an average score over that time period (see digital activist score construction below). Not all groups had websites.

Facebook

Data collection procedures involved writing scripts and code using the Facebook Application Programming Interface (API). Some groups had more than one Facebook page or group. We analyzed all of them and used the one that generated the highest score. For instance, the NC-NAACP took down their Facebook group at one point when racist trolls were dominating conversations and then created a Facebook page that they could better moderate. One Tea Party also had multiple Facebook accounts. Facebook data was for the total time the organization was on the platform.

Twitter

Some groups had more than one Twitter account, so, as with Facebook, I used the account that was most active for the quantitative measures, but I used all of the accounts for the qualitative analysis. I attempted to get historical data (that was not available at the time) from the private companies with which Twitter had contracted, such as Topsy or DataSift, but cost was prohibitive. We had started using Twitter's API to download the data in real time, but we also wanted the historical tweets. In the end, by comparing what was on each organization's Twitter page with those obtained from the API, we discovered that the API was missing tweets. So we found richer data by scraping the data off of each group's Twitter page for a one-year period. The resulting data derived from the total time the organization

was on the platform and measured tweets, who they were following, and follower numbers, but other measures of Twitter participation, such as mentions and hashtags, we collected and averaged over the one-year period.

Moral Monday

The data for Moral Monday focused on the year leading up to the launch of the first Moral Monday mobilization until the fifth protest on June 3, 2013, called "Mega Moral Monday." This data centered on the main organization of the Moral Monday protests—the NC-NAACP—as well as other key groups and protest participants. Data also incorporated Facebook and Twitter metrics of the NC-NAACP account and real-time downloading of tweets that included the phrases "Moral Monday" or "Moral Mondays" and the hashtags #MoralMonday, #MoralMondays, or #ForwardTogether from when they emerged up until the end of the summer.

Digital Activist Scores–Measuring Digital Engagement

I specified and aggregated types of online use based on a typology of groups' development of, architecture for, and participation in websites, Facebook, and Twitter. I analyzed a combination of online activities instead of focusing on any one platform to avoid privileging one that may decline in popularity or is less used by any of the populations under study. Table 2 describes the specific components of this overall score for each platform and activity. The *digital activism score* comprises three measurements:

1) *Development* measures whether a group built and developed each online platform. For social media, this involved measuring the number of posts and how old the account was. Because websites are more static, whether groups updated their websites over a six-month period was measured.
2) *Architecture* measurements describe how much organizations designed each platform for open participation. Websites with a larger proportion of seven interactive features received a higher architectural score. Groups also received a higher score for setting up Facebook groups, which are more participatory than pages, and for allowing anyone to post. For Twitter, encouraging participation included mentions, hashtags, and accounts that the groups followed.
3) *Participation* measures how much people engage with a group's social media platform. On Facebook, participation was a measure of comments and likes, as well as the number of members for a group or "likers" for a page. For Twitter, the number of retweets, favorites, and followers a group received constructed

this measure. Websites did not have a participation measure because "hit" data represented access rather than participation. Note, Facebook and Twitter participation data were divided by the number of days on the platform to capture overall participation, but architecture data were divided by the number of individual posts, since they represented a choice by the organization.

I constructed the overall digital activist score for each group by first standardizing every organization's development, architecture, and participation scores on each of the three platforms. I then averaged all of these scores and standardized them again to create the digital activism score. This total standardized score was verified through factor analysis of the measures in Table 2; all factors loaded onto one latent variable.

Importantly, the digital activist score contains two layers of organizational input—development and architecture—which reflects the unit of analysis here—the social movement organization, which has not only been understudied but is a window into the everyday practices of digital engagement. At the same time, I isolate and analyze the participation measurement on its own. If you build it, will they come? Groups can build platforms, but just as critically, I evaluated whether people, both members and the public, will engage and interact with a group online.

With the score of each group, I then ranked each organization from highest to lowest score to create a *digital activism index.*

Analytic Strategy

Quantitative findings are based primarily on the mean differences between the 15 different types of digital activist scores in Table 2 and the variables of interest (such as class, political orientation, hierarchy levels, etc.) using Welch's t-test, as the data met the basic assumptions for this method. I did not conduct a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) because with the outcome variable as continuous and a vector space that is mostly empty, this method would be overstretched with the counterfactuals and calibration. I also employed robustness checks, such as a two-way regression analysis with class as the primary independent variable, as well as with other possible explanatory variables. A large multivariate analysis as the primary method was not appropriate for this analysis. Small sample sizes and many covariates would overfit the model due to few degrees of freedom. I also measured the effect size using pooled variation. This measures the difference between two variables, complementing p-values. Pooled variation allowed a standardized measure of any effect of the primary independent variable under study relative to variability

in the political field. Using both Cohen's *d* and Hedges' *g*, I corrected for any uneven groups. Cohen argued that any effect size more than 0.8 is considered "large." The effect size was large for all reported differences unless otherwise indicated.[11]

Content Analysis

To measure how the groups were using social media for their organizing, a research team and I coded Facebook and Twitter posts to determine whether groups used the platform to debate organizational issues; whether they posted debatable content; and whether they encouraged people to participate in the group's activities (online or offline). Groups used Facebook more than Twitter: 30 of the 34 groups used Facebook compared to 25 out of the 34 organizations that had a Twitter account. For groups with fewer than 300 posts, we coded every post. For those with more than 300 posts, we used a systematic sample based on the posts' date. Coders received extensive training, and every post was coded twice. After the second round of coding, if a result had a discrepancy under 90 percent agreement between the two sets of codes using ReCal, an online intercoder reliability Web service, we discussed all of the coding differences for that group with the lead coders, and together we made decisions based on the codebook.[12] We then averaged the rates for that code for each group. This average was used for the final results. We did not code comments as the focus was on the message of the organization. Automated text analysis, even with machine learning, was not used for this analysis because the unit of analysis was not individual posts but organizational ones that had their own "language," and the corpus was a reasonable size for the team. Since more groups used Facebook, coding results listed in Table 13 are for Facebook posts, although similar results were found for Twitter.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to the research presented in this book. First, this case is not directly generalizable to other states or countries. However, in many ways that is the point of the study—to show that it is critical to look beyond the digitally successful movements and see what is happening on an everyday level. And every region and country has different levels or types of inequality, institutions, and ideology that could all factor into digital activism levels. Simply, we need to examine how any contextual differences may shape digital use, which is critical to understanding how societal and political structures shape digital activism.

It is also possible that I might have different findings if one group was not included in the analysis or if I overlooked a group that should have been included. This is a potential issue because the sample size is small, which also makes the findings' generalizability limited. However, the small sample size enabled me to go deep and understand what was happening on the ground. It meant I could get to know many of the people who were active in posting and participating to verify that they were real people (and not bots). In fact, doing both online and offline analysis improved the quality of both types of data. For instance, at one point we improved the script for accessing Facebook data because our initial results did not match what I had been seeing on the ground. Still, groups in a field shift over time, and it is this evolution over years and decades that would be worthy of further investigation. Along the same vein, platforms evolve over time in terms of popularity with different demographics, but that was the point of having an overall score whose basic metrics (development, architecture, and participation) could be applied to any social media application.

Finally, throughout the book, I say that one particular variable, such as social class, *shapes* digital activism, or other such language. In a strict statistical sense, this language has limitations—I am not suggesting a universal causation. Nonetheless, experiments or other large-scale quantitative studies might miss the nuance and mechanisms that this study reveals and obscure the balance I sought to maintain.

Table 1. Organizations of the political field of activism around public employee collective bargaining rights in North Carolina

Left—Support	*Right—Oppose*
American Association of University Professors–NC	Americans for Prosperity–NC (NC-AFP)
Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ)	Caldwell Tea Party
CFFA-660 Charlotte Firefighters Association (Firefighters)	Civitas Institute
Citizens Against Racism (CAR)	Coalition for NC Jobs
Historic Thousands on Jones Street Coalition (HKonJ)	Crystal Coast Tea Party Patriots (CCTPP)
HOPE Coalition	John Locke Foundation / *Carolina Journal*
IBT-Local 391 Teamsters	Moccasin Creek Minutemen (MCMM)
Institute for Southern Studies	Moore TEA Citizens
Jobs With Justice–NC	NC Association of County Commissioners
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—NC (NC-NAACP)	NC Board of Governors (BOG)
National Association of Social Workers–NC	NC Chamber of Commerce
NC American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (NC-AFL-CIO)	NC Freedom
NC Association of Educators (NCAE)	NC League of Municipalities
State Employees Association of NC (SEANC)	NC Renegade
United Electrical Workers, Local 150 (UE 150)	NC School Board Association
UNC Student Action with Workers (SAW)	NC Tea Party
Workers World Party Durham Branch	NC Tea Party Revolution

Table 2. Standardized Digital Activist Score Computations by Activity and Platform

	DEVELOPMENT *If you build it . . .*		*ARCHITECTURE* *Design it for participation . . .*		*PARTICIPATION* *Will they come . . . ?*		
Website	Group has website: 1 + Website has video to measure complexity: 1 + Updated last 6 months: 1 *Website Development Score*	+	1 for each of following: donations, membership sign-ups, alert subscriptions, social media links, comments, calendar, petition, or other interactive feature. Max: 7 *Website Architecture Score*	+	N / A	=	**Website Score**
	+		+		+		+
Facebook	Group uses Facebook: 1 + Posts / days on Facebook + Days on Facebook / 1000 *Facebook Development Score*	+	Group: 1; Page: 0 + Anyone can post = 1 *Facebook Architecture Score*	+	Comments / days on Facebook + Likes / days on Facebook + Members or likers / days *Facebook Participation Score*	=	**Facebook Score**
	+		+		+		+
Twitter	Group has Twitter: 1 + Tweets / days on Twitter + Days on Twitter / 1000 *Twitter Development Score*	+	Mentions / tweet + Hashtags / tweet + Following / days on Twitter *Twitter Architecture Score*	+	Retweeted / day + Favorites / day + Followers / days on Twitter *Twitter Participation Score*	=	**Twitter Score**
	=		=		=		=
	Development Score	+	**Architecture Score**	+	**Participation Score**	=	**TOTAL Digital Activist Score**

Note: Each of the 16 cells is standardized with a z score. All of the scores for each row and for each column are averaged to determine the platform (website, Facebook, and Twitter) or activity (development, architecture, and participation) scores. Groups did not track unique visitors consistently for websites, so participation scores are not available. These activity scores (total platform and total activity) are then standardized and averaged for the total digital activist scores, which are also standardized. Website evaluations took place over 18 months; Facebook for the lifespan of the platform; Twitter for the lifespan for measures of the numbers of tweets, following, and follower totals, and between June 2012 and June 2013 for measures of favorites, hashtags, mentions, and retweeted measures.

Table 3. Website Usage Summary Statistics by Organizational Type

	Registered website	*Development Video as complexity*	Updated	*Architecture Scaled*
Less hierarchical	0.75	0.50	0.38	4.00
More hierarchical	0.92	0.77	0.92*[a]	6.96*[a]
Less staff	0.75	0.56	0.56	3.00
More staff	1.00**[a]	0.83[†]	1.00**[a]	4.67*[a]
Left—Support	0.88	0.53	0.65	3.53
Right—Oppose	0.88	0.88*[a]	0.94*[a]	4.24
Radical strategy	0.77	0.54	0.54	2.92
Reformist strategy	0.95	0.81	0.95*[a]	4.48*[a]
Working-class	0.80	0.60	0.40[†a]	2.60[a]
Mixed-class	0.77[†]	0.69	0.77	3.31*
Middle / upper-class	1.00	0.75	0.94	4.75

Notes: The first three columns—the development scores—are all percentages of groups in each category. The architecture score is based on having a percentage of seven website features as described in Table 2.

For full details on all of these factors, see the operationalization description in the Methodological Appendix.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activist score between the second (or third) variable in the set with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between the two variables, or in the case of class, between working-class and middle / upper-class groups.

Table 4. Facebook Usage Summary Statistics by Organizational Type

	Development			*Architecture*		*Participation*		
	Have Facebook	*Posts/days*	*Days/1000*	*Group (1) or page (0)*	*Anyone post? (1)*	*Comments/days*	*Likes/days*	*Members-likers/days*
Less hierarchical	0.88	0.40	0.86	0.13	0.88†	0.59	1.13	0.44
More hierarchical	0.88	0.83	0.97	0.19	0.58	0.95	2.84	2.31†
Less staff	0.94	0.74	0.89	0.25	0.75	0.77	1.26	0.43
More staff	0.83	0.72	1.00	0.11	0.56	0.95	3.48†	3.14†
Left—Support	0.88	0.51	0.80	0.18	0.65	0.37	2.17	1.09
Right—Oppose	0.88	0.95	1.09†	0.18	0.65	1.36*a	2.71	2.64
Radical strategy	0.92	0.40	0.95	0.15	0.69	1.45	0.47	0.62
Reformist strategy	0.86	0.94*	0.95	0.19	0.62	3.05	1.11	2.64
Working-class	0.60	0.05**m a	0.44*m a	0.00m	0.20m	0.02*m a	0.16*a	0.25a
Mixed-class	1.00	0.86	1.03	0.31	0.85	0.92	2.50	1.17
Middle/upper-class	0.88	0.83	1.04	0.13	0.63	1.08	3.10	2.94

Notes: An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between the second (or third) variable in the set with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between the two variables, or in the case of class, between working-class and middle/upper-class groups. "m" indicates a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between working-class and mixed-class groups.

Table 5. Twitter Usage Summary Statistics by Organizational Type

	Development			*Architecture*			*Participation*		
	Have Twitter	*Tweets/ day*	*Day/ 1000*	*Mentions/ tweet*	*Hashtags/ tweet*	*Following/ day*	*Retweet/ day*	*Favorites/ day*	*Followers/ day*
Less hierarchical	0.50	1.70	0.56	0.03	0.24	0.15	0.07	0.01	0.14
More hierarchical	0.81	1.46	0.92	0.22**[a]	0.61	0.45[†]	0.26*	0.03	0.92**[a]
Less staff	0.63	1.65	0.66	0.10	0.30	0.31	0.08	0.01	0.30
More staff	0.83	1.40	1.00	0.24[†]	0.73*	0.45	0.12*[a]	0.03	1.13*[a]
Left	0.65	0.80	0.72	0.11	0.34	0.21	0.08	0.03	0.51
Right	0.82	2.23*[a]	0.96	0.24[†]	0.71	0.56	0.12	0.02	0.96
Radical strategy	0.68	1.43	0.75	0.05	0.34	0.21	0.23	0.03	0.40
Reformist strategy	0.76	1.57	0.89	0.25*[a]	0.64	0.49	0.21	0.02	0.95
Working-class	0.20*[m a]	0.00***[m a]	0.21*[m a]	0.00***[m a]	0.00**[m a]	0.00**[m a]	0.00**[m a]	0.00*[m a]	0.00**[m a]
Mixed-class	0.85	2.02	0.93	0.12*	0.59	0.36	0.26	0.03	0.57
Middle/upper-class	0.82	1.58	0.96	0.27	0.64	0.52	0.25	0.03	1.11

Notes: An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between the second (or third) variable in the set with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level, *** at $p < 0.001$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between the two variables, or in the case of class, between working-class and middle/upper-class groups. "m" indicates a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between working-class and mixed-class groups.

Table 6. Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Social Class Levels

	Development	*Architecture*	*Participation*	*Total Platform*
Website				
Working	−0.59	−0.66[a]		**−0.67[a]**
Mixed	−0.15	−0.30*[a]	NA	**−0.24[†]**
Middle / upper	−0.31	0.45		**0.41**
Facebook				
Working	−1.10*[m a]	−0.87[†m]	−0.52*[m a]	**−1.16**[**m a]**
Mixed	0.25[a]	0.46	−0.06	**0.30**
Middle / upper	0.14	−0.10	0.22	**0.12**
Twitter				
Working	−0.99**[m a]	−0.86**[m a]	−0.82**[m a]	**1.05**[**m a]**
Mixed	0.26	−0.01	−0.10	**0.06**
Middle / upper	0.10	0.28	0.34	**0.28**
Total activity				
Working	**−1.12**[*m a]	**−1.23**[**m a]	**−0.75**[**m a]	**−1.22**[**m a]
Mixed	**0.15**	**0.08**	**−0.09**	**0.05**
Middle / upper	**0.23**	**0.32**	**0.31**	**0.34**
				TOTAL

Notes: Based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between working-class and middle / upper-class groups with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level, *** at $p < 0.001$ level. "m" indicates that working-class groups have a statistically significant difference from mixed-class groups at the $p < 0.05$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between working-class and middle / upper-class groups.

Table 7. Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Staff Levels

	Development	*Architecture*	*Participation*	*Total Platform*
Website				
More staff	−0.51	−0.46		**−0.52**
Less staff	0.46**[a]	0.41*[a]	NA	**0.46**[**a]
Facebook				
More staff	0.01	0.25	−0.30	**−0.02**
Less staff	−0.01	−0.22	0.27[†]	**0.02**
Twitter				
More staff	−0.06	−0.30	−0.47	**−0.32**
Less staff	0.05	0.27[†]	0.42**[a]	**0.29**[a]
Total activity				
More staff	**−0.24**	**−0.26**	**−0.43**	**−0.37**
Less staff	**0.21**	**0.23**	**0.38**[*a]	**0.32**[*a]
				TOTAL

Notes: Based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between groups with more and less staff: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between groups with more and less staff.

Table 8. Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Hierarchy Levels

	Development	*Architecture*	*Participation*	*Total Platform*
Website				
Less Hierarchy	−0.76	−0.78		**−0.83**
More Hierarchy	0.23[a†]	0.24[*a]	NA	**0.26**[*a]
Facebook				
Less Hierarchy	−0.32	0.24	−0.33	**−0.19**
More Hierarchy	0.10	−0.08	0.10	**0.06**
Twitter				
Less Hierarchy	−0.12	−0.53	−0.64	**−0.50**
More Hierarchy	0.04	0.16*	0.20**[a]	**0.15**[†]
Total activity				
Less Hierarchy	**−0.51**	**−0.55**	**−0.54**	**−0.63**
More Hierarchy	**0.16**	**0.17**[*]	**0.17**[**]	**0.19**[*a]
				TOTAL

Notes: Based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between less and more hierarchical groups: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between less and more hierarchical groups.

Table 9. Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Political Orientation

	Development	*Architecture*	*Participation*	*Total Platform*
Website				
Left	−0.33	−0.18		**−0.27**
Right	0.33†	0.18	NA	**0.27**
Facebook				
Left	−0.28	0.00	−0.17	**−0.21**
Right	0.28	0.00	0.17	**0.21**
Twitter				
Left	−0.34	−0.33	−0.15	**−0.32**
Right	0.34*a	0.33†	0.15	**0.32†**
Total activity				
Left	**−0.40**	**−0.27**	**−0.18**	**−0.33**
Right	**0.40*a**	**0.27**	**0.18**	**0.33†**
				TOTAL

Notes: Based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activist score between left and right groups with: † < 0.10 level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between left and right groups.

Table 10. Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Political Strategy

	Development	*Architecture*	*Participation*	*Total Platform*
Website				
Radical	−0.54	−0.50		**−0.56**
Reformist	0.34*[a]	0.31*[a]	NA	**0.35**[*a]
Facebook				
Radical	−0.22	0.03	−0.29	**−0.22**
Reformist	0.14	−0.02	0.18	**0.14**
Twitter				
Radical	−0.08	−0.38	−0.27	**−0.28**
Reformist	0.05	0.23*	0.17	**0.18**
Total activity				
Radical	**−0.44**	**−0.35**	**−0.31**	**−0.43**
Reformist	**0.27**	**0.22**[*a]	**0.19**	**0.27**[*a]
				TOTAL

Notes: Based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference in a t-test (Welch) between the average standardized total digital activism score between radical and reformist groups with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level. "a" indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level with a basic two-way regression between radical and reformist groups.

Table 11. Regression Analysis: Total Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Key Variables

	a	*b*	*c*	*d*	*e*	*f*	*g*	*h*	*i*	*j*
Working-class	–1.56		–1.28		–1.35		–1.40			
	(3.48)**		(2.79)**		(2.98)**		(2.74)*			
Mixed-class	–0.29		–0.04		–0.09		–0.23			
	(–0.88)		(–0.11)		(0.27)		(–0.69)			
Middle / upper-class										
Number of staff		0.02	0.01							
		(2.42)*	(–1.80)†							
More Hierarchical				0.82	0.61					
				(2.13)*	(1.63)					
Less Hierarchical										
Right-wing						0.66	0.24			
						(–2.01)†	(–0.69)			
Left-wing										
Organizational age								0.00		
								(0.97)		
Statewide									0.03	
Local									(0.08)	
Union										–0.24
Nonunion										(0.59)
Constant	0.34	–0.23	0.03	–0.63	–0.23	–0.33	0.18	–6.97	0.31	0.06
	(–1.55)	(–1.25)	(–0.1)	(1.86)	(0.56)	(–1.42)	(–0.55)	(0.97)	(0.84)	(0.28)
R^2	0.28	0.15	0.35	0.12	0.34	0.11	0.29	0.03	0.28	0.01
N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

Notes: Standardized digital activism score based on Table 2 calculations.

An asterisk indicates statistically significant difference with middle / upper-class groups with: † at $p < 0.10$ level, * at $p < 0.05$ level, ** at $p < 0.01$ level, *** at $p < 0.001$ level.

Table 12. Digital Activism Index

Name	*Abbrev. (if used)*	*Score*
Americans for Prosperity–NC	NC-AFP	2.56
John Locke Foundation / *Carolina Journal*		2.02
Civitas Institute		1.18
Crystal Coast Tea Party Patriots	CCTPP	0.94
NC Tea Party		0.84
Institute for Southern Studies		0.80
Caldwell Tea Party		0.64
NC Freedom		0.61
NC American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations	NC-AFL-CIO	0.60
NC Association of Educators	NCAE	0.60
Moore TEA Citizens	Moore TEA	0.57
NC Chamber of Commerce		0.55
CFFA–660 Charlotte Firefighters Association	Firefighters	0.46
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People–NC	NC-NAACP	0.41
National Association of Social Workers–NC		0.32
Historic Thousands on Jones Street Coalition	HKonJ	0.26
State Employees Association of NC	SEANC	0.06
NC Renegade		0.04
NC League of Municipalities		−0.02
NC Association of County Commissioners		−0.05
NC Tea Party Revolution		−0.09
NC School Board Association		−0.12
UNC Student Action with Workers	SAW	−0.49
Moccasin Creek Minutemen	MCMM	−0.57
Black Workers for Justice	BWFJ	−0.67
Jobs With Justice–NC		−0.67
American Association of University Professors–NC		−0.75
Workers World Party Durham Branch		−0.76
HOPE Coalition	HOPE	−1.01
IBT–Local 391 Teamsters		−1.10
Coalition for NC Jobs		−1.21
NC Board of Governors	BOG	−1.48
United Electrical Workers, Local 150	UE 150	−1.64
Coalition Against Racism	CAR	−2.02

Note: Based on calculations from Table 2.

Table 13. Content Analysis of Facebook by Political Orientation—Percentage of Posts

	Left	*Right*
Organizational debate	1%	1%
Encouraging participation online or offline	23%	18%
Post links to an article	68%	78%*
Linked article contains contentious content	34%	45%*

Notes: See Methodological Appendix for details on coding.

* Indicates that the difference is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level between left and right groups.

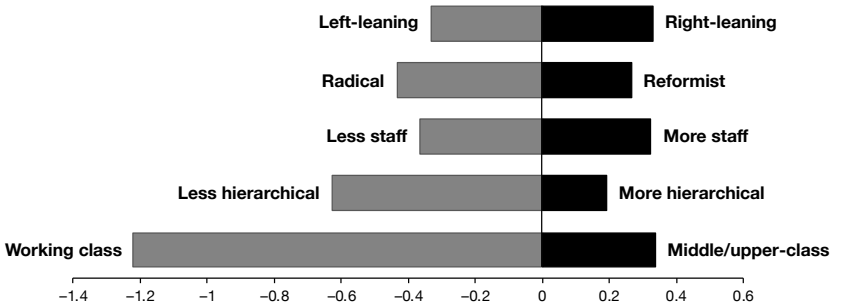

Figure 1. Total Standardized Digital Activism Scores

Notes:

a. Standardized total digital activism scores based on calculations from Table 2.

b. The ideology finding is significant at the $p < 0.10$ level, with a p-value of 0.053. The other differences are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

c. The *x*-axis indicates the number of standard deviations from the mean.

d. The total standardized digital activism score for mixed-class groups is 0.05 standard deviations.

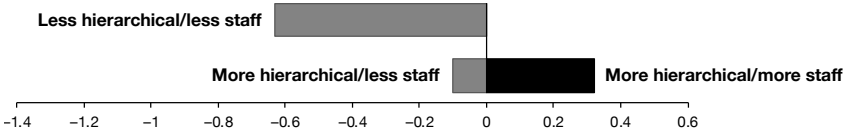

Figure 2. Groups' Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Hierarchy and Staffing Levels

Notes:

a. Total standardized digital activism scores based on calculations from Table *2*.

b. The difference between less hierarchical / less staff and more hierarchical / more staff is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a t-test (Welch).

c. No groups fit the less hierarchical / more staff category. Eight groups were less hierarchical / less staff, eight were more hierarchical / less staff, and 18 were more hierarchical / more staff.

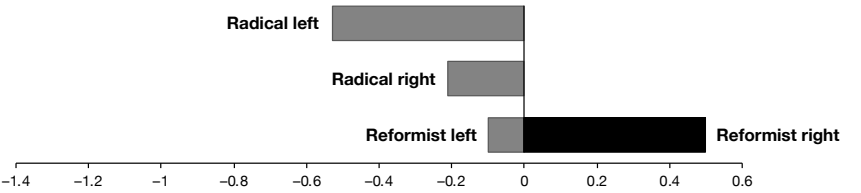

Figure 3. Groups' Standardized Digital Activism Scores by Ideology (Strategy and Political Orientation)

Notes:

a. Total standardized digital activism scores based on calculations from Table 2.

b. The difference between radical left and reformist right is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a t-test (Welch).

c. Nine groups were radical left, eight were reformist left, four were radical right, and 13 were reformist right.

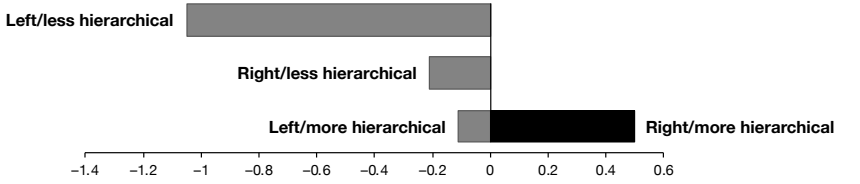

Figure 4. Total Digital Activism Scores by Organizational Hierarchy and Political Orientation

Notes:

a. Total standardized digital activism scores based on calculations from Table 2.

b. The difference between right/more hierarchical groups and left/less hierarchical groups is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level with a t-test (Welch).

c. Four groups were right/less hierarchical, four were left/less hierarchical, 13 groups were right/more hierarchical, and 13 were left/more hierarchical.

NOTES

Introduction: Public Unions, Patriots, and the Battle for the Internet

1. Throughout the book, I follow the general social science protocol of using only first names, as this is not a piece of investigative journalism but sociological research. And, as outlined in the Methodological Appendix, some of the names are pseudonyms. However, when individuals are well-known, I have used first and last names. In addition, UE is the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, and UE 150 is shorthand for the North Carolina Local: UE Local 150.

2. Milla Sanes and John Schmitt, *Regulation of Public Sector Collective Bargaining in the States* (Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2014).

3. Countless publications have made this claim, most recently Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, *New Power: How Power Works in Our Hyperconnected World—and How to Make It Work for You* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018).

4. For example, Samantha M. Shapiro, "Revolution, Facebook-Style," *New York Times Magazine,* January 22, 2009. Or more recently on the #MeToo movement: Nadia Khomami, "#MeToo: How a Hashtag Became a Rallying Cry against Sexual Harassment," *Guardian,* October 17, 2017.

5. Note, the term "Arab Spring" is contested. See Maytha Alhassen, "Please Reconsider the Term 'Arab Spring,'" *Huffington Post,* October 2, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/maytha-alhassen/please-reconsider-arab-sp_b_1268971.html.

6. Evgeny Morozov, *Net Delusion* (London: Penguin, 2011); Micah L. Sifry, *The Big Disconnect: Why the Internet Hasn't Transformed Politics (Yet)* (New York: OR Books, 2014).

7. Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Helen Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 2012): 739–68; Zeynep Tufekci and Deen Freelon, "Introduction to the Special Issue on New Media and Social Unrest," *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 7 (2013): 843–47; Dana R. Fisher and Marije Boekkooi, "Mobilizing Friends and Strangers: Understanding the Role of the Internet in the Step It Up Day of Action," *Information Communication and Society* 13, no. 2 (2010): 193–208; Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, *Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

8. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971); Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961).

9. Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 1960); Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1962): 947–52; Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form," *Political Power and Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1980): 67–115; Steven Lukes, *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

10. Scant research attention has been paid directly to the applicability of polyarchy in the digital era, though some have theorized on it (e.g., Victor W. Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical, and Institutional Constructions," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 1 [2006]: 19–38). However, many have suggested that the internet does create a more democratic space; see Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical / Reconstructive Approach," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 75–100; Tracy Westen, "Can Technology Save Democracy?," *National Civic Review* 87, no. 1 (1998): 47–56; Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (London: Verso, 2013).

11. For instance, John D. H. Downing, "Computers for Political Change: PeaceNet and Public Data Access," *Journal of Communication* 39, no. 3 (Sep-

tember 1989): 154–62. On Indymedia and other WTO anti-globalization activist groups: Graham Meikle, *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia"; J. Pickerill, "Radical Politics on the Net," *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (February 10, 2006): 266–82. Soon after, studies of MoveOn.org—a progressive, mostly online organization—proliferated; see David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). More recent scholarship has focused on the Arab Spring and Occupy movements: Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Rong Wang, Wenlin Liu, and Shuyang Gao, "Hashtags and Information Virality in Networked Social Movement: Examining Hashtag Co-Occurrence Patterns," *Online Information Review* 40, no. 7 (2016): 850–66.

12. Some scholars have researched conservative social media: Jessie Daniels, "Race and Racism in Internet Studies: A Review and Critique," *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 695–719; Neal Caren, Kay Jowers, and Sarah Gaby, "A Social Movement Online Community: Stormfront and the White Nationalist Movement," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 33 (2012): 163–93; Deana A. Rohlinger et al., "Constricting Boundaries: Collective Identity in the Tea Party Movement," in *Border Politics, Social Movements and Globalization,* ed. Nancy Naples and Jennifer Bickham-Mendez (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 177–205.

13. For an overview, see Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Kevin Gillan, "Navigating the Technology-Media-Movements Complex," *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 383–402.

14. For instance, see Patrik Jonsson, "North Carolina Could Be the Most Interesting State This Election," *Christian Science Monitor,* October 20, 2016.

15. For further discussion on the empirical impact of this type of sampling decision on digital inequality research, see Jen Schradie, "The Digital Production Gap in Great Britain: How Sampling, Mechanisms and Theory Matter with Digital Inequality," *Information, Communication and Society* 16, no. 6 (2013): 989–998.

16. This general framework was developed by Douglas McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet for social movement studies. They also studied a broader political arena because, they argued, social movement scholarship often narrowly examines only success-centric mobilizations. Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet, *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

17. Political scientists have recently been zeroing in on the state level as a critical political object of study. For example, see Kathy Cramer Walsh, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

18. According to the Department of Labor, "Union Members—2017," January 19, 2018, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf. By 2017, it had climbed up to 3.4%, making it the second lowest, right behind South Carolina. "Union Members Summary," *Bureau of Labor Statistics,* 2014, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm; "Union Affiliation of Employed Wage and Salary Workers by State," *Bureau of Labor Statistics,* 2018, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t05.htm.

19. R. B. Freeman and E. Han, "The War against Public Sector Collective Bargaining in the US," *Journal of Industrial Relations* 54, no. 3 (May 28, 2012): 386–408.

20. See Appendix for further details on sampling, the list of organizations, and the operationalization of the factors that differentiate the groups from one another.

21. See Appendix for an explanation of the digital activism score and index, as well as Tables 2–12.

22. Two resourced, hierarchical conservative organizations are also at the bottom of the index. A leader of one of these groups said that they have so much power and connections with conservative groups that *are* online that they did not deem it necessary to have a digital strategy (and were not membership groups). But even with these groups' lower scores, the findings stand that working-class, left, and non-hierarchical groups are still outnumbered online.

23. For more context on the limitations of moving toward online data sources, see Jen Schradie, "Beyond the Hashtag: Big Data Is Too Small with Class Inequality," in *Media and Class,* ed. June Deery and Andrea Press (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017).

24. One exception to the communication literature's limitation in grappling with societal and structural differences is the concept of "affordances," which is how technology can allow a user, group, or society to do something that it could not do without that tool—but only under a certain set of conditions. I explain this concept further in subsequent chapters.

25. Steven P. Martin and John P. Robinson, "The Income Digital Divide: Trends and Predictions for Levels of Internet Use," *Social Problems* 54, no. 1 (2007): 1–22; Aaron Shaw and Eszter Hargittai, "The Pipeline of Online Participation Inequalities: The Case of *Wikipedia* Editing," *Journal of Communication* 68, no. March (2018): 143–68.

26. Pew Research Center, "Internet / Broadband Fact Sheet" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2018).

27. Jeroen Van Laer, "Activists Online and Offline: The Internet as an Information Channel for Protest Demonstrations," *Mobilization* 15, no. 3 (2010): 347–66; Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Weapon of the Strong? Participatory Inequality and the Internet," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (June 17, 2010): 487–509; Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age,"

Pew Research Center, April 25, 2013, http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/civic-engagement-in-the-digital-age-2/.

28. These pioneering case studies include Chris Carter et al., "The Polyphonic Spree: The Case of the Liverpool Dockers," *Industrial Relations Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2003): 290–304; Brigitte le Grignou and Charles Patou, "ATTAC(k)ing Expertise: Does the Internet Really Democratize Knowledge?," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens, and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 145–58; Jenny Pickerill, *Cyberprotest: Environmental Activism Online* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). A few studies used a larger sample of organizations to show some differences across organizations based on resources: Tom Denison and Kirsty Williamson, "Website Management Issues for Community-Based, Non-Profit Organizations in Rural and Regional Areas," *Information, Communication & Society* 16, no. 7 (September 2013): 1072–92; Ivar Eimhjellen, Dag Wollebæk, and Kristin Strømsnes, "Associations Online: Barriers for Using Web-Based Communication in Voluntary Associations," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 25, no. 3 (March 15, 2013): 730–753; Melissa K. Merry, "Interest Group Activism on the Web: The Case of Environmental Organizations," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8, no. 1 (February 25, 2011): 110–28. Yet others found no resource differences. For instance, see Bernard Enjolras, Kari Steen-Johnsen, and Dag Wollebaek, "Social Media and Mobilization to Offline Demonstrations: Transcending Participatory Divides?," *New Media & Society* 15, no. 6 (November 26, 2012): 890–908.

29. Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13.

30. Deen Freelon, Chris Wells, and W. Lance Bennett, "Participation in the Youth Civic Web: Assessing User Activity Levels in Web Sites Presenting Two Civic Styles," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 10, no. 3 (2013): 293–309; Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope;* Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al., "Introduction: Social Movements and ICTs," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–22; Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change;* R. Kelly Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs," *Information, Communication & Society* 9, no. 2 (2006): 202–24.

31. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

32. Olson is starting from the idea that rational individuals will not act to further a collective interest, even if they believe the goal is good. The reason is not that they are selfish, but rather that, once you get to a certain group size, it is hard for any given individual to see how their contribution to the collective good will make a difference. Therefore, it is rational to free-ride because it looks like the collective good will be achieved with or without one's individual effort.

33. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

34. Dave Karpf made this argument that the digital era ushered in different types of organizations in *The MoveOn Effect.*

35. While no one is arguing that the "position" is completely eliminated in the digital activism era, the trend toward the "person" gaining more relevance has been gaining strength. See, for instance, Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman, "The New Site of Activism: On-Line Organizations, Movement Entrepreneurs, and the Changing Location of Social Movement Decision-Making," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* 24 (2003): 155–187; Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action"; Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Chris Wells, *The Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen: Communicating Engagement in a Networked Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence.*

36. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope,* 13.

37. Bennett and Segerberg, *Logic of Connective Action.*

38. Some scholars still analyze organizations with digital activism: Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Katrina Kimport, "Organizational Dominance and Its Consequences in the Online Abortion Rights and AntiAbortion Movements," in *Media, Movements, and Political Change,* ed. Jennifer Earl and Deana A. Rohlinger (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change Vol. 33) (London: Emerald, 2012), 139–61; Wells, *Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen;* Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.* And a few scholars have argued for the strong role of organization with digital activism: Grignou and Patou, "ATTAC(k)ing Expertise; Daniel Kreiss, Megan Finn, and Fred Turner, "The Limits of Peer Production: Some Reminders from Max Weber for the Network Society," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 2 (October 12, 2010): 243–59; Daniel Kreiss, *Prototype Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Aaron Shaw and Benjamin Mako Hill, "Laboratories of Oligarchy? How The Iron Law Extends to Peer Production," *Journal of Communication* 64, no. 2 (2014): 215–38. Another argument is that this view of horizontal and leaderless movements toward digital activism is more prominent in the early stages of protest movements: Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

39. Rather than Paul Revere himself, it was Longfellow's poem about him that made him famous, with historians disagreeing about the accuracy of it. In Chapter 3, I explain this Revere reference in more detail. Robert Martello, *Midnight Ride, Industrial Dawn: Paul Revere and the Growth of American Enterprise* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

40. Some suggest that different types of internet activities may map onto either a reformist or radical tactic, such as Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst, "Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires," *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 8 (December 2010): 1146–71. Or digital activities align with participation

patterns: F. Den Hond and F. G. DeBakker, "Ideologically Motivated Activism: How Activist Groups Influence Corporate Social Change Activities," *Academy of Management Review* 32, no. 3 (2007): 901–24. Yet this framework leaves open the question of comparative research on broader strategies and levels of internet use. One study did find that lobbying tactics were more in line with digital use than radical acts, although this analysis only looked at one event: Julie Uldam, "Activism and the Online Mediation Opportunity Structure: Attempts to Impact Global Climate Change Policies?," *Policy and Internet* 5, no. 1 (2013): 56–75.

41. These differences draw from Gamson's categorizations of social movement groups. They are used for reasons of parisimony and were based on the group's strategies at the time of the research. See Appendix for more information on operationalization. William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest,* 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990).

42. While groups can change their strategies over time, I based my categorization on the group's actual practices at the start of the study.

43. For in-depth analyses of how social media platforms were used in protests, see Jennifer Earl et al., "This Protest Will Be Tweeted," *Information, Communication & Society* 16, no. 4 (2013): 459–78; Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas;* Tufekci and Freelon, "Introduction to the Special Issue on New Media and Social Unrest."

44. Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Castells described these peer-to-peer online groups as more libertarian than left, but still disruptive politically: *The Rise of the Networked Society* (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010).

45. Sheetal D. Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age: Considering Values and Technology in Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 3 (January 3, 2014): 326–41; Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Deana A. Rohlinger and Leslie Bunnage, "Connecting People to Politics over Time? Internet Communication Technology and Activist Persistence in MoveOn and the Tea Party Movement," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 5 (2015): 539–52.

46. To further understand the out-party argument, see Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.* Scholars who suggest that ideology is less relevant, include Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action"; Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope.*

47. For example, see Katy E. Pearce, "Democratizing Kompromat: The Affordances of Social Media for State-Sponsored Harassment," *Information Communication and Society* 18, no. 10: 1–17 (March 2015): 1–17.

48. For instance, the *New York Times* published a poll showing that self-described Tea Party activists had a socioeconomic edge. See "How the Poll Was Conducted," *New York Times,* April 14, 2010.

1. The Great Class Wedge and the Internet's Hidden Costs

1. See Methodological Appendix for operationalization of social class.

2. See Appendix, Table 6. For more details on these class findings, see Jen Schradie, "The Digital Activism Gap: How Class and Costs Shape Online Collective Action," *Social Problems* 65, no. 1 (2018): 51–74.

3. Working-class groups had fewer staff on average than their middle/upper-class counterparts, and as I explain further in Chapter 2, higher staff levels were associated with higher digital activism scores. As indicated in the Methodological Appendix, funding per se is not a variable in this analysis but rather the number of staff in an organization, which can also be a proxy for financial resources. Also, having college-educated volunteers did not counteract the class effects on digital activism scores.

4. UE 150 had a static placeholder page but no content. While the national UE union hosted some content about the North Carolina local's activities, the organization did not have its own functioning website to post information or highlight ways to get involved. One of UE 150's chapters, a rural group of low-wage nursing assistants at a state-run hospital, did have a website. However, this seven-year-old site did not come up in Google searches. It was not linked to other UE sites and had a long web address and outdated information.

5. See Appendix, Table 4; see also Appendix, Table 11, for regression analysis incorporating statewide versus local groups as a proxy for size into the analysis.

6. Printed statement distributed by the Labor, Faith and Civil Rights Coalition in Defense of the Public Sector for their rally in Raleigh, NC, on February 21, 2011.

7. Moveon.org (now known as MoveOn), started in 1998, is a predominantly online group that advocates for progressive causes, and it helped organize solidarity events to support Wisconsin public sector workers in 2011 around the country, including in North Carolina.

8. The United Nations International Labor Rights Organization ruled that the United States was in violation of international law for not allowing collective bargaining for public employees, which they viewed as a basic human right. Workers from North Carolina traveled abroad to testify, and lawyers from Sweden, Japan, and Kenya visited North Carolina to evaluate worksites and hear from public sector workers about their conditions. Other public sector workplaces around the state continued this tactic and developed workers' bills of rights. Larsene argued at a public event, "The main thing is we must have a bill of rights to do the things that we need to do and to be treated, just basic human rights. We're not asking for a million dollars; we're asking to be treated with dignity and respect. We're taking care of the least of these, so we just want to be treated and given what's right and duly ours."

9. Amanda Pullum highlights that with this conservative campaign against public sector unions there was a specific attack on teachers' unions: Amanda Pullum,

"Social Movements, Strategic Choice, and Recourse to the Polls," *Mobilization* 21, no. 2 (2016): 177–92; Amanda Pullum, "Foul Weather Friends: Enabling Movement Alliance through an Intentionally Limited Coalition," *Social Currents* 5, no. 3 (2017): 228–43.

10. For how digital technology was used in the Wisconsin movement, see David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For Occupy Wall Street digital diffusion: Ion Bogdan Vasi and Chan S. Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States," *Mobilization* 21, no. 2 (2016): 139–54.

11. Sandra K. Evans, Katy E. Pearce, Jessica Vitak, and Jeffrey W. Treem, in their meta-analysis of "affordances" in communication research, broadly define the term as "possibilities for action" vis-à-vis digital technology. With the advent of websites in the 1990s, scholars began writing about the web's democratizing affordances for social movements. Online architecture allowed anyone to post information to the broader public, rather than relying on traditional media outlets. In the next decade, the proliferation of social media platforms expanded the use of static one-to-many websites to more instantaneous and interactive many-to-many platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter. Scholars suggested that both sets of digital tools are more democratic, not only because a social movement group can reach more people through digital technology than with printed flyers, for instance, but also because more people can interact and respond online than in offline spaces. Evans et al., "Explicating Affordances: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Affordances in Communication Research," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 22, no. 1 (2017). Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al., "Introduction: Social Movements and ICTs," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–22; R. Kelly Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs," *Information, Communication & Society* 9, no. 2 (2006): 202–24; Dana R. Fisher and Marije Boekkooi, "Mobilizing Friends and Strangers: Understanding the Role of the Internet in the Step It Up Day of Action," *Information Communication and Society* 13, no. 2 (2010): 193–208; Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader, "Digital Democracy: An Introduction," in *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision-Making in the Information Age* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3–22; Helen Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

12. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

13. Olson's original formulation of his collective action theory was not about self-interest and costs motivating people to free-ride off of the coat-tails of others. Instead, people would free-ride because they could reap the benefits of the public good

without participating because their participation would not yield personal advantages once a certain group size is reached. Therefore, it would be rational to free-ride if the collective good can be achieved without one's effort. Still, most reinterpretations of Olson offer a classic binary microeconomics model of the individual making a rational decision as to whether or not to engage in collective action based on one's own costs of participation, such as time and personal investment.

14. Key scholarship on resource mobilization can be found in John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization* (Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1973); John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212–41; John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements," in *Handbook of Sociological Theory,* ed. Jonathan H. Turner (New York: Springer, 2001), 533–65. Social movement scholars have argued that there are other factors to movement success, such as political opportunities: David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (2004): 1457–92; Ruud Koopmans, "Political. Opportunity. Structure. Some Splitting to Balance the Lumping," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 93–105. Also key is collective identity: Francesca Polletta, James M. Jasper, and M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283–305; Meyer and Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity."

15. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

16. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

17. Paul Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements."

18. Pamela E. Oliver and Gerald Marwell, "Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory,* ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 241–72.

19. Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form," *Political Power and Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1980): 67–115.

20. The collective action model-change arguments were based on predominantly online movements: Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, "Reconceptualizing

Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment," *Communication Theory* 15, no. 4 (2005): 365–88. Some scholars have questioned if online-only activism is even possible; see, for instance, Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.*

21. For organizational differences in resources and digital use, see Ivar Eimhjellen, Dag Wollebæk, and Kristin Strømsnes, "Associations Online: Barriers for Using Web-Based Communication in Voluntary Associations," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 25, no. 3 (March 15, 2013): 730–753; Melissa K. Merry, "Interest Group Activism on the Web: The Case of Environmental Organizations," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8, no. 1 (February 25, 2011): 110–28; Gabe Ignatow and Jessica Lynn Schuett, "Inter-Organizational Digital Divide: Civic Groups' Media Strategies in the Trinity River Corridor Project," *First Monday* 16, no. 11 (2011): 1–22. Also, for political campaigns, social media usage gaps were found with Facebook; see Christine B. Williams and Girish J. Gulati, "Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the Congressional Elections of 2006 and 2008," *New Media & Society* 15, no. 1 (2013): 52–71. For usage gaps with Twitter, see Maurice Vergeer and Liesbeth Hermans, "Campaigning on Twitter: Microblogging and Online Social Networking as Campaign Tools in the 2010 General Elections in the Netherlands," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18, no. 4 (2013): 399–419. One study found equality with online petition signing: Thomas Elliott and Jennifer Earl, "Online Protest Participation and the Digital Divide: Modeling the Effect of the Digital Divide on Online Petition-Signing," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 2 (February 2018): 698–719. And some preliminary research has pointed to digital activists as more likely to have higher education levels than traditional activists: Katharine Brodock, Mary Joyce, and Timo Zaeck, *Digital Activism Survey Report 2009,* https://www.academia.edu/2061939/2009_Digital_Activism_Survey_Report.

22. David Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights Era Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The poverty rate for the entire state is 32.5%, based on data from 2011–2015 in 2015 dollars, from the U.S. Census. In 2013, 25% of children lived in poverty in North Carolina, one of the highest rates in the country. Overall poverty rates are two times higher for African Americans. See "Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, 2017, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/greenvillecitynorthcarolina,pittcountynorthcarolina,nc/IPE120216; "North Carolina Demographics of Poor Children," National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013, http://www.nccp.org/profiles/NC_profile_7.html; Alexandra F. Sirota, "The Legacy of Hardship: Persistent Poverty in North Carolina," BTC Brief (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Justice Center, 2012).

23. When the group was formed it was called Pitt County Coalition Against Racism, but was later shortened to Coalition Against Racism, or CAR.

24. CAR, like Larsene's UE 150 chapter, had a volunteer create a website, but the link and ability to view or edit it disappeared soon after. As Don described, they had

a website for a "hot minute." And some CAR volunteers have just recently started a Facebook page.

25. The history of labor organizing in North Carolina is marked by some of the bloodiest battles in the country. In 1929, during the Loray Mill Strike, workers were beaten, evicted, killed, and tried for murder; see John A. Salmand, *The Story of the Loray Mill Strike* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Fifty years later in 1979, the KKK shot and killed five labor organizers during a protest, which came to be known as the Greensboro Massacre. Rebecca Boger, Cat McDowell, and David Gwynn, "The Greensboro Massacre," Civil Rights Greensboro, 2009, http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/essay1979/collection/CivilRights; David Cunningham, Colleen Nugent, and Caitlin Slodden, "The Durability of Collective Memory: Reconciling the 'Greensboro Massacre,'" *Social Forces* 88, no. 4 (2010): 1517–42.

26. Reconstruction, which dawned after the Civil War, was a progressive window in southern American history when former slaves and other Black citizens began to become involved legally in civic life. Soon after, the Knights of Labor grew as a major union that organized workers around the country, but by the late 19th century it had started to decline. In the Black Belt area of North Carolina, though, it had a resurgence, even though Reconstruction was on the decline. The Knights of Labor began as majority white, but when African American farm workers, mostly from tobacco fields, started to join the union, an interracial coalition emerged. Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

27. Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism;* Lane Windham, "Greenhands: A History of Local 10 of the Food, Tobacco, and Agricultural Allied Workers of America in Greenville, NC 1946" (Senior thesis, Duke University, 1991).

28. For further context on how Jim Crow resurfaced, fueling racism and limiting interracial cooperation, especially with labor unions, see Larry Griffin and Robert Korstad, "Class as Race and Gender: Making and Breaking a Labor Union in the Jim Crow South," *Social Science History* 19, no. 4 (1995): 425–54.

29. In 1958, Jimmy Hoffa made a public proclamation that he planned to recruit 10 million public workers into the Teamsters Union, especially firefighters and police officers, so local politicians in North Carolina went to state leaders for assistance to prevent this organizing drive. The national guard was called in to quell strikes. The initial ban on membership targeted police and firefighters. In addition to not wanting them unionized, those in power did not want solidarity support toward strikers. For further background, see the report written by historians Jason Burton and David A. Zonderman, "Where Did This Law Come From? A History of General Statute GS 95–98" (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University, 2002). The final

Gs 95–98 statute reads, "Contracts between units of government and labor unions, trade unions or labor organizations concerning public employees declared to be illegal."

30. The 1960s and early 1970s was the heyday of public sector labor organizing around the country, with a growing momentum for a national law allowing collective bargaining for all workers. But then an economic recession, coupled with the left's decline in the late 1970s, reversed that trend just as a right-wing movement was on the rise again across the country. Joseph A. McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970–1976," *Journal of American History* 95 (2008): 123–48.

31. Federal workers are covered by different laws than state and local employees. For more information on the transformation of unions, see Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

32. Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

33. Cunningham, *Klansville, U.S.A;* Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

34. The North Carolina Public Service Workers Organization (NCPSWO) tried affiliating with existing national unions. For instance, when they were organizing sanitation workers in Raleigh they invited the Communication Workers of America. However, when union officials told the workers that they had too many Black people on their committee, the NCPSWO ended their affiliation. I did not seek a response from the union on this, as it had happened years earlier, but multiple respondents reported it, including those who had been at the meeting. NCPSWO worked with their base of workers, legal activists, and leaders like Al McSurley to research and eventually affiliate with UE, which had a reputation for understanding the particular challenges of organizing in the South. The NCPSWO then became UE 150.

35. For instance, see Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

36. Philip N. Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas.* Katy E. Pearce, Jessica Vitak, and Kristen Barta, "Socially Mediated Visibility: Friendship and Dissent in Authoritarian Azerbaijan," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 1310–31.

37. Other scholars have also found fears of surveillance and concerns about privacy with online unionization. See Gary Chaison, "Information Technology: The Threat to Unions," *Journal of Labor Research* 23, no. 2 (2002): 249–60; Martin Upchurch and Rickard Grassman, "Striking with Social Media: The Contested (Online) Terrain of Workplace Conflict," *Organization* 23, no. 5 (2016): 639–56. In addition, more recent research has shown the troubling impact of digital surveillance

on the poor. See Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

38. Scholars who cite benefits of internet use with unions include Chris Carter, Stewart Clegg, John Hogan, and Martin Kornberger, "The Polyphonic Spree: The Case of the Liverpool Dockers," *Industrial Relations Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2003): 290–304; W. J. Diamond and Richard B. Freeman, "Will Unionism Prosper in Cyberspace? The Promise of the Internet for Employee Organization," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40, no. 3 (2002): 569–96; Ian Fitzgerald, Jane Hardy, and Miguel Marinez Lucio, "The Internet, Employment and Polish Migrant Workers: Communication, Activism and Competition in the New Organisational Spaces," *New Technology, Work and Employment* 27, no. 2 (2012): 93–105; Anne-Marie Greene and Gill Kirton, "Possibilities for Remote Participation in Trade Unions: Mobilising Women Activists," *Industrial Relations Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2003): 319–33; Arthur B. Shostack, *CyberUnion: Empowering Labor Through Computer Technology* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Those who point to limitations include Chaison, "Information Technology"; Lina Dencik and Peter Wilkin, *Worker Resistance and Media: Challenging Global Corporate Power in the 21st Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015); Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi, "Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation," *Communication Review* 14, no. 3 (2011): 179–96; Ray Gibney, Tom Zagenczyk, and Marick Masters, "The Face(book) of Unionism," *International Journal of E-Politics* 4, no. 4 (2013): 1–12; Alice Mattoni, *Media Practices and Protest Politics: How Precarious Workers Mobilise* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012).

39. The most prominent reporting in this vein concerned the Indignados movement in Spain (2011–2015), the precursor to Occupy Wall Street, and the earlier WTO resistance in Seattle. Jérôme Ferret found, however, that the Indignados were about corruption in general in Spain, which often included unions and other organizations. Jérôme Ferret, "La Violence Refusée: Des Indignados Espagnols," *Socio* 3 (2014): 375–91. Young anarchists received a lot of media attention in Seattle, but, as I observed, hundreds of organizations, including unions, were very involved during the protest movement.

40. For more background on social movement unionism, see Kim Scopes, "Understanding the New Labor Movements in the 'Third World': The Emergence of Social Movement Unionism," *Critical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (1992): 81–101; Lowell Turner and Richard W. Hurd, "Building Social Movement Unionism: The Transformation of the American Labor Movement," in *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century,* ed. Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz, and Richard W. Hurd (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press / Cornell University Press, 2001), 9–26; Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 2 (2000): 303–49.

41. Upchurch and Grassman, "Striking with Social Media."

42. As a robustness check, I also categorized all of the unions as working-class, and the class-based digital activism gap persisted.

43. Nathan Jurgenson, "When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution," *Future Internet* 4, no. 1 (2012): 83–91.

44. Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman, "The New Site of Activism: On-Line Organizations, Movement Entrepreneurs, and the Changing Location of Social Movement Decision-Making," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* 24 (2003): 155–187; W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 2012): 739–68; Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (London: Penguin, 2009).

45. Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change,* 37.

46. William Gamson, "Safe Spaces and Social Movements," *Perspectives on Social Problems* 8 (1996): 27–38.

47. Francesca Polletta, "'Free Spaces' in Collective Action," *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 1–38.

48. Lee Raine and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

49. Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action," 28.

50. It is difficult to evaluate the type of improvement in internet speed for the "minimum required to engage in modern life" since the 2013 report. The 2018 report created vast disagreement among its political appointees, with Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel writing in one of the dissenting statements, "This report concludes that in the United States the deployment of broadband to all Americans is reasonable and timely. This is ridiculous—and irresponsible. Today there are 24 million Americans without access to broadband. There are 19 million Americans in rural areas who lack the ability to access high-speed services at home." Federal Communications Commission, *2013 Measuring Broadband America: February Report—Technical Appendix*, https://data.fcc.gov/download/measuring-broadband-america/2013/Technical-Appendix-feb-2013.pdf; "FCC Releases 2018 Broadband Deployment Report," Federal Communications Commission, February 2, 2018, https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-2018-broadband-deployment-report.

51. These statistics are from 2003. Current statistics on adult literacy rates are simply not gathered as in the past, according to university librarians, yet given that general inequality measures in the United States are widening and cuts to education funding are increasing, there is little reason to believe that these rates are drastically improving, if at all. "National Assessment of Adult Literacy," National Center for Education Statistics, accessed January 29, 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/naal/.

52. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); Laura Robinson, "A Taste for the Necessary," *Information, Communication & Society* 12, no. 4 (June 2009): 488–507.

53. I use the term "digital divide" because it is commonly used, but scholars generally prefer the term "inequality" rather than "divide" to describe a range of inequalities, rather than the basic question of whether or not someone has a computer. One framework is that the first-level digital divide is about basic access and use; the second-level digital divide concerns the factors that shape digital use; and the third-level digital divide is the outcome of these inequalities. Alexander J. A. M. van Deursen and Ellen Johanna Helsper, "The Third-Level Digital Divide: Who Benefits Most from Being Online?," in *Communication and Information Technologies Annual Volume 10: Digital Distinctions and Inequalities,* ed. Laura Robinson et al. (London: Emerald Group, 2015), 29–53.

54. Eszter Hargittai, "The Digital Reproduction of Inequality," in *Social Stratification,* ed. David Grusky (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), 936–44; Eszter Hargittai and Kaitlin Jennrich, "The Online Participation Divide," in *The Communication Crisis in America, and How to Fix It,* ed. Mark Lloyd and Lewis A. Friedland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 199–213; Monica Anderson and Andrew Perrin, "13% of Americans Don't Use the Internet. Who Are They?," Pew Research Center, September 7, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/07/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they; Steven P. Martin and John P. Robinson, "The Income Digital Divide: Trends and Predictions for Levels of Internet Use," *Social Problems* 54, no. 1 (2007): 1–22; P. H. Zhang, "Digital Divides and Socio-Demographic Factors: A Longitudinal Quantitative Study of Internet Users in U.S. from 2000 to 2010" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2014).

55. Some of the most comprehensive and current reports tracking internet access are surveys from the Pew Research Center.

56. "Internet / Broadband Fact Sheet," Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband.

57. For an overview of the challenges of maintaining consistent Internet engagement, see Amy Gonzales, "The Contemporary US Digital Divide: From Initial Access to Technology Maintenance," *Information Communication and Society* 19, no. 2 (2016): 234–48.

58. On this concept of leapfrogging, Philip N. Howard, "Testing the Leap-Frog Hypothesis: The Impact of Existing Infrastructure and Telecommunications Policy on the Global Digital Divide," *Information, Communication & Society* 10, no. 2 (April 2007): 133–57. And for an analysis on the differences between mobile and desktop usage in general, see Katy Pearce and Ronald E. Rice, "Digital Divides from Access to Activities: Comparing Mobile and Personal Computer Internet Users," *Journal of Communication* 63, no. 4 (2013): 721–44.

59. Teresa Correa, "The Participation Divide among 'Online Experts': Experience, Skills and Psychological Factors as Predictors of College Students' Web Content Creation," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 16, no. 1 (October 2010): 71–92; Michael Haight, Anabel Quan-Haase, and Bradley Corbett, "Revisiting

the Digital Divide in Canada: The Impact of Demographic Factors on Access to the Internet, Level of Online Activity, and Social Networking Site Usage," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 4 (March 7, 2014): 503–19; Jen Schradie, "The Digital Production Gap: The Digital Divide and Web 2.0 Collide," *Poetics* 39, no. 2 (April 2011): 145–68; Nicole Zillien and Eszter Hargittai, "Digital Distinction: Status-Specific Types of Internet Usage," *Social Science Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2009): 274–91; Hargittai and Jennrich, "Online Participation Divide."

60. Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005); Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst, "Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires," *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 8 (December 2010): 1146–71; Seong-Jae Min, "From the Digital Divide to the Democratic Divide: Internet Skills, Political Interest, and the Second-Level Digital Divide in Political Internet Use," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7, no. 1 (2010): 22–35; Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Mary Stansbury, *Virtual Inequality: Beyond the Digital Divide* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Weapon of the Strong? Participatory Inequality and the Internet," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (June 2010): 487–509. Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For instance, in 2013, 23% of American adults with less than a high school education were active politically on social media versus 51% of those with a college education, and these gaps are similar among youth. Aaron Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age," Pew Research Center, April 25, 2013, http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/civic-engagement-in-the-digital-age-2; Cathy J. Cohen and Joseph Kahne, *Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action,* https://dmlhub.net/wp-content/uploads/files/YPP_Survey_Report_FULL(1).pdf.

61. A pioneer in digital divide research is Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

62. For an overview of various digital inequality factors, see Pearce and Rice, "Digital Divides from Access to Activities." Skills and literacy are factors in digital participation: A. J. A. M. Van Deursen and J. A. G. M. Van Dijk, "Internet Skills and the Digital Divide," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 6 (2011): 893–911; Eszter Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives? Variation in Internet Skills and Uses among Members of the 'Net Generation,'" *Sociological Inquiry* 80, no. 1 (2010): 92–113; Eszter Hargittai and Aaron Shaw, "Digitally Savvy Citizenship: The Role of Internet Skills and Engagement in Young Adults' Political Participation around the 2008 Presidential Election," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57 (2013): 115–134. Even when these factors are accounted for, marginalized populations still participate less online. Correa, "Participation Divide among 'Online Experts'"; Christo Sims, "From Differentiated Use to Differentiating Practices: Negotiating Legitimate Participation

and the Production of Privileged Identities," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 6 (2014): 670–682; Heinz Bonfadelli, "The Internet and Knowledge Gaps: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation," *European Journal of Communication* 17, no. 1 (2002): 65–84. Researchers suggested that online content production, such as posting to a daily blog or maintaining a website, involves both time and labor costs, and in the digital economy such work is often unpaid and therefore considered as "free." But the poor and working-class may not be as likely to have this disposable digital labor available to them. Christian Fuchs, "Class and Exploitation on the Internet," in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory,* ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 211–224; Schradie, "The Digital Production Gap"; T. Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (June 2000): 33–58. See also Allan Jeremy Waddington, "E-Communications: An Aspect of Union Renewal or Merely Doing Things Electronically?," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 52, no. 4 (2014): 658–681. Some research found that online organizing reinforces societal hierarchies based on "expertise": Brigitte le Grignou and Charles Patou, "ATTAC(k)ing Expertise: Does the Internet Really Democratize Knowledge?," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens, and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 145–58. Based on survey data in general, willingness to express political opinions was lower among people from lower socioeconomic demographics. Daniel Laurison, "The Willingness to State an Opinion: Inequality, Don't Know Responses, and Political Participation," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. 4 (2015): 925–48.

63. See, for instance, Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The Great Equalizer? Patterns of Social Media Use and Youth Political Engagement in Three Advanced Democracies," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 2 (2014): 151–67. Yet because of the dearth of research on the topic, others have suggested that inequality with digital activism may be brewing and that more research on the topic is warranted. Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements, 1768–2012,* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016); Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Kevin Gillan, "Navigating the Technology-Media-Movements Complex," *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 383–402.

64. Elliott and Earl, "Online Protest Participation and the Digital Divide."

65. See, for instance, Deana A. Rohlinger, Leslie A. Bunnage, and Jesse Klein, "Virtual Power Plays: Social Movements, Internet Communication Technology, and Political Parties," in *The Internet and Democracy in Global Perspective,* ed. Bernard Groffman, Alex Trechsel, and Mark Franklin (Switzerland: Springer, 2014), 83–109.

66. Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas.*

67. For context of the foundational communication view by Lazarsfeld, see Elihu Katz, "Lazarsfeld's Map of Media Effects," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 13, no. 3 (2001): 270–79.

68. I use the term "classed resources" as a way to describe how resources are more than funding but also incorporate class power.

69. Deen Freelon, Meredith Clark, and Charlton D. McIlwain, *Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice* (Washington, DC: Center for Media & Social Impact, 2016).

70. Meredith Clark, "Black Twitter: Building Connection through Cultural Conversation," in *Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks,* ed. Nathan Rambukkana (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 205–18.

71. This finding builds on other studies that found that internet skills also varied among youth from different social classes; see, for instance, Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives?"

72. This term is often used to show how one type of inequality, for example gender, intersects with other inequalities, such as race and class. For context on intersectionality, see Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities," *Sociological Theory* 28, no. 2 (2010): 129–49. My research in this book does not address gender inequality per se although there is a rich literature on digital inequality and gender, including Jen Schradie, "The Gendered Digital Production Gap: The Inequalities of Affluence," in *Communication and Information Technologies Annual Volume 9: Politics, Participation, and Production,* ed. Laura Robinson and Shelia R. Cotten (London: Emerald Group, 2015): 185–213; Sonia Liff and Adrian Shepherd, "An Evolving Gender Divide?," *Oxford Internet Institute,* no. 2 (2004): 1–17; Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zayovdny, "Gender and the Internet," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2003): 111–21.

73. Eszter Hargittai and Eden Litt, "The Tweet Smell of Celebrity Success: Explaining Variation in Twitter Adoption among a Diverse Group of Young Adults," *New Media and Society* 13, no. 5 (2011): 824–42; Jen Schradie, "The Trend of Class, Race, and Ethnicity in Social Media Inequality: Who Still Can't Afford to Blog?," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 4 (2012): 1–17.

74. Anderson and Perrin, "13% of Americans Don't Use the Internet."

75. Jennifer Earl et al., "Changing the World One Webpage at a Time: Conceptualizing and Explaining 'Internet Activism,'" *Mobilization* 15, no. 4 (2010): 425–446; Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect;* Anastasia Kavada, "Activism Transforms Digital: The Social Movement Perspective," in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change,* ed. M. Joyce (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2010), 101–18.

76. Kate Zernike and Megan Thee-Brenan, "Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated," *New York Times,* April 14, 2010; Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology,* no. 36 (2010): 269–86; Paul Street and Anthony DiMaggio, *Crashing the Tea Party: Mass Media and the Campaign to Remake American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2011); Theda Skocpol and Venessa Williamson, *The Tea*

Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

77. Pinehurst's poverty rate is just 2%, but not all of Moore County is wealthy, and some neighboring towns have poverty rates over 50%. "American Fact Finder," U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk.

78. She listed "Obamacare" and "Benghazi" as two of those constitutional rights at stake, although these occurred after her Tea Party formed. "Obamacare" refers to the Affordable Care Act that was passed in the U.S. Congress in 2010. "Benghazi" refers to a 2012 attack on the U.S. embassy and another government facility in the Libyan city.

79. See Appendix, Table 12.

80. Other scholars have also pointed out this grassroots characterization of the Tea Party. For instance, see Ruth Braunstein, *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy across the Political Divide* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 2017).

81. For example, see Adele M. Stan, "How Workers Learned to Fear Unions in Wisconsin," *Investigative Fund,* June 2, 2011.

82. Doug Burghart, "View from the Top: Report on Six National Tea Party Organizations," in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party,* ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 67–97; Tina Fetner and Brayden G. King, "Three-Layer Movements, Resources, and the Tea Party," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 35–54; Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 15, 2011): 25–43; Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

83. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of Citizenship in Political Campaigns," *New Media & Society,* no. 13 (2011): 755–771.

84. For instance, see Eszter Hargittai and Kerry Dobransky, "Old Dogs, New Clicks: Digital Inequality in Internet Skills and Uses among Older Adults," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42, no. 2 (2017): 195–212.

85. Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change.*

86. Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change.*

87. For instance, see McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements."

88. Offe and Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action."

89. Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

90. For instance, see Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer, "Introduction," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–11.

91. This aligns with the argument that technology's promises are often thwarted by elites. Michael Margolis and David Resnick, *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace "Revolution"* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000).

92. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961). Scholars who challenged Dahl's theory of polyarchy include Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1962): 947–52; Offe and Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action"; Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 1960).

2. Bureaucracy's Revenge and the Organization of Digital Activism

1. After the Moral Monday protests were well underway, Civitas posted a database of hundreds of people who had been arrested for civil disobedience, and they included information such as names, race, age, political and organizational affiliation, employment, and even if the individual's driver's license address matched their voter registration address. They eventually took it down.

2. See Methodological Appendix, Figure 2.

3. The foundational book for this "flat" argument is Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Picador, 2005).

4. For these general network society shifts, see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell, 2010); Lee Raine and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); and Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

5. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

6. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (London: Penguin, 2009); Benkler, *Wealth of Networks.*

7. Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical / Reconstructive Approach," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 75–100; Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Tracy Westen, "Can Technology Save Democracy?," *National Civic Review* 87, no. 1 (1998): 47–56; W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013);

Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, "Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment," *Communication Theory* 15, no. 4 (2005): 365–88; Jennifer Earl, "The Future of Social Movement Organizations: The Waning Dominance of SMOs Online," *American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 1 (2015): 35–52; Yannis Theocharis, "Every Crisis Is a Digital Opportunity: The Aganaktismenoi's Use of Social Media and the Emergence of Networked Solidarity in Greece," in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 184–97; Ion Bogdan Vasi and Chan S. Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States," *Mobilization* 21, no. 2 (2016): 139–54; Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism," *Polity* 31, no. 1 (1998): 133–169; Helen Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Ilhem Allagui and Johanne Kuebler, "The Arab Spring and the Role of ICTs: Editorial Introduction," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1435–42.

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Jennifer Earl, Lauren Copeland, and Bruce Bimber emphasized this pivotal digital shift away from organizations in "Routing around Organizations: Self-Directed Political Consumption," *Mobilization* 22, no. 2 (2017): 131–153, which references Jennifer Earl, Jayson Hunt, and R. Kelly Garrett, "Social Movements and the ICT Revolution," in *Handbook of Political Citizenship and Social Movements,* ed. Hein-Anton van der Heijden (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2014), 260.

9. Bimber, "Internet and Political Transformation"; Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy Technology in the Evolution of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

10. Jennifer Earl et al., "Changing the World One Webpage at a Time: Conceptualizing and Explaining 'Internet Activism,'" *Mobilization* 15, no. 4 (2010): 425–446; Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change.*

11. Paulo Gerbaudo, *Tweets in the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Allagui and Kuebler, "The Arab Spring and the Role of ICTs Editorial Introduction."

12. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport pointed out that a weakness of just studying select organizations in evaluating the role of the internet is that it is difficult to evaluate protest actions without organizations at the helm. Laura Stein suggested that digital activism scholars should go beyond studying vanguard movements, or those in the early radical stages. Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change;* Laura Stein, "Social Movement Web Use in Theory and Practice: A Content Analysis of US Movement Websites," *New Media & Society* 11, no. 5 (July 21, 2009): 749–71.

13. Pamela E. Oliver and Gerald Marwell, "Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory,* ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 241–72. These authors

suggested that social movement scholarship would benefit from studying social movement activity during more "normal times."

14. This has not just been a weakness with digital activism scholarship; the social movement literature as a whole has often just focused on successful movements. In addition to McAdam and Boudet, other scholars have pointed this out, as well. Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet, *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); K. T. Andrews and M. Biggs, "The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (October 1, 2006): 752–77. Other researchers have done similar comparative work on an issue in one region. See, for instance, Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950–1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

15. In so doing, I build on scholarship that goes beyond digitally centric movements to compare a spectrum of organizations: Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, *Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Sheetal D. Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age: Considering Values and Technology in Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 3 (January 2014): 326–41; Katrina Kimport, "Organizational Dominance and Its Consequences in the Online Abortion Rights and AntiAbortion Movements," in *Media, Movements, and Political Change,* ed. Jennifer Earl and Deana A. Rohlinger (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change Vol. 33) (London: Emerald, 2012), 139–61; Chris Wells, *The Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen: Communicating Engagement in a Networked Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jennifer Earl, "Spreading the Word or Shaping the Conversation: 'Prosumption' in Protest Websites," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change* 36, no. 3 (2013): 3–38; Ivar Eimhjellen, Dag Wollebæk, and Kristin Strømsnes, "Associations Online: Barriers for Using Web-Based Communication in Voluntary Associations," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 25, no. 3 (March 15, 2013): 730–753. Also, Earl et al. point out that the literature on this debate tends to sample on organizations, rather than individuals. Earl et al., "Routing around Organizations." I tackled this challenge by focusing on one issue where groups displayed organizational variation (from loose networks to bureaucratic structure). In Chapter 1 and the Conclusion, I address the role of the issue itself in these findings. See the Appendix for details on sampling.

16. David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Daniel Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of Citizenship in Political

Campaigns," *New Media & Society,* no. 13 (2011): 755–771; Wells, *Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen;* Earl, "Future of Social Movement Organizations"; Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Daniel Kreiss, Megan Finn, and Fred Turner, "The Limits of Peer Production: Some Reminders from Max Weber for the Network Society," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 2 (October 2010): 243–59. Also, some scholars suggest that the internet has little effect on decentralization with mobilization. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al., "Introduction: Social Movements and ICTs," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–22; Sebastien Haunss, "Promise and Practice in Studies of Social Media and Movements," in *Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest: Between Control and Emancipation,* ed. Lina Dencik and Oliver Leistert (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 13–34.

17. Andrew Chadwick was another early scholar of these changes, which he called "hybridization," in that the internet has enabled traditional political interest groups to act more like social movements. Andrew Chadwick, "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity," *Political Communication* 24, no. 3 (August 6, 2007): 283–301. For a detailed analysis of this shift from legacy organizations, see Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.* Other scholars have also detailed organizational transformations. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 2012): 739–68; Deen Freelon, Chris Wells, and W. Lance Bennett, "Participation in the Youth Civic Web: Assessing User Activity Levels in Web Sites Presenting Two Civic Styles," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 10, no. 3 (2013): 293–309; Wells, *Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen;* Ivar Eimhjellen, "Web Technologies in Practice: The Integration of Web Technologies by Environmental Organizations," *Media Culture and Society* 36, no. 6 (2014): 845–861.

18. For background on recent prefigurative movements, see Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis* (London: Polity, 2016).

19. Bennett and Segerberg, *Logic of Connective Action.*

20. A division of labor is not the key defining characteristic of bureaucracy according to Weber, but it is a useful measure here. For more recent background on bureaucratization, see Charles Perrow, *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay* (Bratleboro, VT: Echo Point Books, 2014); Weber, *Economy and Society.*

21. In addition to Weber, other major sociologists have theorized the division of labor more broadly. Marx argued that it creates atomization and alienation, only deepening class divisions in society. Durkheim had a more positive view in that a division of labor was simply part of modern society and capitalist divisions. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* 3 vols., ed. Ben Fowkes and Ernest Mandel (London: Marx Library, 1977); Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

22. See Appendix for the operationalization of staff. This main finding was robust with the number of staff people as a continuous variable but given that the main analytic tool was a t-test, a dichotomous variable is reported here. Groups with more than three paid staff members were categorized as "more staff" (18 groups) and those with three or fewer (16 groups) as "less staff." Groups with more staff were 0.32 standard deviations (SDs) above the mean while those with less staff had on average scores 0.37 SDs below the mean, with a 0.69 total difference. For quantitative results on staff levels and digital activist scores, see Appendix, Table 7. For the breakdown in component scores by platform, see Appendix, Tables 3–5.

23. The gap is 0.81 SDs. See Appendix, Table 7, for results.

24. As indicated previously, funding per se is not a variable in this analysis although the number of staff can reflect financial resources. The inclusion of staffing levels as a separate variable in a regression analysis did not remove the significance of the class gap when considering all groups. See Appendix, Table 11.

25. Chris Hayes, "Public Employee Collective Bargaining: Bad Policy for North Carolina," *Civitas,* May 16, 2007.

26. Chris Cillizza, "The Fix's Best State-Based Political Blogs, 2011 Edition," *Washington Post,* August 2, 2011.

27. Earl et al., "Routing around Organizations"; Freelon et al., "Participation in the Youth Civic Web"; Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action"; Barry Wellman et al., "The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 8, no. 3 (2003).

28. Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action"; Bimber et al., *Collective Action in Organizations;* Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman, "The New Site of Activism: On-Line Organizations, Movement Entrepreneurs, and the Changing Location of Social Movement Decision-Making," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* 24 (2003): 155–187.

29. Raine and Wellman, *Networked.*

30. See Earl et al., "Routing around Organizations" (citing Earl et al., "Social Movements and the ICT Revolution").

31. Lance W. Bennett and Shanto Iyengar, "A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication," *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 4 (1998): 707–31; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

32. Bennett and Segerberg, "Logic of Connective Action"; Raine and Wellman, *Networked.*

33. In his historical account of the political and cultural origins of the internet, Turner took issue with claims that the New Left and other radical movements inspired techno-utopianism. He explained that while both movements rejected hierarchy, it was the New Communalists who challenged the bureaucratic order with

collaborative technology rather than reject the technical/military-industrial complex outright. In fact, Turner said that early internet pioneers such as Stuart Brand, founder of the WELL, were inspired as children by the face-off against the Soviet Union in the Cold War. For these pioneers "the liberation of the *individual* was simultaneously an American ideal, an evolutionary imperative, and, for Brand and millions of other adolescents, a pressing personal goal" (emphasis added). Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 45.

34. Barbrook and Cameron criticized *Wired* magazine for promoting what they called a California Ideology, a "profoundly anti-statist dogma." They argued that it embodied an internet utopian philosophy of individualism and the free market at the expense of others. Elsewhere I build on and refine their argument by specifying a "Silicon Valley Ideology" that is tied to the corporate headquarters and platform control of digital neoliberalism and that includes a belief in nonhierarchical, diverse participation in online social media spaces. Jen Schradie, "Silicon Valley Ideology and Class Inequality: A Virtual Poll Tax on Digital Politics," in *Handbook of Digital Politics,* ed. Deen Freelon and Stephen Coleman (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2015), 67–84. Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The California Ideology," *Mute,* September 1, 1995.

35. Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change*. They emphasized, though, "We are not arguing that SMOs never matter in the Internet age. We are claiming that they matter most when costs are higher and they matter least when costs are lower (or at a minimum, that SMOs must return other rewards aside from cost management to be useful in low-cost environments. Therefore, we expect that SMO sites would only 'outperform' non-SMO sites when the costs of organizing are higher," 117.

36. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody.*

37. Bennett and Segerberg described three types of internet-era social movement action, ranging from traditional organizations to network-oriented movements: organizationally brokered collective action, organizationally enabled connective action, and crowd-enabled connective action. Bennett and Segerberg, *Logic of Connective Action.* Earl et al. call this "self-directed" rather than "organization-directed" in "Routing around Organizations."

38. Weber, *Economy and Society.*

39. Antonio A. Casilli and Dominique Cardon, *Qu'est-Ce Que Le Digital Labor?* (Paris: INA Editions, 2015); M. Graham and M. A. Anwar, "Digital Labour," in *Digital Geographies,* ed. A. Ash, J., Kitchin, R. and Leszczynski (London: Sage, 2018); Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Sevignani, "What Is Digital Labour? What Is Digital Work? What's Their Difference? And Why Do These Questions Matter for Understanding Social Media?," *Triple C* 11, no. 2 (2014): 237–93. And some re-

search shows that *more* organization does lead to *more* digital engagement over the long term: Eimhjellen, "Associations Online"; Melissa K. Merry, "Interest Group Activism on the Web: The Case of Environmental Organizations," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8, no. 1 (February 25, 2011): 110–28; Abigail De Kosnik, "Fandom as Free Labor," in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory,* ed. Trebor Scholz (London: Routledge, 2013): 33–57.

40. See also Deana A. Rohlinger and Jesse Klein, "From Fervor to Fear: ICT and Emotions in the Tea Party Movement," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. David S. Meyer and Nella Van Dyke (New York: Ashgate, 2013), 125–47.

41. Communication scholar David Karpf argues that the use of the internet by civic groups has inadvertently created "beneficial inefficiencies," in that it is more difficult to fundraise for general funds to pay staff and general infrastructure costs when digitally enabled targeted fundraising goes toward a specific cause because people will respond more to targeted ads that pique their interest than to contributing to administrative costs. Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.*

42. Twitter limited the number of characters to 140 up until November 2017, when it doubled the limit to 280.

43. David Karpf, *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

44. In her analysis of the Tahrir Square uprising, Tufekci pointed out that activists did not have the organizational capacity to continue to be effective after its initial horizontal organizing. Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

45. Sidney Tarrow also challenged the claim that digital era connective action is different from legacy organizations on account of its "personalized action frames" because environmental and identity movements also had incorporated personalization. Sidney Tarrow, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 468–69.

46. Other scholars have also argued that social movement organizing, a process that builds leaders from personal relationships, can benefit from digital networks, creating a symbiotic process between the individual / organization and the online / offline. See, for instance, Hahrie Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations and Leadership in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

47. Personalization can lead to more successful social media posts. Nir Noon Nave, Limor Shifman, and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, "Talking It Personally: Features of Successful Political Posts on Facebook," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 3 (2018): 1–12.

48. For instance, see Zizi A. Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2010); Bimber et al., "Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment."

49. Freelon et al., "Participation in the Youth Civic Web."

50. This finding seems to align with one of the three types of social movement activity in the digital era that Bennett and Segerberg describe: "organizationally-enabled connective action," in which well-funded groups encourage personalization. What I observed, however, was more manufactured than this characterization. Bennett and Segerberg, *Logic of Connective Action.*

51. Even so-called horizontal movements have found this behind-the-scenes digital work critical to a protest. For instance, see Jérôme Ferret, "Mouvements Sur Places, Critiques Médiatisées et Conflits de Réputation," in *Critiques Du Numérique*, ed. Roland Canu, Johann Chaulet, Caroline Datchary, and Julien Figeac (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018), 133–54.

52. See Henry Jenkins's foundational work about how digital technology has accelerated an active audience and people reinterpreting media on their own terms, as well as participatory digital culture. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture.*

53. This is based on interviews with communication scholars Phil Howard and Stuart Geiger. According to Geiger, by mid-2013, there were millions of bots on Twitter, and the selling of followers and retweets to inflate numbers was just beginning. Most bots at that time were related to blatant commercial spamming and scams. The generation of sophisticated fake profiles that tweeted their own content would not start until 2014 with Gamergate. It is possible that some automated bots were fake sockpuppet accounts. One person could reasonably create a couple dozen accounts and tweet/retweet from them manually, especially as Twitter had fewer protections against this technique at that point. For further information on the human labor behind bots, see R. Stuart Geiger, "Bots, Bespoke, Code and the Materiality of Software Platforms," *Information Communication and Society* 17, no. 3 (2014): 342–56; R. Stuart Geiger, "Beyond Opening up the Black Box: Investigating the Role of Algorithmic Systems in Wikipedian Organizational Culture," *Big Data & Society* 4, no. 2 (2017): 1–14.

54. R. Stuart Geiger, "The Lives of Bots," in *Critical Point of View: A* Wikipedia *Reader,* ed. Geert Lovink and Nathaniel Tkacz (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 78–93.

55. For an overview of how corporate and political institutions shape algorithms, see Micah L. Sifry, "Power Needs to Be Restored to Internet Users: The Problem Is Bigger than Facebook," *The Nation*, May 14, 2018. For an in-depth analysis, see Taina Bucher, *If . . . Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

56. Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *Second Wave* 2, no. 1 (1972): 807–38. See also Oliver and Marwell, "Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action." They argued for the need to mobilize knowledge *and* mobilize time.

57. I evaluated whether or not a group was part of a national organization—and how that might be associated with higher scores, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

58. Hierarchy was measured as a categorical variable based on the number of levels of decision making in each organization. Drawing on William Gamson's operationalization, I coded groups with three or more levels as *more* hierarchical and groups with only one or two levels of decision making as *less* hierarchical. William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest,* 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990). See Appendix for more operationalization details.

59. Twenty-six groups were more hierarchical in that they had three or more levels of decision making, and eight groups were less hierarchical with one or two levels. See Appendix, Figure 2, for hierarchy and staffing findings on digital activist levels.

60. The difference was 0.82 SDs. See Appendix, Table 8, for details.

61. See Appendix, Table 8, for details.

62. Hierarchy and bureaucracy worked together. More hierarchical groups also had higher levels of staffing, and these groups had higher digital activist scores (0.32 SDs higher than the mean) than less hierarchical groups with less staff (0.63 SDs below the mean) for a 0.95 gap. These two factors are related so much that their individual statistical significance is reduced in a two-way regression, which could indicate that the two variables worked together. See Appendix, Figure 2.

63. I am using the terms "left" and "right" for reasons of parsimony, but as I point out in Chapters 3 and 4, many union members in this study were reluctant to adopt the union label, often preferring "professional association." Rather than pure "leftists," many were centrist or conservative, but it was in Civitas's interest to continue to portray them as left-wing unions.

64. On digital opportunity structures, see Daniel Kreiss, *Prototype Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Also, for managed digital politics, see Philip N. Howard, *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

65. There is a wide body of literature on open source software and development that shows that in contrast to the celebratory notion that online peer production is driven by volunteers, Mozilla and Linux, for instance, have organizations and staff, as well as being backed by traditional organizations. See Daniel Kreiss, "Open Source as Practice and Ideology: The Origin of Howard Dean's Innovations in Electoral Politics," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8, no. 3 (2011): 367–82; Matthew Hindman, "Open-Source Politics Reconsidered: Emerging Patterns in Online Political Participation," in *Governance and Information Technology from Electronic Government to Information Government* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 183–207; Kreiss, et al., "Limits of Peer Production"; Aaron Shaw and Benjamin Mako Hill, "Laboratories of Oligarchy? How The Iron Law Extends to Peer Production," *Journal of Communication* 64, no. 2 (2014): 215–38.

66. Paul Mason, "From Paris to Cairo, These Protests Are Expanding the Power of the Individual," *Guardian,* February 7, 2011; Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (London: Verso, 2013).

67. Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); J. S. Juris, "The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 189–208; Anastasia Kavada, "Activism Transforms Digital: The Social Movement Perspective," in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change,* ed. M. Joyce (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2010), 101–18; Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence;* Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); John Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," *Middle East Report* 262 (2012): 6–11; Marina Sitrin, "Horizontalism: From Argentina to Wall Street," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 44, no. 6 (2016): 8–11. See also Francesca Polletta, "Participatory Democracy's Moment," *Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (2014): 79–92, for a contextual account of participatory movements and how this digital era coincides with this distinct time period.

68. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope;* Vasi and Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States."

69. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope,* 15.

70. Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas;* Polletta, "Participatory Democracy's Moment."

71. Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect;* Karpf, *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy;* Kreiss et al., "Limits of Peer Production"; Kreiss, *Prototype Politics;* Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back;* Merry, "Interest Group Activism on the Web"; Deana A. Rohlinger and Leslie Bunnage, "Connecting People to Politics over Time? Internet Communication Technology and Activist Persistence in MoveOn and the Tea Party Movement," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 5 (2015): 539–52.

72. Two factors could explain the lack of a difference in digital activist scores between statewide / larger groups and local / small groups. The first explanation runs counter to expectations. Given the need for coordination across a larger geographical area, statewide groups should *need* to use the internet more for organizational functioning because staff and members are spread out geographically. But as reported above, major decision making was still conducted face-to-face in these organizations. In other words, based on my observations, all the statewide groups still conducted major meetings in person, even though the drive across the state could take up to eight hours. In addition, one might reasonably expect that the sheer number of social media metrics would be higher in larger, statewide organizations. However, this was not always the case (Appendix, Table 11). The other factors of organizational structure, ideology, and class are more important. Another reason for this lack of association is that some of the smaller, local groups had very high digital activism scores. In

particular, Tea Party groups engaged with the internet at high rates, so their higher scores canceled out any small effect of size or statewide organization.

73. He was also a member of the American Association of University Professors, one of the groups in the study.

74. Occupy was well-known for its horizontal general assemblies and participatory structure as well. Some of the SAW activists had also participated in Occupy Chapel Hill, which had an encampment in front of the main post office across from campus.

75. The coalition also had the Twitter name @stopsb575. There were 65 tweets from this twitter name and only five tweets with the hashtag.

76. There is a wide body of literature on deliberative democracy in online spaces. For an overview of even broader viewpoints of online decision making, see L. Dahlberg, "Re-Constructing Digital Democracy: An Outline of Four 'Positions,'" *New Media & Society* 13, no. 6 (February 8, 2011): 855–72.

77. This was similar to the campaign that UE 150 had successfully taken to the United Nations International Commission for Labor Rights in 2006 due to North Carolina's banning collective bargaining rights for public employees. In addition, after pressure from housekeepers, the university hired a consulting firm to investigate housekeeping conditions. PRM Consulting Group found a number of issues, such as verbal abuse and harassment, as well as retaliation for filing grievances. SAW was frustrated when they talked to housekeepers, who told them that nothing had changed despite these findings.

78. Rohlinger and Bunnage argue that internet use goes hand in hand with horizontal groups' community-building while hierarchical organizations can harness the internet for event mobilization. SAW, however, used the internet more for mobilization than for community-building. Rohlinger and Bunnage, "Connecting People to Politics over Time?"

79. This was similar to working-class groups who preferred face-to-face discussions, as well as to some conservative groups, such as radical-right respondents, who expressed similar sentiments. One leader remarked to me, "I prefer face-to-face. I want to look you in the eye. There are probably traitors amongst us that we don't know about."

80. For groups that were active online—and again not all groups were—websites were the most common, Facebook was second, and Twitter third. However, for the groups that were online, Facebook was the most used and talked about, as well as the most interactive for many of the groups, particularly Tea Party groups. Similar arguments about Facebook were made by Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age"; Vasi and Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States"; Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas.*

81. See Appendix for coding details.

82. Most of the posts provided information about issues with which the group was concerned, often in the form of articles. Though this information sharing may have been part of a group's activities, it did not directly pertain to decision making or internal democracy.

83. For a comprehensive analysis of this physical co-presence argument, see Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change.*

84. See Appendix, Table 11.

85. See Appendix, Table 13, for content analysis details.

86. Because I did not have other groups' e-mail for comparison, I could not evaluate the numbers of listserv messages. While it is possible that their listserv was used at higher levels than other groups used their e-mail, many other organizations reported similar use of e-mail to discuss organizational issues.

87. Many scholars have made this association between the internet and democratic participation, including Wells, *Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen;* Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence;* Jeffrey S. Juris, "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 259–79; Karolina Koc-Michalska, Darren G. Lilleker, and Thierry Vedel, "Civic Political Engagement and Social Change in the New Digital Age," *New Media & Society,* 18, no. 9 (2016): 1807–1816.

88. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy,* trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Hearst's International Library, 1911).

89. M. Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," *Politics & Society* 37, no. 2 (April 3, 2009): 203–28; Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman, *Union Democracy: The Inside Politics of the International Typographical Union* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956). These scholars were directly addressing Michels's "iron law of oligarchy" theory in which he contended that leaders and staff would inevitably dominate and consolidate decision-making power in political organizations. This central control and back-room decision making, he argued, would stifle any minority dissent before it could grow. In addition to communication tools, researchers have uncovered institutionalized mechanisms for contestation. See, for instance, on competing and autonomous political factions: Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On a culture of debate: Paul Osterman, "Overcoming Oligarchy: Culture and Agency in Social Movement Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* no. 51 (2006): 622–49. On outsider agitation challenging oligarchy within an organization: Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 2 (2000): 303–49.

90. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 5–41;

Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

91. Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

92. Still, Victor W. Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical, and Institutional Constructions," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 1 (March 2006): 19–38, found that in some instances within the anti-globalization movement, groups that began with nonhierarchical organizational structures eventually became hierarchical. J. Pickerill, "Radical Politics on the Net," *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 2 (February 10, 2006): 266–82.

93. Matt Ratto and Megan Boler, *DIY Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Anne-Marie Greene and Gill Kirton, "Possibilities for Remote Participation in Trade Unions: Mobilising Women Activists," *Industrial Relations Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2003): 319–33; Chris Carter et al., "The Polyphonic Spree: The Case of the Liverpool Dockers," *Industrial Relations Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2003): 290–304.

94. Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting.*

95. Brigitte le Grignou and Charles Patou, "ATTAC(k)ing Expertise: Does the Internet Really Democratize Knowledge?," in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens, and Social Movements,* ed. Wim B. H. J. van de Donk et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 145–58; Bruce Bimber, "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level," *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2001): 53–67; Donk et al., "Introduction"; Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi, "Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation," *Communication Review* 14, no. 3 (2011): 179–96; Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age."

96. Nielsen, "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of Citizenship in Political Campaigns."

97. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 2005); Freeman, "Tyranny of Structurelessness."

98. Freeman, "Tyranny of Structurelessness." David Harvey also argued that "decentralisation is one of the best means to preserve highly centralised power because it masks the nature of this centralised power behind a veneer of individual liberty." David Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 142.

99. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," *Sociological Theory* 29 no. 1 (March 2011): 1–26; Klaus Weber and Brayden King, "Social Movement Theory and Organization Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory, and Organization Studies: Contemporary Currents,* ed. Paul Adler et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 487–509.

100. Rohlinger and Bunnage, "Connecting People to Politics over Time?" The authors found that the Tea Party they were studying was horizontal as compared to a hierarchical Moveon.org chapter. However, the findings of Agarwal et al. aligned more with my own—that Tea Party organizing was hierarchical. Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age."

101. See Methodological Appendix, Table 12.

102. For instance, see Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change.*

103. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Organizations," in *Handbook of Organizations,* ed. James G. March (New York: Routledge, 1965), 142–93.

104. I analyzed the digital activism scores based on the era of an organization's founding: pre-web era (before 1995) and digital era (post 1995), as well as dividing up the digital era into web era (2005–2006) and social media era (after 2006). See Methodological Appendix for operationalization details.

105. There was no significant correlation between scores and date of founding. The average means of the digital activist scores are very similar across the three eras and hover around the standardized mean of zero, with no statistically significant difference or effect size between different eras. I analyzed development scores—as well as the architecture and participation scores—and also found no association. Further, I found no statistically significant or substantial effect size across era of founding for websites, Facebook, or Twitter. The only difference was in the Facebook architecture score. Newer groups were more likely to set up Facebook groups rather than websites. There was a 0.91 SD difference between pre-web era and social media era groups on this particular measure. However, the overall architecture score and the participation score showed no difference. Overall, then, the age of an organization was not associated with higher or lower levels of digital engagement and participation. In other words, an organization was not imprinted by the era of its founding (Appendix, Table 11).

106. Of the 11 groups founded in the social media era, only two had full-time staff members, although the volunteer labor in Tea Party groups complicates this finding. In addition, the NC-AFP was founded in the web era and had the highest number of staff of all the groups, as well as the highest level of digital engagement across all platforms and activities. Of course, groups evolve over time and may add staff and hierarchical levels.

107. A. Velasquez and R. LaRose, "Youth Collective Activism through Social Media: The Role of Collective Efficacy," *New Media & Society* 17, no. 6 (June 2015): 899–918.

108. W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, and Deen Freelon, "Communicating Civic Engagement: Contrasting Models of Citizenship in the Youth Web Sphere," *Journal of Communication* 61, no. 5 (2011): 835–56; Alan Schussman and Jennifer Earl, "From Barricades to Firewalls? Strategic Voting and Social Movement Leadership in the Internet Age," *Sociological Inquiry* 74, no. 4 (2004): 439–63.

109. This aligns with Tufekci's description of the challenges that internet-enabled protest movements face in maintaining organizational capacity, which builds on Dave Karpf's beneficial inefficiencies theory. Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect;* Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas.*

3. The Right's Digital Evangelism and Its Boots on the Ground

1. Forty-two Facebook posts from *Breitbart News* and 122 from the *Carolina Journal.*

2. For instance, see Paul Krugman, "Tea Parties Forever," *New York Times,* April 12, 2009.

3. Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Social and Political Views of American College and University Professors," in *Professors and Their Politics,* ed. Niel Gross and Solon Simmons (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 19–52.

4. Scholars of far-right online use and activism include Jesse Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009); Neal Caren et al., "A Social Movement Online Community: Stormfront and the White Nationalist Movement," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 33 (2012): 163–93; Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti, *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2013). Comparisons of left-wing and right-wing groups online are few but growing. See Deana A. Rohlinger and Leslie Bunnage, "Connecting People to Politics over Time? Internet Communication Technology and Activist Persistence in MoveOn and the Tea Party Movement," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 5 (2015): 539–52; Sheetal D. Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age: Considering Values and Technology in Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 3 (January 3, 2014): 326–41.

5. For instance, see Yannis Theocharis, "Every Crisis Is a Digital Opportunity: The Aganaktismenoi's Use of Social Media and the Emergence of Networked Solidarity in Greece," in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 184–97; Ion Bogdan Vasi and Chan S. Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States," *Mobilization* 21, no. 2 (2016): 139–54; Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Internet Activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging," *New Media & Society* 6, no. 87 (2004): 87–95.

6. For instance, see W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, *Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

7. For instance, see David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

8. See Methodological Appendix, Table 12, for details.

9. The difference between right-wing and left-wing groups' total standardized digital activism scores shows an overall gap of 0.66 SDs, which is significant at $p < 0.10$ and a medium effect size (Appendix, Table 9). The difference between radical left groups and reformist right groups was almost double that at 1.03 SDs, significant at $p < 0.05$ (Figure 3).

10. Middle/upper-class groups had on average total digital activism scores 0.45 SDs above the mean, and working-class left-wing groups a full 1.22 SDs below the mean, with a difference of 1.67 SDs, significant at $p < 0.05$.

11. Less hierarchical groups on the left had, on average, total digital activism scores 1.05 SDs below the mean while more hierarchical groups on the right had digital activism scores 0.50 SDs above the mean for a 1.55 SD total gap, significant at $p < 0.05$.

12. Much of this derived from beliefs around the Obama campaign's digital strategy, which is outlined in Daniel Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

13. Not all grassroots conservatives liked to publicly call themselves Patriots because of some negative connotations around paramilitary groups.

14. This was the State Employees Association of North Carolina (SEANC). Also, while not all conservatives identified as Republicans nor all progressives as Democrats, none identified as libertarian per se. Still, for reasons of parsimony, in this study groups supporting public sector collective action are designated as "right" and those opposing it as "left." I further complicate this binary with strategic differences in Chapter 4.

15. Fifty years before Gramsci, Marx and Engels had critiqued ideology for just philosophizing about ideas rather than material reality. Much later, Williams critiqued Marx for dismissing "what men say," and explained three interpretations of Marxist ideology: beliefs from a specific class or group; false consciousness; and the production of meaning and ideas. Like Gramsci, Williams argued for bringing back material social processes, rather than separating ideas from them. However, Williams also pointed out that Marx did not always separate out the base (economic relations) from the superstructure (everything else, i.e., ideas), and that Marx recognized "the complexity of real relations," which Williams described as key to looking at practices—or these material social processes that Gramsci also explained. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 2005); Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One,* ed. C. J.

Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1947); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2005).

16. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* 376. See also the sections on "The Modern Prince" and "State and Society."

17. Gramsci wrote in prison and presumably used the term "praxis" as a code word for early, less deterministic Marxism. I am stretching Gramscian theory with this conceptualization of ideology.

18. For more on this evolution, see Cihan Tugal, "'Serbest Meslek Sahibi': Neoliberal Subjectivity among Istanbul's Popular Sectors," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 46 (2012): 65–93.

19. Munson found that practices drove ideology, and sociologists, most prominently Pierre Bourdieu, more generally theorized practice to explain how societies operate, expanding on only structurally driven forces. Ziad W. Munson, *The Making of Pro-Life Activists: How Social Movement Mobilization Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

20. Since I am linking ideas to practices and institutions vis-à-vis ideology, I use the term "ideas" as part of ideology rather than a commonly used concept of framing, which is explained in Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–39. For background, see Pamela E. Oliver and Hank Johnston, "What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research," *Mobilization* 5, no. 1 (2000): 37–54.

21. Rosenfeld argued that unions leverage their bargaining power to deliver tangible benefits to workers while shaping cultural understandings of fairness in the workplace. Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

22. I use freedom and liberty interchangeably here, yet conservative activists emphasized the difference between liberties and freedom. Freedom cannot be touched by the government—it may try to restrict freedom by taking away our liberties, but freedom is what the individual will always have, they explained. It cannot be taken away as it is "God-given." Obamacare was often the epitome of this distinction for conservatives. One Tea Party activist described it as an "assault of Obamacare against liberties. It is so against the Constitution. It's not authorized in the Constitution, which does not have authority over our health care. That's a private industry and a personal responsibility choice." Berlet also found the connection with freedom and liberty in his study of right-wing group philosophy: Chip Berlet, "Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement," in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party,* ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 47–66.

23. Other scholars have also argued that a common target of the Tea Party are public sector unions: Joseph Lowndes, "The Past and Future of Race in the Tea Party Movement," in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party,* ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

24. Some scholars have found a similar discourse. See, for instance, Ronald P. Formisano, *The Tea Party: A Brief History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

25. Rohlinger argued that the Tea Party she studied started out with fervor but after the 2010 elections it began to communicate a message of fear, and Berlet found "fear based frames" in Tea Party discourse, which he called "mobilizing resentment." Hochschild traces Tea Party activists' sense of loss. Deana A. Rohlinger and Jesse Klein, "From Fervor to Fear: ICT and Emotions in the Tea Party Movement," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. David S. Meyer and Nella Van Dyke (New York: Ashgate, 2013), 125–47; Berlet, "Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement"; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016).

26. Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Rory McVeigh, "What's New about the Tea Party Movement?," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (London: Routledge, 2014), 15–34.

27. Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Barreto, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). And Mason and Wonski point out that conservatives are more likely to be motivated by, and use language based on, identity threat (being white and evangelical): Lilliana Mason and Julie Wronski, "One Tribe to Bind Them All: How Our Social Group Attachments Strengthen Partisanship," *Political Psychology* 39, suppl. 1 (2018): 257–277.

28. Blee and Yates, for instance, argued that Tea Party groups are implicitly racist while neo-Nazi and other groups are more explicitly racist. Kathleen M. Blee and Elizabeth A. Yates, "The Place of Race in Conservative and Far-Right Movements," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 127–36.

29. McVeigh, "What's New about the Tea Party Movement?," 17.

30. Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology,* no. 36 (2010): 269–86.

31. Theda Skocpol and Venessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land.*

32. Deana A. Rohlinger, Leslie A. Bunnage, and Jesse Klein, "Virtual Power Plays: Social Movements, Internet Communication Technology, and Political Parties," in *The Internet and Democracy in Global Perspective,* ed. Bernard Groffman, Alex Trechsel, and Mark Franklin (Switzerland: Springer, 2014), 83–109.

33. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer, "Introduction," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–11; Rohlinger and Klein, "From Fervor to Fear."

34. A few scholars have explicitly made this fairness versus freedom distinction between the left and right. See David Hackett Fischer, *Fairness and Freedom: A History of Two Open Societies—New Zealand and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Others have used similar terms to describe this difference. For instance, Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age"; Rohlinger et al., "Virtual Power Plays"; Ruth Braunstein, *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy across the Political Divide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

35. Blee and Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements"; Berlet, "Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement"; Formisano, *Tea Party.*

36. While scholars recognize a variety of factors for Tea Party emergence, they tend to focus on one area. For instance, Skocpol and Williamson on economic factors, Lowndes on anti-state reasons, and Hochschild on cultural areas, and Fetner and King on institutional resources and structures: Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism;* Lowndes, "The Past and Future of Race in the Tea Party Movement"; Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land;* Tina Fetner and Brayden G. King, "Three-Layer Movements, Resources, and the Tea Party," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 35–54.

37. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land;* John D Kincaid, "Theorizing the Radical Right: Directions for Social Movements Research on the Right-Wing Social Movements," *Sociology Compass,* no. January (2017): 1–10.

38. Blee and Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements."

39. Scholars have also found that conservatives tend to view the media as having more bias than liberals, and right-leaning readers trust the news less than those who are left-leaning. Jakob Moritz Eberl, "Lying Press: Three Levels of Perceived Media Bias and Their Relationship with Political Preferences," *Communications,* 2018; Nic Newman et al., "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018" (Oxford, UK, 2018).

40. At the time I interviewed him, David told me he was not a Tea Party member, but he was still very active politically.

41. Other scholars have also pointed out this seeming contradiction. For instance, see Van Dyke and Meyer, "Introduction."

42. Blea and Creasap pointed out the research by Gerstenfeld and Grant and that by Simi and Futrell, suggesting that "because mainstream media tend to portray right-wing movements negatively, their activists create virtual communities to control their images." Blee and Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," 277; Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld and Diana R. Grant, "Hate Online: A Content Analysis of Extremist Internet Sites," *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy* 3, no. 1 (2003):

29–44; Pete Simi and Robert Futrell, "Negotiating White Power Activist Stigma," *Social Problems* 56, no. 1 (2009): 89–110.

43. Jules Boykoff and Eulalie Laschever, "The Tea Party Movement, Framing, and the US Media," *Social Movement Studies* 10, no. 4 (2011): 341–366; Anthony DiMaggio, *The Rise of the Tea Party: Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

44. This way in which sentiment can inspire political internet use aligns with Zizi A. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

45. Posts were coded positively if they contained a strong editorial opinion that was part of a larger political debate either nationally or locally but not about the organization's own work. This was based on a qualitative content analysis of 8,063 Facebook posts. Coders described the main content of each post with 1–3 words. We did not code for freedom or nonfreedom content in this typology. See the Appendix for other details. However, Agarwal et al. found that the online content of the Tea Party they studied did not reflect liberty ideas: Agarwal et al., "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age."

46. Posts were coded positively if the post was an announcement about a public event, conference, rally, meeting, fundraiser, or another way for someone to get involved in the organization (or another organization's activities). Based on the words in the post, a call to action of any kind was coded as encouraging participation.

47. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell, 2010). In addition, Michael Schudson argued that it is only within the last 150 years that "informed citizenship" ushered in by progressives, rather than conservatives, marked the American political landscape in how individuals, rather than parties, should have information to participate democratically. He further explains how the middle of the 20th century marked an expansion of citizens' demanding public transparency from corporations and the state. Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: The History of American Civic Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Michael Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945–1975* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

48. This particular meeting was attended by one of my research assistants.

49. The Wounded Warrior Project is an organization that supports veterans and active duty military personnel.

50. Verne was right: the news network started in 1996, three years after Mosaic, the first web browser, became available to the general public.

51. Darren Janz, "County Cataret," *PoliticsNC,* April 16, 2008, https://www.politicsnc.com/carteret-county-profile.

52. Over the course of the study, Randy would frequently take down his blog and then put up a new one.

53. David had also participated in another group—NC Freedom, also in this analysis. He told me, "Well, I started NC Freedom, and I left that, and I started NC Renegade."

54. This digital activism gap between radical and reformist right-wing groups was 0.71 SDs, significant at $p < 0.05$.

55. In Gamson's case, he used an "unruly" categorization of protest groups. He categorized groups as unruly if they resorted to violence, but, given the nonviolent nature of these groups' practices, I instead use the term "radical." William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest,* 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990).

56. The total strategy gap was 0.70 SDs, significant at $p < 0.05$.

57. See Appendix, Table 10.

58. Rohlinger et al. described how the Tea Party movement constricted their identity from a broader movement at the start to a much narrower one: Rohlinger et al., "Constricting Boundaries: Collective Identity in the Tea Party Movement," in *Border Politics, Social Movements and Globalization,* ed. Nancy Naples and Jennifer Bickham-Mendez (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 177–205.

59. I tracked both. Like with all the groups that had more than one account for a platform, I picked the one with the highest score to represent that group, that of the *Carolina Journal.*

60. A similar finding is described in Rohlinger et al., "Virtual Power Plays."

61. The CCTPP website included information for two chapters.

62. For in-depth analyses of this funding connection, see DiMaggio, *Rise of the Tea Party;* Jeff Nesbit, *Poison Tea: How Big Oil and Big Tobacco Invented the Tea Party and Captured the GOP* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

63. Chris Kromm, "Investigative Series: How Pope Reigns," *Facing South*, January 14, 2011. https://www.facingsouth.org/2011/01/investigative-series-how-pope-reigns.html.

64. This conservative digital eco-system was able to harness what Chadwick called "repertoire switches" in that they could quickly and efficiently shift between online and offline, as well as across different types of organizations. Andrew Chadwick, "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity," *Political Communication* 24, no. 3 (August 6, 2007): 283–301.

65. M. Deuze, "Global Journalism Education," *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 1 (2006): 19–34; D. H. Weaver and G. C. Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996); D. H. Weaver et al., *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007); Rodrigo Zamith, "Are More Journalists Receiving Formal Education? A Longitudinal Assessment of the Rates of College Education among Journalists in the United States" (working paper).

66. However, only 28% identify as Democrats; 50% are independent. Weaver and Wilhoit, *American Journalist in the 1990s;* Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver, *The American Journalist in the Digital Age: Key Findings,* 2014, http://archive.news.indiana.edu/releases/iu/2014/05/2013-american-journalist-key-findings.pdf.

67. Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know*; Michael Schudson, "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism" *Journalism* 2, no. 2 (2015): 149–70.

68. Folkerts argues that the conflicts with traditional and college educated journalists started much earlier. Jean Folkerts, "History of Journalism Education," *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 16, no. 4 (2014): 227–299.

69. Despite some major newspapers being purchased by wealthy individuals, such as Jeff Bezos who bought *The Washington Post* in 2013, the corporatization of the news media continues to accelerate.

70. See, for instance, *Washington Post* reporter Ben H. Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

71. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Vintage, 1988).

72. Diana Kendall, *Framing Class: Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in America* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

73. James T. Hamilton, *Democracy's Detectives: The Economics of Investigative Journalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

74. Newsroom staff includes reporters, copyeditors, line editors, photographers, videographers, social media producers, online staff, and managers, such as the executive and managing editors. Earlier numbers also included designers, who have since been consolidated by McClatchy, the owner. These numbers come from a news editor who verified the numbers and has been at the paper for over 30 years.

75. Christopher Ali, *Media Localism: The Policies of Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

76. For a solid summary of this conservative media ecosystem, see Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, "Why Republicans Rely More than Democrats on Ideological Sources of Information," *Scholars Strategy Network,* October 13, 2017 , https://scholars.org/brief/why-republicans-rely-more-democrats-ideological-sources-information. For more background on think tanks, see Thomas Medvetz, *Think-tanks in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

77. Berry and Sobieraj found conservative media outlets to be a safe haven for the right wing: Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj, *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

78. Sheelah Kolhatkar, "The Growth of Sinclair's Conservative Media Empire," *The New Yorker,* October 22, 2018.

79. Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); Peter Montgomery, "The Tea Party and the Religious Right Movements: Frenemies with Benefits," in

Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party, ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 242–74.

80. Jacobs described this phenomenon among mainstream journalists in particular as getting caught off guard: Ronald N. Jacobs, "Journalism after Trump," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2017): 409–25.

81. Matt Grossman and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Berry and Sobieraj, *Outrage Industry.*

82. Even in 2012, while most Americans were still getting their news from television, they were increasingly relying on social media. In 2016, 60% of Americans used social media for their news consumption, according to Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, "News Use across Social Media Platforms," Pew Research Center, May 26, 2016, http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016.

83. To put fake news in context, see Andrew Guess, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler, *Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the Consumption of Fake News during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign,* January 9, 2018, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf. Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2017): 211–36.

84. Guess et al., "Selective Exposure to Misinformation."

85. Polletta and Callahan also argued that sharing digital media went hand in hand with an increase of the right-wing media landscape. They suggested that digital sharing of conservative media was key in Trump's election. I build on this analysis with the integration of organizations, rather than just individual consumers. Francesca Polletta and Jessica Callahan, "Deep Stories, Nostalgia Narratives, and Fake News: Storytelling in the Trump Era," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2017): 392–408.

86. Based on interviews with scholars who research bots, such as Stuart Geiger and Phil Howard. Chapter 2 has more bot background.

87. Philip N. Howard, "Digitizing the Social Contract: Producing American Political Culture in the Age of New Media," *Communication Review* 6 (2003): 213–45; Lisa Barnard and Daniel Kreiss, "A Research Agenda for Online Advertising: Surveying Campaign Practices, 2000–2012," *International Journal of Communication* 7, no. 21 (2013): 2046–66; Philip N. Howard, Samuel Wooley, and Ryan Calo, "Algorithms Bots, and Political Communication in the US 2016 Election," *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* 15, no. 2 (2018): 81–93.

88. For more on this topic, see R. Stuart Geiger, "The Lives of Bots," in *Critical Point of View: A* Wikipedia *Reader,* ed. Geert Lovink and Nathaniel Tkacz (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 78–93.

89. Guess et al., "Selective Exposure to Misinformation."

90. While other theoretical frameworks could also be applied to this case of right-wing digital dominance, such as social movement scholars use of "framing" of their ideas or the Bourdieusian term "field" to describe the conservative media ecosystem, none of these quite get at the connections of these groups online and offline. Ideology, in the form of ideas, institutions, and practices, is the connecting web that sustained conservative political action—and hegemony. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci.*

91. While Gramsci dedicated an essay on "The Intellectuals" and their formation, he brought up the concept throughout his writing. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* 5–23.

92. Again, Gramsci focused on his concept of "The Modern Prince" with an essay with the same name, but this idea of a political party forging consent and incorporating "collective will" appears throughout his writing. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* 123–205.

93. Hochschild also challenged this gullibility assumption as too simplistic: Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*. And this Gramscian linkage of ideas with institutions and practices is related to what social movement scholars have coined "discursive opportunity structures." For instance, see Myra Marx Ferree et al., *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

94. Note that Riley did not directly unpack the Hitler case (p. 186). He did, however, divide hegemony into "intraclass" (intra-group) and "interclass" (inter-group) hegemony, and in this North Carolina case and perhaps nationally, intraclass hegemony was readily apparent in the early to mid-2010s, and the internet was a key vector for this intraclass hegemony. Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2010): 189.

95. William W. Biddle, "A Psychological Definition of Propaganda," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 26, no. 3 (1931): 283–95.

96. There is a long-lived debate within media studies over this question of active versus passive consumers of information, most notably around the question of "media effects," yet over the years a more nuanced approach has emerged, drawing from Katz and Lazarsfeld, who suggested that information may be persuasive but is often accessed through an opinion leader from one's social network. Elihu Katz, "Lazarsfeld's Map of Media Effects," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 13, no. 3 (2001): 270–79.

97. Fetner and King, "Three-Layer Movements, Resources, and the Tea Party." See also Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism;* Formisano, *Tea Party;* Daniel Kreiss, *Prototype Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

98. Some studies of right-wing politicians have also found that they use digital technology for one-to-many distribution of content, rather than online participatory and interactive activities. Sven Engesser et al., "Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology," *Information, Communication & Society,* no. 8 (2017): 1109–26; Eric Klinenberg and Andrew Perrin, "Symbolic Politics in the Information Age: The 1996 Republican Presidential Campaigns in Cyberspace," *Information, Communication & Society* 3, no. 1 (2000): 17–38. But what was surprising here is that even activists themselves often followed this pattern.

99. Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect.* Also, one study did find that right-wing, not left-wing, social media posts were more successful when they showed their political stance to be the out-party. Nir Noon Nave, Limor Shifman, and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, "Talking It Personally: Features of Successful Political Posts on Facebook," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 3 (2018): 1–12.

100. For an overview of political opportunity, see David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity" 82, no. 4 (2004): 1457–92.

101. A series of scholars have not only critiqued the chasing of one theory of social movements but also the asking of narrow emergence questions that fail to involve the state, ideology, or political economy more broadly: Andrew G. Walder, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology,* no. 35 (2009): 393–412; Jeff Goodwin and Gabe Hetland, "The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies," in *Marxism and Social Movements,* ed. Colin Barker et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 82–102; John Krinsky, "Marxism and the Politics of Possibility: Beyond Academic Boundaries," in *Marxism and Social Movements,* ed. Colin Baker et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 103–21. A related debate is how to navigate political and cultural explanations—whether to "split" them or "lump" them together: Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Jaswinder Khattra, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 27–54; Ruud Koopmans, "Political. Opportunity. Structure. Some Splitting to Balance the Lumping," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 93–105. In an effort to reconcile competing material and symbolic sources of power that social movements face, Armstrong and Bernstein suggested a "multi-institutional" approach for a comprehensive explanation: Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein, "Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements," *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 1 (2008): 74–99. And many researchers who were leading contenders of one theory later came back and critiqued themselves for not considering other factors. See, for instance, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

102. Tugal, "'Serbest Meslek Sahibi.'"

103. Williams further argued that such a "reduction, abstraction, or assimilation" of cultural forms was a common Marxist interpretation of "what men say" and that "signification, the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs, is

then a practical material activity; it is indeed, literally, a means of production." Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 38.

104. Williams, *Marxism and Literature.*

105. Casemajor described the term "digital materialism" in the context of a variety of approaches, from the humanities to anthropology. It also includes more of the Marxist derivative, also referred to by Fuchs in the narrower context of platform and other digital workers. I am expanding it here to include any type of digital use and am emphasizing the importance of putting it into a political, cultural, and economic context. Nathalie Casemajor, "Digital Materialisms: Six Frameworks for Digital Media Studies," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2015): 4–17; Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

106. Lina Dencik and Oliver Leistert, "Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest: Between Control and Emancipation," in *Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest: Between Control and Emancipation,* ed. Lina Dencik and Oliver Leistert (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 1–12; Nick Couldry, "The Myth of 'Us': Digital Networks, Political Change and the Production of Collectivity," *Information, Communication and Society* 18, no. 6 (2015): 608–26.

4. The Left's Radical Fairness and Its Muted Online Bullhorn

1. I am not evaluating directly how digital activism translates into movement success but measuring and evaluating digital activism levels and what leads to them.

2. A proclamation for a Teamsters organizing drive was threatening to Charlotte city leaders, who feared both the Hoffa name and the idea that a powerful police union might side with other striking workers, resulting in civil strife that they could not control. The city council passed a resolution that banned the Teamsters, and though it did not have legal teeth, the Teamsters quickly backed off of organizing in Charlotte. Fearing they would lose their jobs, Charlotte police officers and firefighters, who had been organizing with other unions, announced that they would not strike. The city approached the state's attorney general for a ruling about banning union membership among police officers, and the attorney general agreed that North Carolina labor laws only applied to private employees, so the city council also passed a resolution that would dismiss any police officer who joined a union. For more background on the history of the bill, see Jason Burton and David A. Zonderman, "Where Did This Law Come From? A History of General Statute 95–98" (Raleigh, NC, 2002).

3. During the 2012 DNC, Charlotte mayor Anthony Foxx was touring a blogging press office, shaking hands, and posing for photos. I asked him what he thought about Charlotte city workers' efforts to organize, and he said, "This is really some-

thing for the city manager to deal with. We're discussing it." I asked him what his position was, and he walked away.

4. See Methodological Appendix, Table 12.

5. Unions were also frustrated that Charlotte did not have any unionized hotels. Some unions organized their own event in Philadelphia to show their independence from the DNC.

6. Hans Nichols and Jonathan D. Salant, "Companies Pay $20 Million to Fund Democratic Convention," *Bloomberg*, September 4, 2012, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-09-04/companies-pay-20-million-to-fund-democratic-convention.

7. See Appendix, Tables 3–5, 9. The effect size for the total score is medium, with a statistical significance at $p < 0.10$.

8. See Appendix, Tables 3–5, 10. Across the left groups I studied, radical organizations' practices focused on contested activities, such as protest and picketing, to broadly change the political landscape. A group was reformist if its strategies were incremental legislative change—often through lobbying. See Methodological Appendix for further operationalization of "radical" and "reformist."

9. There is a SD difference in the standardized total digital activism score between radical left and reformist right groups. See Appendix, Figure 3.

10. David contacted colleagues in the Triangle Labor Group (TLG), an ad hoc group that he described as "academics, labor movement people, community people, and sympathetic state government folk to at least talk about labor issues in a state that's so hostile to organized labor." As members of the TLG are almost all part of other organizations in the field, including HOPE, the TLG was not one of the official groups in the field of study.

11. SEIU is often viewed as more of a social movement union, but in this context they had been "hands-off" with SEANC, which was not social movement oriented.

12. Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi, "Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation," *Communication Review* 14, no. 3 (2011): 179–96. A similar argument was made about how the leftist ideology of the inclusion of diverse views contrasts with the right. W. Lance Bennett, Alexandra Segerberg, and Curd B. Knüpfer, "The Democratic Interface: Technology, Political Organization, and Diverging Patterns of Electoral Representation," *Information, Communication and Society* 21, no. 11 (2018): 1655–80.

13. Collective also doesn't necessarily mean horizontal, as the groups on the left that were trying to make decisions together—either out of survival as a coalition or because of their beliefs in fairness—ranged in hierarchical levels.

14. See Appendix, Table 13.

15. For instance, one of the groups I studied, the Institute for Southern Studies, is a key news and information site for progressive causes in North Carolina.

16. Grossman and Hopkins compared the Republican and Democratic Parties and found a similar distinction in that Republicans were more ideological and Democrats more focused on a broad range of policies. Matt Grossman and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

17. Hahrie Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations and Leadership in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

18. George Lakoff, *Don't Think Like an Elephant: The Essential Guide for Progressives* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2014). For an overview on framing, see Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–39. See David Karpf's analysis of organizational beta testing: *Analytic Activism Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

19. Some HOPE activists thought they should have pushed for repeal of the ban more aggressively when they had a chance. Others were less certain that they ever really had a chance, even when Democrats were in charge. One labor activist quipped, "The Democratic Party in this state is just a stale microwave version of the Republican Party. You know, there's not much. When I'd go to national conventions, . . . people would ask you to describe your state, and I'd say well, they're old, they're white, they're homophobic, racist, and then there's the Republicans."

20. Moral Monday sprang from long-standing coalitions broader than HOPE, such as HKonJ, and included the interfaith groups that had rallied in front of the legislature to support Wisconsin public sector workers in 2011.

21. Some radical SEANC activists did participate in Moral Monday protests, however. For further context between these groups, see Jen Schradie, "Labor Unions, Social Media, and Political Ideology: Using the Internet to Reach the Powerful or Mobilize the Powerless?," *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): 1985–2006.

22. See Appendix, Tables 3–5.

23. See Appendix, Figure 3.

24. In 2015, Dana was sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement of union funds. Joseph Neff, "Cope Guilty of Felonies: 'Because I Am a Thief,'" *The News & Observer,* November 17, 2015.

25. An executive director, a board of governors, and an executive committee ran the union. Most of the everyday power was with top staff leadership, especially Dana, the executive director, who had been in the position for over ten years. Instead of the elected union president who was actually a state employee, Dana was the spokesperson for the union.

26. For more in-depth analyses of internal union democracy movements within and across unions, see Amanda Pullum, "Foul Weather Friends: Enabling Movement Alliance through an Intentionally Limited Coalition," *Social Currents* 5, no. 3

(2017): 228–43.; M. Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," *Politics & Society* 37, no. 2 (April 3, 2009): 203–28; Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor Movement," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 2 (2000): 303–49.

27. See Chapter 1 for details on labor repression. Some of the harshest repression was in the 1950s, also known as the anti-communist "Red Scare."

28. In the distribution of groups across class and strategy, four out of five working-class groups were radical while 14 out of 16 middle/upper-class groups were reformist. Yet, the mixed class groups were split: seven radical and six reformist.

29. Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971).

30. The union was the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

31. Not much research has conducted this type of strategy comparison, but a study that looked at one event found that lobbying tactics were more in line with digital use than radical acts: Julie Uldam, "Activism and the Online Mediation Opportunity Structure: Attempts to Impact Global Climate Change Policies?," *Policy and Internet* 5, no. 1 (2013): 56–75. And some have argued that social media platforms can be used for a variety of goals, including undemocratic ones. Joshua A. Tucker et al., "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (2017): 46–59. For a comparative overview, see Raquel Rego, Greg Thomson, and Daniele Di Nunzio, "The Use of New ICTs in Trade Union Protests—Five European Cases," *European Review of Labour and Research* 22, no. 3 (2016): 315–329.

32. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

33. Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); H. M. Cleaver, "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric," *Journal of International Affairs,* no. 51 (1998): 621–40; Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

34. Chapter 2 highlights these arguments on participatory democracy and the internet.

35. Hierarchical conservative groups had higher digital use and participation than horizontal progressive groups. See Appendix, Figure 4. For instance, less hierarchical left groups averaged 0.02 comments per day while more hierarchical right groups averaged 1.42 comments per day—70 times higher. These differences were even more dramatic between hierarchical conservative reformist versus less hierarchical progressive radical groups.

36. Lincoln Dahlberg, "The Internet, Deliberative Democracy, and Power: Radicalizing the Public Sphere," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 3,

no. 1 (2007): 47–64; Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012). For an overview of theories of power, see Steven Lukes, *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

37. For a good overview of affordances, see Sandra K. Evans et al., "Explicating Affordances: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Affordances in Communication Research," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 22, no. 1 (2017): 35–52.

38. Certainly, not all affordance theoretical frameworks ignore the big picture. For instance, see Peter Nagy and Gina Neff, "Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory," *Social Media + Society* July–December (2015): 1–9. And as an antidote, some have suggested that an analysis of internet politics requires examining broader institutional contexts: Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick, "Parties, Election Campaigning, and the Internet: Toward a Comparative Institutional Approach," in *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics,* ed. Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (New York: Routledge, 2009), 56–71; Daniel Kreiss, "Acting in the Public Sphere: The 2008 Obama Campaign's Strategic Use of New Media to Shape Narratives of the Presidential Race," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 33, no. 2012 (2012): 195–223; Deana A. Rohlinger and Jesse Klein, "From Fervor to Fear: ICT and Emotions in the Tea Party Movement," in *Understanding the Tea Party,* ed. David S. Meyer and Nella Van Dyke (New York: Ashgate, 2013), 125–47. Another popular approach to studying technology is actor network theory (ANT), which considers people and machines working together in related and overlapping ways. While ANT can describe technology with thick descriptions, broader societal differences—and mechanisms of difference—are not emphasized in this theory.

39. Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?," *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (1980): 121–36.

40. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2005).

41. For a nuanced analysis of this distinction between mobilizing and organizing, see Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists.*

42. Ion Bogdan Vasi and Chan S. Suh, "Online Activities, Spatial Proximity, and the Diffusion of the 'Occupy' Movement in the United States," *Mobilization* 21, no. 2 (2016): 139–54; Halim Rane and Sumra Salem, "Social Media, Social Movements and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Arab Uprisings," *International Journal of Communication* 18, no. 1 (2012): 37–41; Helen Margetts et al., *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Anne Gervais, "Social Network Websites as Information Channels for the US Social Forum," *Media Culture & Society* 37, no. 4 (2015): 547–65; Zeynep Tufekci and Deen Freelon, "Introduction to the Special Issue on New Media and Social Unrest," *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 7 (2013): 843–47.

43. In this regard, I build on emerging scholarship which has begun to widen the time and technology scope. See for instance, Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Wells, "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 397–418. For an overview of how movements emerge and diffuse, see David Strang and Sarah A. Soule, "Diffusion in Organizations and Social Movements: From Hybrid Corn to Poison Pills," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 265–90.

44. This is similar to Nielsen's arguments around the normalization of digital activity as part of a social movement. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of Citizenship in Political Campaigns," *New Media & Society,* no. 13 (2011): 755–771.

45. Mary Gable and Douglas Hall, "Ongoing Joblessness in North Carolina," Economic Policy Institute, May 16, 2013. https://www.epi.org/publication/ongoing-joblessness-north-carolina-unemployment/; "North Carolina Demographics of Poor Children," National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013, http://www.nccp.org/profiles/NC_profile_7.html. Also, overall poverty rates are two times higher for African Americans: Alexandra F. Sirota, "The Legacy of Hardship: Persistent Poverty in North Carolina," BTC Brief (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Justice Center, 2012).

46. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Jaswinder Khattra, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 27–54; Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet, *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Andrew G. Walder, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 393–412.

47. Rebecca Boger, Cat McDowell, and David Gwynn, "The Greensboro Massacre," Civil Rights Greensboro, 2009, http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/essay1979/collection/CivilRights.

48. This was not based on a randomized sample of participants.

49. Melissa Harris Perry of MSNBC was actively reporting on Moral Monday.

50. Left-leaning groups have a long history of incorporating liberation theology into their political organizing, a term most notably used to describe Marxist revolutions tied to Catholic faith-based leaders and activists in Latin America in the latter half of the last century. American movement ties to religion have ranged from anti-slavery to civil rights organizing. For an in-depth comparison between religion and left/right organizing in the current era, see Ruth Braunstein, *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy across the Political Divide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

51. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope,* 2.

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