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The Use of Protest Event Data in Comparative Research: Cross-National Comparability, Sampling Methods and Robustness

Ruud Koopmans¹

Introduction

This chapter discusses some of the central issues concerning the problems and uses of newspaper-based protest event data, referring to experiences gathered in the context of a comparative research project on the development of new social movements (NSMs) in Western Europe. The project started in 1988 and was recently concluded.² Principal collaborators were Hanspeter Kriesi, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Marco Giugni and the present author.³ Data were gathered on protest events (of NSMs and other movements, with the exclusion of labor strikes, see below) in four Western European countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland) for the period from 1975 to 1989. For Germany and the Netherlands, data were also gathered for the years 1965 through 1974, albeit based on a smaller sample.⁴ Recently, the data set has been extended to include protest events in Great Britain between 1975 and 1989, and in Spain (also based on a smaller sample⁵) between 1977 and 1989 (see Koopmans 1996a).⁶

Originally, the research design of the project was rather conventional and did not envisage the gathering of protest event data. The idea was to gather data on

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- 1 I thank the participants in the workshop "Protest Event Analysis: Methodology, Applications, Problems," and in particular Friedhelm Neidhardt, for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.
 - 2 Publications deriving from the project include Kriesi et al. (1992, 1995), Duyvendak et al. (1992), Koopmans (1993, 1995, 1996a), Duyvendak (1995), Giugni (1993), Giugni and Kriesi (1990), and Koopmans and Duyvendak (1991, 1995).
 - 3 Other participants were Hein-Anton van der Heijden, Florence Passy and Luuk Wijnmans.
 - 4 While the 1975 to 1989 data are based on each Monday issue, the 1965 through 1974 data are based only on the first Monday issue of each month.
 - 5 The sample for Spain was similar to that for the 1965 to 1974 periods for the Netherlands and Germany. However, because the Spanish newspaper (*El Pais*) also has a Sunday edition, the Spanish sample is based on the first Monday and Sunday issues of each month.
 - 6 In addition, using a slightly adapted version of our coding scheme, Walgrave (1994) has collected data on NSM protest events in Flanders, Belgium.

some fifty new social movement organizations (SMOs) in each country through a combination of interviews and archive research. We soon became convinced, however, that such data alone would not allow us to answer the questions we wanted to address. To begin with, a focus on SMOs seemed too narrow, since many protests, especially those of the NSMs, are not organized by formal SMOs but are carried by informal subcultural and countercultural networks, or by loose, temporary coalitions of local groups. Indeed, we later found that the SMOs we had interviewed according to the original plan (the most important ones in terms of members and resources in each country) were responsible for only a small minority of protest events. Thus, data on the volume, themes and forms of protest events for the different movements seemed necessary to complement the study of SMOs. The literature did abound with statements about movements being stronger at time X than at time Y, more radical in country A than in country B, but these statements lacked any systematic empirical basis. Moreover, many of these statements seemed to us to be highly dubious. For instance, journalists and social scientists almost invariably concluded that since the late 1960s the level of protest had declined and described the 1980s as a period of political disinterest, apathy, cocooning and yuppiedom. We increasingly suspected that these conclusions were, at least for some of our countries, far off the mark.

We therefore decided to follow the example of earlier studies using protest event data (Tilly et al. 1975; Kriesi et al. 1981; McAdam 1982). I will first discuss why we chose newspapers as a data source, and not, for instance, movement or police archives. Next, I will discuss two important characteristics that distinguish our approach from that of most other projects using protest event data. First, our data include different countries, which gives rise to a number of problems and questions that are specific to the use of protest event data in cross-national comparisons. Second, we chose to draw a systematic sample from our sources, which greatly reduced the financial resources and time needed for the completion of the project. Finally, I will discuss the robustness of newspaper-based gathering of protest event data through a comparison of our data on Germany with first results from another project on protest in Germany, in which a different approach was used to gather event data.

Why Newspapers?

The gathering of protest event data on the basis of newspapers has become increasingly popular (see, for instance, Tilly et al. 1975; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989; Olzak 1992). This popularity is mainly the result of a negative choice. Anyone studying social movements will be aware of the fact that newspapers reflect only a selective part of reality, and that even that part is always colored

by the subjective interpretations of reporters and editors. Similarly, it is one of the eternal complaints of movement activists that many of their actions are either not reported at all in the press, or are covered in a negatively biased way. Therefore, newspapers can hardly be seen as superior sources of information on protest in any absolute sense, and it is rather the deficiency of the alternatives that makes newspapers so attractive.

The most common alternative is, of course, to refrain from quantifying protest altogether and to rely solely on qualitative sources and methods. Such an approach is indeed appropriate if one's interest is limited to qualitative aspects of social movements, such as the internal structure of their organizations or the motivations and ideologies of their activists. However, most qualitative studies also aim at explaining quantitative aspects of social movements, such as the development of their strength over time or the composition of their action repertoire, and thus they cannot avoid making quantitative statements. In the absence of systematic empirical data, such statements are likely to be even more selective and biased than newspaper reports. To an important extent, the quantitative assertions in qualitative studies are themselves implicitly derived from the reflection of social movement activities in the media. Because this happens in an unsystematic way, the resulting statements are in fact the product of a double process of selection and bias, in which the subjective interpretation and selection of the social scientist are added to those of the journalist. Therefore, explicit and systematic quantification, difficult as it may be, is a necessary complement to qualitative information.

Among the possible sources for quantitative data on protest development, newspapers are generally the best choice. With the partial exception of strikes, official data on social movement activities are usually lacking, and if they exist, their criteria of selection and categorization are often vague and subject to changes over time, and anyway likely to be different from those of the social scientist. Further, the number of variables employed in these statistics is very limited; usually they are no more than counts of a specific action form. Last but not least, such listings are themselves often (partly) based on newspaper reports (see Danzger 1975).

Archives are another possible source of information. Police archives, if accessible, are one option, but for obvious reasons they are often biased toward violent or illegal events (but see McCarthy, McPhail and Smith 1996, and Hocke in this volume). Moreover, police authorities, who are often a direct party to political conflicts, can even less than the media be expected to impartially reflect even the most basic aspects of protest events. This is also true to some extent for social movement archives, which, in addition, tend to be discontinuous, incomplete, unsystematic and so disorderly as to be virtually inaccessible.

Newspapers have distinct advantages over these sources. They report a large number of news events on a regular, day-to-day basis, and because they are in competition with each other and need to maintain their credibility as reliable news sources, they - or at least those "quality" papers with an educated readership - are obliged to cover important events with some degree of accuracy (see Danzger 1975). Of course, the reliability of newspapers depends on the kind of information one wants to get from them. Here Tuchman's (1973) distinction between "hard" and "soft" news is often cited. Newspapers can be considered to be relatively reliable when it comes to reporting the "hard," factual aspects of protest events, such as their timing and locality, the number of participants, action form, the stated goal of the protestors, the number of arrests, etc. For "softer," more subjective aspects of social movements, such as whether the participants were motivated by universalistic values or merely by self-interest, or whether they were motivated by their stated goal or merely out for a riot, it is obvious that newspapers are as reliable or unreliable as anyone else's subjective judgement.

Of course, even some of the "hard" facts will sometimes be distorted to some extent. This is especially true for the number of participants and for the question whether or not a demonstration was violent. Although it is impossible to solve this problem, it should be stressed that bias as such is not always a real problem as long as we are not interested in any "absolute" truth and as long as the bias is systematic. If, for instance, a particular newspaper systematically presents only the police's estimate of the number of demonstrators, we would still be able to trace changes in the level of participation over time, because even the police estimate is a reflection of the actual size of a demonstration. Similarly, a significant increase in the amount of movement violence would be visible in the columns of any newspaper, no matter how sympathetic or unsympathetic to the protestors it may be; differences in sympathy among newspapers may affect the absolute level of violence reported in them, but they are unlikely to affect the trends.

An important conclusion that can be derived from this is that for variables that are possibly subject to bias or for which different versions of an event are presented in a report (for instance both the police's and the movement's estimate of the number of participants, and both sides' accounts of who initiated violence) the best solution is not to let the coder try to infer what "really" happened, but to create coding instructions that make the bias systematic, i.e. constant across the units - countries, movements, periods, etc. - one wants to compare.

Comparability in Cross-National Research on Protest

Anyone who has ever done cross-national comparative research has been confronted with the uncomfortable question whether he or she is really comparing like with like. This is already the case when one studies phenomena that at first sight seem relatively easily measurable, such as levels of unemployment. Each country tends to have its own definition and way of measuring and registering unemployment, and sometimes even within one country different definitions and measures coexist. Worse problems arise, for instance, with regard to the cross-national comparability of official statistics on racist violence, which display widely diverging definitions of "racism" and of "violence" and equally divergent methods of data gathering (see Koopmans 1996b).

Cross-national differences in meaning, interpretation and connotation also plague cross-national survey research. No matter how carefully one translates questions from one language to another, the problem remains that the same word often does not mean the same thing because it is embedded in different social, political and cultural contexts. What should one think, for instance, of survey results showing that the proportion of the population who "strongly approve" of the ecology movement is larger in Nigeria and China than in Switzerland and the Netherlands (Inglehart 1995: 59)? In Nigeria and China, hardly anything like an ecology movement exists and the environment is neither prominent nor polarized as a political issue. In Switzerland and the Netherlands, on the other hand, strong ecology movements exist; most people will know about one or more specific organizations or protest campaigns, and the environment is a highly prominent and contested social and political issue. Of course, this is an extreme example (though it comes from the authoritative *World Values Survey*), but similar problems also play a role when comparing Western European countries.⁷

Newspaper-based protest event data gathering is, of course, not immune to such problems. However, this method avoids some of the problems involved in using official statistics or surveys as a data source. The main advantage of using newspapers (or of any other form of content analysis) is that the researcher - at least as long as she or he sticks to the relatively "hard" aspects of protest events indicated above - has the power of definition and is independent of the definitions, categorizations and interpretations of statistical agencies or respondents, which are beyond her or his control. The fact, for instance, that

7 For instance, with regard to the Eurobarometer data on support for new social movements, which sometimes also produce awkward results. For a critique, see Fuchs and Rucht (1989).

blockades were until recently officially considered a form of violence in Germany does not force the researcher to code blockades in Germany as violent and blockades in other countries as a form of peaceful civil disobedience. And neither is the researcher troubled by the fact that in France survey respondents tend to identify the stimulus "peace movement" with one particular organization linked to the Communist Party, which calls itself *Mouvement de la Paix*.

Of course, there are a few borderline cases where the researcher does not have full control over definitions. With regard to our coding scheme, the most important of these problem cases concerns the distinction between legal and illegal demonstrations. In the Netherlands, for instance, the proportion of illegal and/or confrontational protests (such as blockades and the occupation of buildings) is much higher than in Germany, with the exception of illegal demonstrations, which are more frequent in Germany. In both countries peaceful demonstrations are, in principal, legal, but in both countries the possibility also exists for authorities to ban or dissolve a demonstration when public order is threatened. The problem here, of course, is that one does not know whether the larger number of illegal demonstrations in Germany is a result of a deliberate choice of German activists (who may, for instance, more frequently refuse to register or to cooperate with the police), or of a broader interpretation of German authorities of the clause "threat to public order," which would result in demonstrations being banned while similar demonstrations in the Netherlands might be perfectly legal.⁸

Nevertheless, in general, the use of newspapers as a data source allows the researcher more scope to define, operationalize, categorize and interpret the material in cross-nationally comparable ways than do the alternatives.⁹ Opposing this advantage, however, is a clear disadvantage, namely that the researcher has little knowledge about and control over the selectivity of his or her sources.

This problem is not limited to cross-national protest event studies. Even if only one country is studied, the use of newspapers always implies that one works with biased sources. Only a small fraction of the total population of protest events is reported in the press, which selects those few (large, violent,

8 The generally lower level of tolerance of German authorities towards forms of civil disobedience as well as the fact that the tendency towards illegal demonstrations runs counter to the trend for all other forms of illegal disruption, would support the second explanation.

9 The same applies, perhaps even more strongly, to comparisons between historical periods within one country.

spectacular) events it considers "newsworthy."¹⁰ Therefore, anyone who searches for the Holy Grail of the "true" number of protest events or the "true" distribution of protests over different themes and strategies in a certain country at a certain point in time, must be disappointed: Newspapers - *all* newspapers and *any combination* - are an extremely biased source and are absolutely unsuitable for answering such questions.

For most of the research questions that occupy our attention, however, knowledge about "true" numbers and "absolute" levels is relatively unimportant. Would it make us any wiser if we were to know, for instance, that 12.48% of all protest events in Germany are violent? In fact, it is not so much the precise levels that are interesting, but trends and differences, and these can also be inferred from biased sources, provided that the bias is more or less constant, and as long as the number of protest events reported is large enough to allow the detection of significant trends and differences. From newspaper data we may learn, for example, that the proportion of violent events is twice as high for the new social movements as for the labor movement, or that it doubled from 1980 to 1990. *These* are interesting findings, compared to which knowing whether this proportion increased from 5% to 10% or from 10% to 20% is of secondary importance.

This is not to say, of course, that comparisons of newspaper data with other sources, or comparisons between newspapers are not relevant and necessary. Particularly interesting in this respect is the comparison of newspaper data with local data on officially registered demonstrations, which is being conducted by Peter Hocke at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) for the German city of Freiburg and by John McCarthy and others for Washington, D.C. (see their respective chapters in this volume). At least for one specific set of action forms (legal demonstrations and rallies), these allow a source containing probably approximately the whole population of events to be compared with the small subset of these events reported in the media.

Nevertheless, these studies' substantiation of the fact that newspapers are highly selective in reporting protest events is in itself no argument against using newspapers to study protest. On the contrary, as McCarthy, McPhail and Smith show, the number of participants is by far the most important determinant of the chance of a particular protest event to be reported in the press. Other effects, such as those of media attention cycles around specific protest issues, can also

10 Thus, the German Ministry of the Interior counts several thousand demonstrations each year, of which at most some 10% are reported in the national press (see Brand 1988: 181). Similarly, McCarthy, McPhail and Smith (1996) found that of all demonstrations registered with the police in Washington, D.C., only 4 and 8% were reported in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* respectively.

be detected, but "are dwarfed by the consequences of size on media coverage." Moreover, the magnitude of this effect of protest size is highly similar for the two newspapers as well as for the two years compared in this study (McCarthy, McPhail and Smith 1996: 492-493). In other words, newspapers are not selective in random ways, but in highly systematic ways related to actual characteristics of protest events. Such systematic newspaper biases do not infringe in any way upon the possibilities for drawing comparative conclusions of the more/less, growth/decline type from newspaper data. Moreover, to some extent this type of bias may even be considered a blessing for protest researchers. By drawing attention to important protests and underrepresenting the far larger number of relatively insignificant protests, newspaper-based protest data may well reflect the development of the magnitude of protest in a society more accurately than more complete sources that treat huge and tiny protests on an equal basis.

While, thus, for many purposes, the fact that newspapers are a selective source of data is not really problematic when one conducts a study focusing on one country, for cross-national studies the problem of selectivity is much more aggravating. The point in cross-national studies is that one not only works with selective sources, but that one wants to compare these selective sources with one another, without knowing whether they are selective to the same extent and in the same way.

Of course, it is possible to limit the seriousness of this problem to some extent by a careful selection of newspapers in the different countries, aiming for maximum comparability. For our study, we employed the following six criteria for selecting the four newspapers:

1. *Continuity*: First, each newspaper must have appeared continuously during the whole period under study, and, second, there should be no significant changes with regard to any of the other criteria.
2. *Frequency*: Because we decided to code only Monday issues, which report news events that have taken place during the two weekend days (see below), newspapers which also appear on Sundays had to be excluded.
3. *Quality*: They should be widely recognized as a high-quality source of information.
4. *National scope*: They should cover the entire national territory.
5. *Political color*: They should be roughly comparable in their political color, and should have neither very conservative nor extremely left-wing sympathies.
6. *Selectivity*: The newspapers' selectivity in reporting protest events should be comparable and not too high.

On the basis of these criteria, we ended up choosing the following four newspapers: the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR) for Germany, *Le Monde* for France, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) for Switzerland and the *NRC/Handelsblad* (NRC) for the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, as regards the important criterion of comparable selectivity, it was impossible to conduct direct tests to compare the bias of the newspapers chosen for the different countries, simply because their respective coverage is based on different facts. The only way to answer this question would be to conduct pretests and compare each newspaper with a more or less complete source (such as the police registration data alluded to above) in each of the countries. The problem here is that one would need the same kind of objective reference source, structured in the same way in each country, to conduct such a pretest. And here one runs into all the problems discussed above with regard to the cross-national comparison of official statistics (different definitions, methods of registration and classification, etc.), which is usually even more problematic than the comparison of newspapers. Thus, although the papers finally selected seemed roughly comparable as regards political color - from moderately left-wing (*Le Monde*, FR), to the center (NRC) and somewhat right of center (NZZ) - there was no way to know beforehand whether the four papers would really be comparable as regards selectivity.

It was, however, possible to conduct a limited and indirect selectivity test a posteriori. As Snyder and Kelly have demonstrated, the chances of a protest event being reported in a particular newspaper depend on two factors, the newspaper's sensitivity with regard to protest events, and the intensity of protest. They distinguish three determinants of intensity: Size, violence and duration (1977: 110). Novelty can be added as an additional determinant (Koopmans 1993). If different newspapers are equally sensitive to protest events, there should be no differences in the likelihood of events of the same intensity being reported. Legal and non-violent demonstrations and public assemblies are particularly suited to such a comparison because their intensity varies on only one dimension. They last no longer than one day, they are characterized by the same low level of militancy and, as a particularly traditional form of protest, they are unlikely to be reported because of their novelty. In other words, the intensity of demonstrations and public assemblies is simply a function of their size. If, then, the four newspapers are equally selective, demonstrations and assemblies of the same size should have the same likelihood of being covered in the four countries. Of course, we do not have data about those actions that were not reported in the newspapers, but the question can nevertheless be answered in an indirect way by looking at the frequency distribution of the number of participants in the demonstrations and assemblies that were reported.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Frequency Distribution of Participation in Demonstrations and Public Assemblies in France, Germany (Total and Hesse), the Netherlands and Switzerland

	Mean	Mode	Median	N =
France	11,237	500	1,000	838
Germany (total)	9,483	500	1,000	1,288
Hesse	3,497	500	500	482
The Netherlands	4,845	500	500	534
Switzerland	2,073	500	500	557

Table 1 presents the mean, mode and median of the number of participants for these events in each of the four countries. For Germany, the table additionally shows these measures for those events that took place in the *Bundesland* (state) of Hesse, where the *FR* is based. The mean is the least informative of these measures, because it is strongly influenced by relatively few very large demonstrations and assemblies, which are likely to be reported in any newspaper, no matter how selective it is. In Germany, for instance, the largest 1% of these events (150,000 participants or more) contributed 33%, and the largest 10% (15,000 or more) contributed 75% to the total number of participants. Precisely because the total volume of participation is so insensitive to newspaper selectivity, it is particularly suitable for comparing levels of social movement activity among countries (provided, of course, that it is related to the population size of a country).

The mode - the most frequently reported size - and the median - the size of the average reported demonstration or assembly - on the other hand, are more likely to reflect newspaper selectivity. Both measures may be expected to be higher if a newspaper is more selective, because a higher intensity will be required to reach its columns. As it turns out, no differences at all are found with regard to the mode. In all four countries, demonstrations or assemblies with 500 participants are those most frequently reported.¹¹

With regard to the median, however, there is a difference between the two larger and the two smaller countries. In France and Germany, the average reported demonstration or assembly has 1,000 participants, in Switzerland and the Netherlands 500. However, it is very likely that this difference is not due to differences in selectivity, but is related to the countries' sizes. The intensity of a particular demonstration size is likely to be lower in larger than in smaller polities; a demonstration of 300 in Switzerland may be as politically relevant

11 Moreover, the relative width of this category of demonstrations and assemblies is very comparable between the countries, it ranges from 12% of all events in France to 16% in the Netherlands.

and newsworthy as a demonstration of 3,000 in Germany. This argument can be checked by looking at the median for demonstrations and assemblies in Hesse. If the *Frankfurter Rundschau's* selectivity is comparable to that of the Dutch and Swiss newspapers, the median for those events taking place in the small-size polity of Hesse should be the same as that for Dutch and Swiss events. As the table shows, this is indeed the case. Thus, this indirect test suggests - though of course does not prove - that there are no large differences in the four newspapers' selectivity.

Sampling Protest Events

No researcher interested in the public's opinion on a certain subject would go door-to-door and interview each citizen individually. Of course, such a research strategy would produce very reliable results. However, provided that the sample is large enough, survey techniques can reach a level of reliability that is almost as high, with much less resource investment. Therefore, public opinion researchers agree that there are better ways of spending one's time, energy and resources than by investigating the whole population. As obvious as this may seem, sampling has not yet penetrated the field of protest event analysis, which is still characterized by "the fetish of thoroughness," as Tarrow has called it (1989: 363).¹²

Still, there is no reason why sampling could not be used equally well in the analysis of newspaper data on protest events. Our decision to sample was, to a significant extent, forced on us by the discrepancy between our ambitions and the limited resources available to us. Because we wanted to study protest events produced by any conceivable movement in four countries over a period of fifteen years, non-sampled data gathering would have required enormous investments, which we were unable to make. Moreover, the range of protest events we were interested in ensured that even a sampled data base would contain enough cases to allow for statistically relevant analyses.¹³

If one decides to sample, several options are possible. The method that is closest to the methodology of surveys, is to draw a random sample of newspapers to be coded. A similar, but more practical, method is to draw a

12 Tarrow regretfully remarks: "Had we sampled events, we might have had more time and resources available to devote to studying their environment, and in this way learned more about their dynamics than by recording each event" (1989: 363).

13 This implies that sampling is not always a viable option. If one is interested in a limited range of phenomena (a short period, one movement, etc.) sampling is both less necessary and less adequate, because it will probably result in too few cases to be analyzed. Our sampled data base, however, was sufficiently large, comprising 9,022 events.

sample not of individual newspapers but of months or weeks, of which all newspapers are coded (see, for example, Tilly 1978). Although such methods of random selection seem at first sight to be most appropriate, they fail to appreciate an important difference between protest events and human individuals as units of analysis. In survey research, each individual's opinion or characteristics are of equal importance, and thus a random selection method is most appropriate. Protest events, however, are not all of the same value; they have varying intensities, and their importance to politicians, to movement activists, to the media, as well as to researchers differs widely. In fact, as argued above, the coverage of newspapers already constitutes a non-random selection of protest events based to a large extent on the criterion of intensity. Thus, when sampling protest events, the question arises whether one should sample randomly, or whether the selection method should take into account differences in intensity.

Examples of the latter type of sampling can be found in the literature. Tilly, for instance, used violent events as "a biased but useful tracer of collective action in general." Within this category, he sampled on intensity as well, as only those violent events with at least 50 participants were included (1978: 245, 251).

The results of our project cast some doubt upon the usefulness of violent events as an indicator for the development of protest at large. If we had focussed on violent events we would probably have overestimated the level of protest in France and underestimated social movement activity in Switzerland, simply as a result of the fact that the share of violent events in total social movement activity differs strongly among countries (see Kriesi et al. 1992). Similarly, violence can only to a limited extent be used to trace the development of social movement activity within a country because violence often increases in periods when the general level of activity declines (see Koopmans 1993). Most importantly, this sampling method does not allow one to investigate one of the most interesting topics in protest development: Shifts over time and differences among movements and countries as regards action repertoires. In other words, violence as an indicator is not so much "biased but useful" as, for most purposes, too biased to be useful.

The main problem with choosing violence as an indicator is that it represents only one element of intensity. Theoretically, an intensity-directed sample should take into account militancy, size (possibly in combination with duration), as well as novelty. The problem, of course, is that these three elements cannot be related to each other in any meaningful way. We could, for instance, decide to include demonstrations only if their size exceeds a certain maximum, say 1,000 (cf. Tilly 1978: 247). But what is the equivalent of such a

size in terms of militancy or novelty? Attempts to solve this insoluble problem will always be arbitrary.¹⁴

Summing up, random sampling has the advantage of methodological straightforwardness, but will also lead to the exclusion of many important protest events from the sample. Sampling on intensity has the theoretical advantage of including all important events in the sample, but is practically impossible to implement in a consistent way.

Our decision to concentrate on Monday issues constitutes a compromise between these two options.¹⁵ A first, pragmatic, reason to choose Monday newspapers is that they cover the news from two days, Saturday and Sunday. Thus, with the same investment in time and resources, Monday issues allow one to trace substantially more information than other issues. Second, the weekend is a particularly popular time for some of the most important forms of protest mobilization. Because the political and media impact of moderate forms of mobilization such as marches and rallies depend on the "power of numbers" (De Nardo 1985), mass mobilization events are often organized during the weekend, when more people have time to protest. However, it is clear that the weekend is not the most popular time for all forms of protest. Most importantly, this is true for labor strikes, which by definition take place on workdays. To a lesser extent, the weekend may also be less suitable for detecting conventional actions - particularly juridical action, which almost never takes place during the weekend - which may be expected to follow to some extent the rhythm of conventional politics in general, i.e. to be concentrated during weekdays. Other action forms may be expected to be neither overrepresented nor underrepresented on weekend days. This will especially be the case for forms of severe violence (bombings, for instance) that depend on the involvement of very few people, and, more in general, for radical (confrontational and violent) actions, which are - at least in Western Europe - often based on a constituency of students and unemployed youth, whose availability for protest activities will not depend very much on the day of the week.

A small pretest conducted for Germany for eight weeks in 1986 confirmed these expectations. First, this test showed that the Monday issues included a sizeable share, about a third, of the total number of protest events reported. Second, strikes, conventional actions and heavy violence were relatively more

14 An example of a - not very selective and therefore not so problematic - attempt to solve this problem is Tarrow's decision to code only those actions with at least 20 participants or in which violence occurs (1989: 359).

15 If, for whatever reason (public holiday, strike, etc.), no Monday issue was available for a particular week, coders were instructed to code the first subsequent issue of the newspaper.

frequently reported in non-Monday issues. On this basis, we made two decisions.

First, we decided to exclude labor strikes from the sample, even in the few cases in which they were reported in the Monday paper. Although - following the above argument that a systematic bias does not preclude the detection of trends and differences - we considered a certain amount of Monday bias not to be problematic, it was clear to us that for labor strikes the representativeness of the weekend would be so low as to make the data useless for this type of mobilization. In addition, our primary interest was in the new social movements, which do not use this action form (apart from a few very exceptional cases such as a short work-stoppage organized by the German and Dutch unions within the framework of the campaign against medium-range nuclear weapons). Finally, in as far as we needed information about the level of strike activity as a context variable for new social movement mobilization, we could rely on the available official data on labor strikes.

Second, we concluded that the choice for Monday issues would not ensure that all important actions would be included in the sample. We could be quite certain to capture the vast majority of large-scale actions, such as mass demonstrations, but we would probably miss many important actions of a more conventional or more radical nature. Therefore, we decided to broaden the range of actions to be coded by including all actions that were referred to in the Monday paper, and which had taken place during the preceding week, or would take place in the following week. For instance, an action that had taken place on Thursday could be referred to in several ways: In an article that mentioned the release of those arrested during the action; in a report on a demonstration demanding the release of those arrested; in statements by politicians referring to the action; in a press release by an organization claiming responsibility for the event; in a report on the closing event of an action campaign, etc. Similarly, the Monday issue sometimes contained information referring to an event that would be taking place on one of the following days: In published announcements or advertisements by SMOs; in statements made by the authorities (who, for instance, could express their fears that the action would get out of hand); in articles on preparatory actions or meetings held by movement activists; in articles reporting the opening event of an action campaign, etc. In all these cases, the coders were instructed to consult, if necessary, the newspaper (or newspapers) in which the event (or campaign) to which the Monday issue referred was reported to find additional information.¹⁶

16 Any events which were reported in other issues, but to which no reference was made in the Monday paper, were to be ignored, no matter how important they might seem to the coder.

Although this strategy significantly increased the amount of time needed for coding (particularly for those periods in which the level of protest activity was very high), we considered this to be a worthwhile investment because it would substantially lower both the Monday bias and, more importantly, the chances that we would miss high-intensity events. Indeed, our sample seems to include the large majority of important events. For instance, of the 57 actions (for the period 1975 to 1988) reported in Rucht's listing of important protest events in West Germany (1989: 340-344), 52, or 91%, are represented in our sample.

Table 2: Weekend and Non-Weekend Events by Action Form
(Germany, 1982 and 1986, excluding conventional events)*

	Weekend days	Non-weekend days
Demonstrative	72.5%	52.8%
Confrontational	11.8%	25.8%
Light violence	6.1%	3.3%
Heavy violence	9.6%	18.0%
Total	100%	100%
N =	313	89
(100%)	(77.9%)	(22.1%)

* We have presented figures only for two years of the West German sample, because the day of the week was unfortunately not included among the coded variables. The day thus had to be determined from the date, which was too labor-intensive to do for the whole sample.

Table 2 gives an impression of both the number of non-weekend events included in the sample as a result of our method of tracing references, and of the differences between these events and those actions that took place during the weekend. As the table shows, our sample contains a substantial number of events (some 20 to 25%) that did not take place during the weekend. These events were on average more radical than weekend actions, which were to a large extent of the moderate, demonstrative type.

The fact that non-weekend events are still strongly underrepresented in our sample implies that our data cannot be used to infer the "true" distribution of protest events over the different strategies (but, as argued above, this is true for all data based on newspapers). However, because this bias is systematic, it is not likely to affect trends over time and differences between countries. Again, the fact that there are substantial differences between weekend and non-weekend events is in itself not problematic for comparative purposes.¹⁷ This

17 Thus, Rucht's conclusion that "it is likely that Kriesi et al. have underestimated the actual activity of the labor movement, and correspondingly, overestimated that of new social movements simply due to their concentration on Monday issues as a data source" (1996: 14) is probably correct. Nevertheless, it misses the point, since we never pretended - and

would only be so if we had reason to believe that the weekend bias varies over time or across countries, for instance because during an earlier period the Saturday was still a working day or because there have been significant changes in newspaper deadlines during the period under study.

The Robustness of Protest Event Data

Still, the question remains whether the pragmatic optimism that pervades the preceding pages is really warranted. The problems of selectivity and bias involved in taking newspapers as a data source make many researchers skeptical about the reliability and validity of this method. Does one not get entirely different results depending on which newspaper or newspapers one takes and on which sampling strategy one employs? This question can be addressed by comparing our data for Germany with those gathered in the context of the Prodat project at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB), which also focuses on protests in Germany, and also includes the period 1975 through 1989 (see Rucht and Neidhardt in this volume). This project differs significantly from ours, both as regards the sources and the sampling method used.

1. Prodat is based on two newspapers, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, whereas we only used the *FR*.
2. We also coded the regional and local sections of the paper, while Prodat's coding was limited to the national sections of the two papers.
3. Prodat is based on a sample of all Monday newspapers, but also all issues of every fourth week, while we relied solely on Monday issues.
4. Whereas we coded all events reported in the Monday paper and traced all references to events one week backward or forward, Prodat strictly limited itself to selected "event-days" (i.e. all Saturdays and Sundays as well as all days of every fourth week).

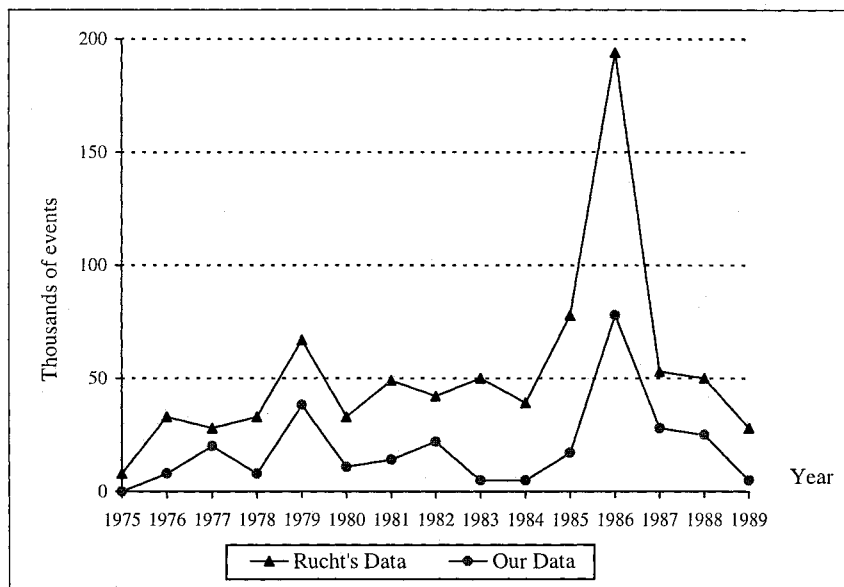
In spite of these substantive differences, however, a comparison of the development of the number of protest events in the 1980s in both projects yields highly similar results. The correlation between the two curves is as high as 0.94,

would advise anyone using newspaper data not to pretend - that our percentages are true in any absolute sense. What our data show, among other things, is that NSMs are a much more important actor within the social movement sector in Germany than in France, and that their mobilization increased in the 1980s in Germany while at the same time it decreased in France. Had we coded all newspaper issues, we would certainly have found different absolute levels than we found on the basis of Monday issues alone. However, we have no reason to believe - and comparison with other sources has thus far confirmed this expectation - that our comparative conclusions relating to differences across countries and periods would have been any different.

and every year-to-year change in the level of protest goes in the same direction in both data sets.¹⁸ In other words, despite the fact that not only were different coders used, but also different sources and different samples, the inter-project reliability easily fulfills the methodological standard for within-project inter-coder reliability.

Similarly encouraging results can be derived from a comparison of data collected by Dieter Rucht on protest events produced by the anti-nuclear energy movement in Germany and our data (see Rucht 1994: 452). Again, Rucht's data have been gathered in a very different way than our data. Rucht aimed for a data set as inclusive as possible, and therefore used a wide variety of sources, including newspapers, the scientific literature and movement journals. As a result, the number of protests is substantially higher than in our data set (789 versus 301 [38%] for 1975 to 1989).

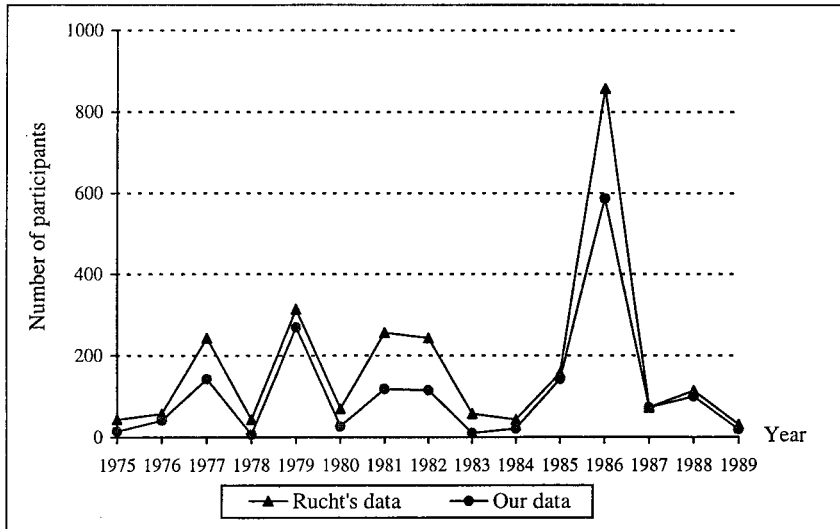
Figure 1: Number of Anti-Nuclear Protests, 1975 to 1989



18 I thank Dieter Rucht for letting me use Prodat results. The correlation was computed excluding the labor movement. Obviously, for this movement a substantial difference between the two data sets exists, since we did not code strikes (as a result, labor movement events comprise about 19% of Prodat events and only 4% of our events).

A comparison of the number of participants in these events, shows, however, that, despite the higher total number of protests in Rucht's data set, our sample is much more inclusive when it comes to high-intensity events. Thus, the aggregate number of participants in our data is 65% of that in Rucht's data.

Figure 2: Number of Participants in Anti-Nuclear Protests, 1975 to 1989



As Figures 1 and 2 above show, both for the development of the number of events and for the number of participants, the two data sets, despite the very different ways in which they have been gathered, yield highly similar results. Moreover, as Table 3 shows, the same is true for the distribution of events over various strategies, which is strikingly similar in both data sets. Thus, again, a level of reliability is reached which easily satisfies strict methodological criteria.¹⁹

¹⁹ A further example for the high reliability and validity of newspaper data is presented by Koopmans and Rucht (1996) in a study on extreme right mobilization in Germany in the early 1990s, for which two newspaper data sets using different samples and sources were used. The intercorrelation of the monthly number of acts of extreme right violence between 1990 and 1992 in the two data sets turned out to be as high as 0.98. Moreover, both data sets correlated more than 0.90 with police data on extreme right violence, despite the fact that the latter data comprised a more than ten times as high number of events.

Table 3: Distribution of Anti-Nuclear Movement Protests by Strategies

	Our data	Rucht's data
Demonstrative	70.8%	69.4%
Confrontational	20.3%	18.6%
Violent	9.0%	11.9%
Total	100.1%	99.9%
N =	301	789

We may conclude then that, despite all the problems of selectivity and bias one can think of at the theoretical level, the method of gathering protest events through newspapers seems much more robust, reliable and replicable than one might think. Moreover, these results support the idea that the field of protest studies is no exception to the rule that a sound method of sampling can produce reliable results.

In addition, these comparisons show that one does not necessarily need to use a multitude of sources to get reliable results, and that differences between sources are not as large as one tends to think. Of course, there is no denying that non-sampled data sets based on a multitude of sources will, all other things being equal, produce more reliable and valid results. The available evidence suggests, however, that for most intents and purposes the gain is relatively marginal when compared to lean designs and may not weigh up against the price to be paid for thoroughness - which not only comes in the form of time and research funds, but especially in the form of hindering the spread of an innovation that has the potential to dramatically improve the empirical foundations for research and theorizing on protest.

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