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# From Protest to Organization

## *The Impact of the 1960 Sit-Ins on Movement Organizations in the American South*

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For the past three decades, scholars of social movements have debated whether collective protest is the product of prior organization, as predicted by resource mobilization and political process theories. In this chapter, we consider the other side of this relationship: whether the diffusion of protest leads to the growth of movement organizations. This tackles the third question posed by Givan, Roberts, and Soule in the introduction to this volume: What is the impact of diffusion? This question is rarely asked, as studies of diffusion devote much greater attention to the onset and spread of innovations than to their long-term consequences (Soule 2004; Strang and Soule 1998). Although the consequences of the diffusion of protest for movement organization have attracted remarkably little attention, various theories converge on the prediction that the effect will be positive. People drawn into protest are available to be recruited as new members, and activists have reason to consolidate the enthusiasm of defiance by expanding existing organizations or founding new ones.

This chapter considers a historically and theoretically influential case: the 1960 sit-ins by black college students in the American South. The sit-ins have been credited with revitalizing a civil rights struggle that had been floundering in the late 1950s. Local campaigns were set in motion, new leaders emerged, established organizations increased their efforts, and a new organization was created – the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Using data on 334 cities in the American South, we investigate whether cities where sit-ins occurred were more likely to experience organizational expansion, measured by membership growth or the establishment of local affiliates or representatives. Various organizations are considered: the venerable National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), including its youth councils and college chapters, and three organizations that took the form of activist

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networks – the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and SNCC. Our analysis controls for each city's organizational ecology on the eve of the sit-ins as well as its sociopolitical characteristics, thus enabling us to isolate the impact of protest on subsequent organization.

The chapter begins by reviewing the literature on the relationship between protest and organization. The second section sketches the historical context of the 1960 sit-ins. Qualitative evidence shows that CORE and SCLC, in particular, were keenly aware of the opportunities provided by the rapid diffusion of protest. The third section describes the data used in the quantitative analysis. Considering the South as a whole, it is surprising that aggregate figures reveal no substantial increase in membership and no great expansion of organizational presence for existing organizations. Results from our analysis of 334 cities are presented in the fourth section. Again, the results are surprising: Controlling for prior organizational ecology and sociopolitical characteristics, the occurrence of sit-ins had no discernible positive effect on subsequent organization growth or expansion. These unexpected results are scrutinized in the final section, in which we address the implications of our findings.

## THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

Scholars of social movements seek to explain two distinct but related phenomena: collective protest or contention and formal organization. There are many empirical analyses of the diffusion of movement organization, generally the formation of local affiliates of existing organizations (e.g., Biggs 2003; Conell 1988; Conell and Voss 1990; Hedström 1994; Hedström et al. 2000; Voss 1988, 1993). Likewise, there are many analyses of the diffusion of protest (e.g., Andrews and Biggs 2006; Biggs 2005; Conell and Cohn 1995; Myers 1997, 2000; Soule 1997). Controlling for variation in sociopolitical characteristics, these studies consistently demonstrate "positive feedback": The occurrence of protest in one place (in geographical or social space) makes the occurrence of protest nearby more likely; the formation of an organization in one place makes the formation of another nearby more likely. The relationship between protest and organization, however, is rarely analyzed empirically. This omission may be due in part to differing time scales: waves of protest unfold over weeks or months, whereas organizations expand over years.

One side of the relationship between protest and organization has been the subject of theoretical controversy: the effect of movement organization on collective protest. Reacting against theories that viewed protest as a consequence of social disintegration, scholars in the political process and resource mobilization traditions (e.g., Shorter and Tilly 1974; McAdam 1982) originally argued that organization was a necessary condition for protest. Such arguments tended to conflate preexisting social networks with formal movement organizations. Against this view, Piven and Cloward (1977) contended that movement organizations – at least bureaucratic organizations that focused on recruiting a mass

membership – stifled rather than stimulated collective protest. The controversy is illustrated by the debate over the role of movement organizations in the wave of sit-ins that occurred in 1960 (Killian 1984; Oberschall 1989; Morris 1981, 1984; Polletta 1998). Our event-history analysis of this episode found only modest positive effects of organization on protest (Andrews and Biggs 2006). In a similar analysis, unionization had no effect on strikes by French coal miners from 1890 to 1935 (Conell and Cohn 1995).

The other side of the relationship – the effect of collective protest on movement organization – has attracted far less attention. Scattered remarks suggest a theoretical consensus that protest helps to build organization, at least when protesters remain optimistic about the prospect of success and when repression is relatively modest. According to Piven and Cloward (1977: xx), "activists' conviction that formal organization is a vehicle of power" leads them to recruit protesters as members of movement organizations – although Piven and Cloward view that conviction as an illusion. To similar effect, McAdam (1982: 147) argues that "the ad hoc groups and informal committees that typically coordinate the movement at its outset are ill-equipped to direct an ongoing campaign of social protest." Therefore, we should expect "formal movement organizations . . . to replace indigenous institutions as the dominant organizational force within the movement."

Different theoretical perspectives converge on the hypothesis that collective protest has a positive effect on movement organizations. It is worth distinguishing three different sorts of positive effect.[1] One is the founding of new movement organizations. Another is the formation of additional local affiliates of existing organizations. This is important because an organization composed of multiple local units spread across the country is likely to behave very differently from an organization consisting of a single headquarters (Skocpol 2004). A third effect is growth in the membership of movement organizations. Are such positive effects of protest on organization confirmed by empirical analysis? A crucial methodological point is that such effects can be identified only by controlling for prior organization – because prior organization may also affect protest (even if the precise effect is a matter of dispute, as we have seen). In other words, we need to estimate the effect of protest at time $t$ on organization at time $t + 1$, controlling for organization at time $t - 1$ as well as for sociopolitical variables at time $t - 1$.

One promising domain of investigation is the relationship between strikes and union membership, because lengthy time series are available. Qualitative explorations of the relationship suggest that strike waves often precede an influx of union members (Cronin 1989; Franzosi 1995). In a quantitative analysis of the United States and France from 1880 to 1914, Friedman (1998: 37–42) suggests a strong positive effect, but this finding seems to be a statistical

[1] This does not exhaust the possible positive effects; another would be an influx of financial resources (e.g., Jenkins and Eckert 1986).

artifact.[2] Curiously, the most convincing demonstration of a positive effect on unionization does not involve strikes: Isaac et al. (2006) show that "New Left" protest (encompassing the civil rights, feminist, and antiwar movements) increased the membership of public sector unions in the United States from 1950 to 1981. Turning from membership to organizational founding, Minkoff has collected data on movement organizations in the United States from 1955 and 1985. A series of analyses find that collective protest had a *negative* effect on organizational founding for the civil rights movement (Minkoff 1995; Meyer and Minkoff 2004) and had no statistically significant effect for the women's movement (Minkoff 1997).[3] These analyses control for prior organizational density.

Taken together, these empirical findings are curious. There is little evidence that collective protest has a positive effect on movement organization. Indeed, for organizational founding the opposite holds: More protest leads to fewer new organizations. Thus far the empirical data examined have been aggregated at the national level. Data disaggregated into spatial units such as cities provide greater analytical leverage, because we can investigate whether places where protest occurred were more likely to have membership growth or to form local affiliates than places without protest. The proliferation of local affiliates of a movement organization is also a substantively important process to investigate.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The sit-ins that spread across the South in the spring of 1960 constitute an especially relevant case for studying the relationship between protest and organization. By mobilizing thousands of activists across the South to engage in disruptive protest, the sit-ins struck participants and observers at the time as a watershed moment. This view has been endorsed by sociologists. Morris, for example, sums up this episode as the "origins of a decade of disruption" (1984: 195). McAdam and Sewell argue that the first sit-in in Greensboro,

[2] Friedman analyzes union growth as a function of the "quasi-striker ratio" (this year's strikers divided by last year's members), so the basic model is:

$$\frac{M_t}{M_{t-1}} = a + b\frac{S_t}{M_{t-1}} + e_t$$

where M stands for union members and S for workers involved in strikes. The dependent and independent variables share the same denominator, and so the model can be rewritten:

$$M_t = a\,M_{t-1} + bS_t + e_t\,M_{t-1}$$

The model's fit stems from the fact that last year's union membership is a good predictor of this year's, irrespective of the effect of strikes.

[3] Using Minkoff's data, Olzak and Ryo (2007) found that protest in the prior year has a positive and significant effect on the tactical and goal diversity of the population of civil rights organizations.

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North Carolina was a "transformative event," exemplifying the way in which "very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects" (2001: 102). The sit-ins, they claim, "revitalized all of the major civil rights organizations" and "the impact [on the movement] was as dramatic as the event itself was unpredictable" (ibid.: 108).

A brief historical sketch sets the scene for our analysis. The sit-in tactic – physically occupying space reserved for whites only – had been pioneered by activists associated with CORE and NAACP youth councils in the 1940s and 1950s, primarily in border states and the upper South (Meier and Rudwick 1973; Morris 1981). However, these early efforts failed to inspire large-scale protest, because they received little media coverage and they were geographically distant from the concentrations of black college students in the South. On Monday, February 1, 1960, four freshmen at Greensboro's North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College occupied the lunch counter of Woolworth's (Chafe 1980; Wolff 1970). The initial event involved minimal planning and no involvement of movement organizations. The store manager decided to ignore the protesters, rather than having them removed or arrested. When the store closed, the students promised to return the following day, and when they arrived back on campus, they found "a beehive of activity" (Raines 1977: 79). Students turned to Dr. George Simkins, president of the Greensboro branch of the NAACP, who contacted the national office of CORE about providing assistance to the students. Simkins recalled that he "thought the organization [CORE] might be more experienced at the sort of operation under way," having recently read a CORE pamphlet about sit-ins in Baltimore (Powledge 1991: 201, Wolff 1970: 35–6). The size of the protest grew throughout the week culminating in a major protest the following Saturday with hundreds of students. That evening a mass meeting of sixteen hundred students decided to suspend protest for the purpose of "negotiation and study" (Chafe 1980: 88).

By then, the confrontation in Greensboro had drawn the attention of students elsewhere. Sit-ins spread quickly in the following week to other North Carolina cities and then onward to cities in Florida, South Carolina, and Virginia. By mid-April protest had occurred in more than sixty cities in every Southern state except Mississippi. In a previous article (Andrews and Biggs 2006), we investigated the diffusion of protest across 334 Southern cities in the ten weeks following February 1. Our analysis demonstrates that the key determinant of protest was the number of black college students. Movement organizations facilitated protest, primarily through cadres of activists in CORE and NAACP college chapters; the membership of NAACP and the presence of SCLC was not significant. News media played an important role in the diffusion of protest by circulating information about sit-ins in nearby cities.

Shortly after the first protest began in Greensboro, the sit-ins activated leaders and organizers connected to formal movement organizations. Both NAACP and CORE sent representatives to North Carolina to support student protesters. For example, CORE contacted its local chapters barely a week after

the first sit-in, reporting on the efforts of two field secretaries to assist students in North Carolina and urging members to contact Woolworth's national office and to organize sympathy picket lines.[4] Two weeks after Greensboro, student leaders met in Durham with established civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King (Meier and Rudwick 1973). Thus, within two weeks of the initiating event, the major civil rights organizations had sent leaders to North Carolina to observe and support the emerging protest movement. CORE fieldworkers, in particular, spent the spring traveling to cities where protest had been initiated to organize training workshops in the techniques of nonviolence (ibid.). The national organizations also attempted to mobilize support among their members and local affiliates. NAACP and CORE sent letters to local affiliates encouraging them to support the sit-ins by organizing sympathy pickets, boycotting national chain stores that had segregated lunch counters in the South, and writing to chain stores to express opposition to segregation.

Civil rights organizations directed new resources toward sustaining the sit-in campaigns. For example, CORE hired Len Holt, an attorney from Norfolk, Virginia, as a new field secretary in mid-April; he worked with activists in cities such as Memphis and Tallahassee.[5] The field staff grew from two to five full-time field secretaries by April (Meier and Rudwick 1973). During the spring, CORE received inquiries about establishing local chapters in Durham and Atlanta,[6] but the staff was too focused on the protest already under way to shift attention toward building local affiliates. By summer, CORE's field director, Gordon Carey, appears to have been less distracted by the demands of sit-in campaigns. He traveled to multiple cities seeking to establish contacts and lay the foundation for local chapters.[7]

Like CORE, SCLC did not have a sustained program for building local affiliates. Wyatt T. Walker, SCLC's executive director, advocated strongly for a staff position and resources for this purpose, but he reported in 1961 that the "growth of the affiliate program was arrested due to a shortage of personnel and the two great crises of the past year, the jailing of Dr. King and the Freedom Ride. There has simply been no opportunity to do what needed to be done."[8] As with CORE, the desire to build local affiliates was circumscribed by the exigencies of sustaining a protest campaign.

[4] Memo to all CORE groups and members of the Advisory Committee from Marvin Rich, February 9, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 26.

[5] Letter from Carey to Wyckoff, February 26, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 40; Carey to Fullerton, March 18, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 42.

[6] Letter from Carey to Martha and Peter Klopfer, February 26, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 42; Letter from Robinson to Wyckoff, March 1, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 40.

[7] Report on Florida Contacts and Field Work, Gordon R. Carey, July 28, 1960, CORE Papers, Reel 40.

[8] Report of the Director, October 1960–September 1961, delivered at the Annual Convention, September 20, 1961, SCLC Papers, Part 3, Reel 8; for a detailed description of SCLC's plans for a larger affiliate program, see Memo to Wyatt Tee Walker, Staff Expansion, October 23, 1961, SCLC Papers, Part 2, Reel 13.

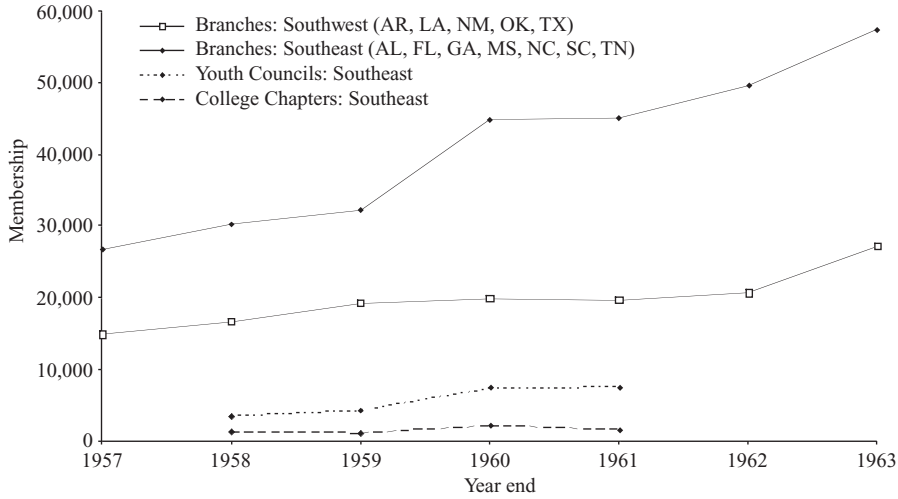


FIGURE 10.1. NAACP Membership in the South, 1957–1963

The most direct organizational legacy of the sit-ins was the establishment of SNCC, which emerged from a conference of student activists held at Shaw University in April 1960. The Shaw conference was organized by Ella Baker, SCLC's executive director at the time. Given SCLC's sponsorship of the conference and King's role as keynote speaker, SCLC was in a key position to shape the organizational direction of the sit-in movement. However, Baker herself urged the students toward establishing an independent organization – an outcome that was far from certain (Carson 1981). At the time, she famously wrote in the *Southern Patriot* about the "frustration and the disillusionment that comes when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay" – a thinly veiled critique of King and his leadership style (Ransby 2003: 245).

All the established civil rights organizations played active roles in supporting the 1960 sit-ins. Nevertheless, the impact of that experience on the growth and expansion of movement organization remains unclear. On one hand, staff and resources were mobilized, and staff inevitably came into contact with hundreds of newly committed young activists. On the other hand, the demands of responding to the emerging movement in 1960 and beyond may have undercut the opportunities to institutionalize protest by recruiting new members and establishing new local affiliates. To determine the impacts of the sit-ins, we turn to our empirical analysis.

## DATA

NAACP was the largest and longest established civil rights organization. It recruited members into local branches, and also two separate types of local affiliates (with separate membership): youth councils and college chapters. Figure 10.1

TABLE 10.1. *Movement Organizations in 334 Southern Cities, 1959–1962*

| **Total Membership** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | End of 1959 | End of 1960 | End of 1961 |
| NAACP Branches | 70,265 | 82,682 | 79,597 |
| **Number of cities with:** | | | |
| | End of 1959 | +1960 charter | +1961 charter |
| NAACP youth council | 117 | 131 | 140 |
| NAACP college chapter | 13 | 16 | 18 |
| | Early Feb 1960 | | Dec 1961/Feb 1962 |
| SCLC presence | 22 | | 30 |
| | End of 1959 | Nov 1960 | June 1962 |
| CORE chapter | 12 | 16 | 22 |
| | | Oct 1960 | |
| SNCC delegate | | 39 | |

depicts membership at year end.[9] At the end of 1959, on the eve of the sit-ins, branches in the South had 51,539 members. A year later, membership had increased by 26 percent, to 64,690. By comparison, there had been a 10 percent increase from 1958 to 1959. Youth councils and college chapters should be especially important because students were disproportionately involved in the sit-ins. Membership returns for these units are fragmentary, so it is possible to reconstruct time series only for the Southeast. In 1960, membership in youth councils increased by 70 percent, from 4,347 to 7,384, whereas college chapter membership doubled, from 1,040 to 2,161. In all three series, growth was not sustained in the following year, and indeed, college membership fell by almost a quarter from 1961 to 1962.

For quantitative analysis, we focus on 334 Southern cities with a population of at least ten thousand and a black population of at least one thousand.[10] Table 10.1 shows the extent of organization before the sit-ins occurred and at two later points. We consider two points in time to check whether organizational expansion in the aftermath of the protest wave was sustained over the longer term. NAACP branch membership approximates the trends shown in Figure 10.1.[11] For youth councils and college chapters, we measured whether they were present in each city at the end of 1959.[12] Because of the paucity of membership returns in the following years, we measure newly chartered councils or chapters during 1960 and 1961. These are used to estimate the number

[9] The NAACP's Southeast and Southwest regions are not coterminous with the Southern states in our analysis. This difference in geographical coverage explains why the membership figures in Table 10.1 are higher.

[10] We include states of the former Confederacy plus Maryland, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

[11] Some branches encompassed a county rather than a city. When the county contributed more than one city to our dataset, the membership is distributed evenly between those cities.

[12] There are no extant returns for youth councils or college chapters for 1959 from Kentucky, Maryland, and West Virginia; for these states we have used the returns for 1958.

of cities with at least one youth council or college chapter, respectively.[13] Youth councils and college chapters alike expanded modestly after the sit-ins.

Unlike NAACP, the other civil rights organizations did not focus on recruiting members. CORE, SCLC, and SNCC were essentially networks of activists. Again, we measure whether each organization was present in the city. For SCLC, this is defined as the existence of a local affiliate (usually a church) or the residence of someone on the executive board. Unfortunately, there are no reliably dated lists of affiliates from the eve of the sit-ins until the beginning of 1962.[14] Over that period, SCLC expanded by just over a third, from 22 to 30 cities. For CORE, presence is defined by the existence of an affiliated chapter (or one in the process of applying for affiliation). CORE expanded steadily from the eve of the sit-ins to late 1960, and then again to mid-1962, almost doubling the number of chapters from 12 to 22 over the entire period. SNCC was formally founded at a conference in Atlanta in October 1960. Delegates came from 39 cities, giving this fledgling organization a greater geographical extent than either SCLC or CORE.

Leaving aside SNCC, these aggregate figures do not suggest that the wave of sit-ins in 1960 had a dramatic impact on established organizations. To further assess the impact of the sit-ins, we analyze cross-sectional variation across cities. There are two types of dependent variables. One is the organization's membership in the city, which is applicable only to NAACP. The other is a dichotomous variable for the organization's presence in the city. Statistical models are estimated for the membership or presence of each organization at one or two points after the sit-ins of spring 1960.

The key independent variable is a dichotomous variable for the occurrence of a sit-in, defined as the physical occupation of space from which blacks were excluded (usually a dining facility), at any time between February 1 and April 14, 1960. These ten weeks encompass the rapid diffusion of sit-ins across the South; sit-ins occurred in 66 of the 334 cities. Only a few additional cities experienced sit-ins in succeeding weeks, and there was a general hiatus of protest over the summer vacation. Aggregate time series data on movement

[13] This is not the same as the total number of affiliates, because a few cities had more than one, as, for example, where there were multiple colleges.

[14] In a previous article (Andrews and Biggs 2006), we used a list of affiliates apparently dating from February 3, 1960 ("Affiliate List," Folder: Directory, 1960, SCLC Papers, Part 2, Reel 13). On further scrutiny, we consider the second part of this list to be an entirely separate document, from a later date (quite possibly after 1962). The variable we used therefore exaggerated the extent of SCLC (as present in 34 cities). Fortunately, the corrected variable (22 cities) makes very little difference to the results. SCLC presence now has no effect (whereas before the effect was substantial but not statistically significant). The same error also entered an article (Biggs 2006) on individual participation in the sit-ins. The corrected variable now has no effect on protest (whereas before the effect was strong and statistically significant), although it still has a positive effect on NAACP membership. This correction strengthens that article's main finding, that frequent church attendance made protest less likely. Corrected tables are available at http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/1960.shtml and http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/1960survey.shtml.

activity also indicate the abrupt decline of protest following the spring of 1960 (McAdam 1983: 739). Needless to say, this variable does not capture subsequent sit-ins, and this limitation should be emphasized especially for our analyses of organization at the end of 1961 or in 1962. The variable is strictly a measure of the *initial* wave of confrontational protest.

There are two further sets of independent variables. One set pertain to the city's organizational ecology on the eve of the sit-ins: NAACP branch membership (square root) and dichotomous variables for the presence of an NAACP youth council, an NAACP college chapter, SCLC, and CORE.[15] Another set of independent variables capture sociopolitical characteristics likely to affect both collective protest and movement organization.[16] The resources and autonomy of the black community are measured by the male unemployment rate and the percentage of the male labor force relegated to unskilled occupations. Political opportunities are measured by four variables: the presence of the Southern Regional Council (SRC), an organization promoting interracial cooperation; the percentage of blacks in the county, which is often used as a proxy for the degree of repression exercised by whites; the existence of a state poll tax, used to disenfranchise blacks; location in the Deep South, where repression was more severe. There are also two demographic variables: the number of black students enrolled in college (logged), and the black population (logged).

## RESULTS

Table 10.2 summarizes the results of the statistical models, identifying those coefficients that are statistically significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level. (See Appendix Tables for detailed results.[17]) In Models 1A and 1B, the dependent variable is membership of the regular NAACP branch (as in Table 10.1), so negative binomial regression is used. The other models use logistic regression. In Models 2A and 2B, the dependent variable is whether an NAACP youth council was newly chartered in the city during 1960 (26 cities) and 1961 (34 cities), respectively.[18] The latter model drops thirteen observations, because the presence of a college chapter in 1959 perfectly predicts the absence of newly chartered youth councils in 1961. Model 3 is the same for NAACP college chapters; the years 1960 and 1961 are combined because of the small numbers (11 cities). In the remaining models, the dependent variable is simply organizational presence (as in Table 10.1).

[15] NAACP branch membership is transformed by taking the square root because we expect a diminishing marginal effect; a logarithmic transformation is not appropriate because many cities have zero members.

[16] For explication of these independent variables, see Andrews and Biggs 2006.

[17] In Appendix Tables 10B and 10C, each model's ability to discriminate between cities with and without organizational presence is measured by the area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve, which can range from 0.5 (no discrimination) to 1 (perfect discrimination).

[18] Note that the returns did not distinguish the "rechartering" of lapsed units from the chartering of new ones, but the former were a small minority.

TABLE 10.2. *Determinants of Organizational Presence and Membership*

| | NAACP Branch Members | | Youth Council | | College Chapter |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | End of 1960<br>1A | End of 1961<br>1B | 1960 Charter<br>2A | 1961 Charter<br>2B | 1960–61 Charter<br>3 |
| NAACP branch members, end of 1959 (√) | + | + | | | |
| NAACP youth council, end of 1959 | + | | + | + | + |
| NAACP college chapter, end of 1959 | | | | N/A | |
| SCLC presence, early Feb 1960 | | | | | |
| CORE, end of 1959 | | | | | |
| Black population (logged) | | | | + | |
| Black college students (logged) | | | | | + |
| Black % of county | | | | | |
| Poll tax in state | | | | − | |
| Deep South | | | | | |
| Sit-in, spring 1960 | | | | | |

| | SCLC Presence | CORE Chapter | | SNCC Delegate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Dec 1961/Feb 1962<br>4 | Nov 1960<br>5A | June 1962<br>5B | Oct 1960<br>6 |
| NAACP branch members, end of 1959 (√) | + | + | | |
| NAACP youth council, end of 1959 | | | | + |
| NAACP college chapter, end of 1959 | − | | | |
| SCLC presence, early Feb 1960 | + | | | |
| CORE, end of 1959 | | + | + | − |
| Black population (logged) | | | | − |
| Black college students (logged) | | | | + |
| Black % of county | | | − | |
| Poll tax in state | | − | − | |
| Deep South | | | | + |
| Sit-in, spring 1960 | | | | |

N = 334 (321 in Model 2B).
+ or − indicates effect that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed test).
Other independent variables include: black unskilled %, black unemployed %, SRC presence, black % of county (squared orthogonal).

The most striking result is the absence of any positive effect: When we take into account the city's prior organizational ecology and its sociopolitical characteristics, the occurrence of sit-ins in the spring of 1960 has *no* discernible effect on subsequent organizational expansion. In the negative binomial regressions, the coefficients are −0.20 and 0.25, close to zero. In the logistic regressions, the odds ratios range from 0.20 to 3.9, not significantly different from 1; even for the highest odds ratio, the *p*-value is only 0.12. If the sociopolitical variables are omitted from the models, then the occurrence of sit-ins does have a statistically significant and positive effect in three models: NAACP youth councils chartered during 1960 (Model 2A), college chapters chartered during 1960–61 (Model 3), and SNCC delegates (Model 6). This finding helps to interpret the negative results of the full models: The sociopolitical variables predict with considerable accuracy which cities were likely to experience sit-ins (as shown in Andrews and Biggs 2006); therefore, the sit-ins variable yields little additional information. The same factors were conducive to disruptive protest and also to subsequent organizational expansion.

The results for the sociopolitical variables are straightforward. Organization was more likely to expand in cities with wider political opportunities and more potential supporters.[19] When we consider organizational ecology, the analyses suggest that the newer organizations were more likely to expand where NAACP was strong.[20] Higher NAACP membership at the end of 1959 makes the subsequent presence of SCLC and CORE (as least in Model 5A) more likely. The presence of an NAACP youth council at the end of 1959 raises the probability of a delegate going to SNCC's founding conference. Nevertheless, prior organization has a negative impact in two instances. The presence of an NAACP college chapter makes the subsequent presence of SCLC less likely; the presence of CORE reduces the probability of a delegate to SNCC. This pattern suggests some degree of competition for activist students.

In sum, cities with sit-ins had neither more members nor a greater probability of organizational presence than cities without sit-ins – after we control for prior organizational ecology and sociopolitical variables. The effect of protest was minimal in explaining cross-sectional variation.

Hypothetically, this minimal effect could be attributed to a lack of opportunity for expansion in the 66 cities where sit-ins had occurred in the spring of 1960. Figure 10.2 shows the presence of various types of organizations. The great majority of the cities had an NAACP branch and a youth council. The other organizations, however, were remarkably sparse. Two-thirds of the cities lacked SCLC presence, whereas four-fifths had no CORE chapter. For NAACP college chapters and SNCC, the appropriate denominator is the 34 cities with a black college: Almost half of those cities had no college chapter, although only

[19] The only surprise is the negative effect of black population in Model 6.

[20] The very high odds ratios, for example, in Model 5A (Appendix Table 10C) for the effect of CORE in 1959 on CORE in 1960, reflect the fact that the former is a very powerful predictor of the latter.

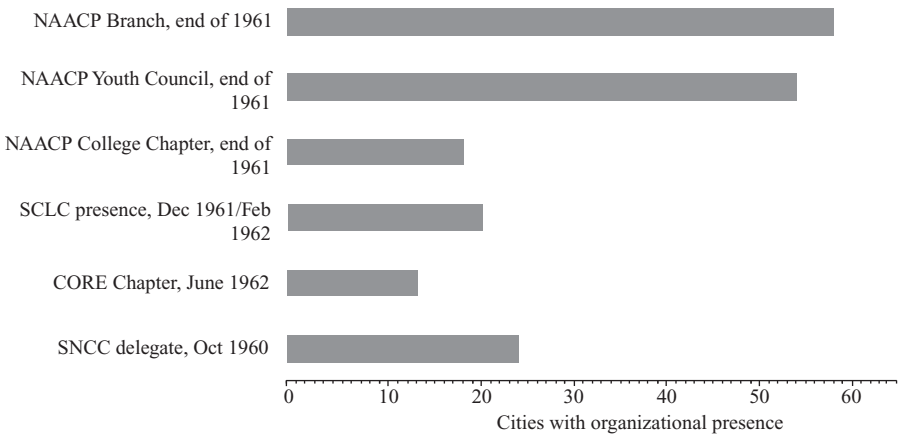


FIGURE 10.2. Organizational Presence in 66 Cities Where Sit-Ins Occurred in Spring 1960

a quarter failed to send a delegate to SNCC. Even when considered together, the organizations most closely associated with the sit-ins – NAACP college chapters, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC – failed to achieve comprehensive coverage. In 23 cities out of the 66, none of those organizations was present. In a significant number of cities, then, sit-in protest did not produce any new organizational affiliate of a civil rights organization.

## CONCLUSION

The sit-ins led directly to the founding of a new organization, SNCC, and were followed by a modest expansion of existing organizations. Nevertheless, the diffusion of sit-in protest did not generate any equivalent diffusion of local movement organization. How can these findings be reconciled with the theoretical expectation that protest will lead to organizational expansion? We should begin by acknowledging possible limitations of our analysis. Our measure of protest is restricted to sit-ins that occurred by April 1960, so it omits later protest events. But the incorporation of later events in other cities would make the limited expansion of CORE, SCLC, and SNCC still more pronounced and therefore more puzzling. College students constitute an unusually mobile population – going home during the summer, moving away after graduation – and this might confuse our cross-sectional analysis. But this would not affect the aggregate figures for membership and local affiliates throughout the South (Table 10.1).

Given that our findings are unlikely to be an artifact of data or method, how can they be explained? For NAACP, two factors can be considered. It already had a mass membership: about 1.5 percent of the total black population in these Southern cities. Although there was scope for growth, it is also true that few membership organizations of any sort – aside from trade unions – have

recruited more than 1 percent of their target population (Skocpol 2004; Skocpol et al. 2000). In addition, although NAACP provided considerable support to the student protesters (and the college chapters were especially important), the leadership did not embrace disruptive protest. The organization as a whole remained associated with an older generation and with institutional tactics such as litigation.

CORE and SCLC, by contrast, were closely associated with the sit-ins. In both cases, the leadership did not see the formation of local affiliates as a top priority; they also did not depend on membership dues for income. CORE hired new staff in 1960 and attempted to form local affiliates in the South, but it soon shifted attention to the Freedom Rides in 1961 (Arsenault 2005). SCLC was a network of activist congregations, and although some had ties to black colleges, ministers may have found it difficult to organize the new generation of student activists that emerged in 1960. Contrary to accepted wisdom, a survey of black colleges shows that students who frequently attended church were less likely to take part in the sit-ins (Biggs 2006).

More generally, the ethos of the sit-ins was more conducive to protest than organization. Observers at the time viewed the student protest as a critique of established civil rights leaders and organizations (Lomax 1960; Polletta 1998). Activists established various committees and ad hoc organizations to manage the campaign in each city, and soon founded SNCC (Searles and Williams 1962; Wehr 1960). But this organization – modestly titled a Coordinating Committee – was very different from the bureaucratic model offered by NAACP or the SCLC's charismatic leadership. SNCC celebrated its informality as a "band of brothers" who put their "bodies on the line" (Carson 1981: 180; Polletta 2002: 55). More prosaically, the established strength of NAACP – with branches in most Southern cities – freed SNCC, SCLC, and CORE to devote their energies to sustaining and innovating protest.

We conclude that the sit-ins of 1960 did not provide a massive impetus for local organization building. This finding challenges a widely held view in the study of social movements and poses two important questions about the diffusion of collective protest and movement organizations. One question is theoretical: Why does a sudden eruption of protest coincide in some cases with the rapid growth of movement organizations but not in others? The other question is historical: If the diffusion of sit-ins in the spring of 1960 did not transform the organizational ecology of the movement in the South, exactly how did these events have an enduring impact on the struggle for civil rights?

TABLE 10A. *Determinants of Organizational Membership*

| | NAACP Branch Members | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1A: End of 1960 | | | 1B: End of 1961 | | |
| **Negative Binomial Regression** | **coeff.** | **s.e.** | **p** | **coeff.** | **s.e.** | **p** |
| Black unskilled % | −.012 | .015 | .44 | −.003 | .016 | .87 |
| Black unemployed % | −.027 | .037 | .46 | −.048 | .034 | .15 |
| Black college students (logged) | .002 | .107 | .99 | .006 | .110 | .95 |
| SRC presence | .226 | .329 | .49 | .217 | .334 | .52 |
| Black % of county | −.019 | .014 | .16 | −.005 | .013 | .72 |
| Black % of county (squared orthogonal) | .000 | .001 | .74 | −.001 | .001 | .53 |
| Poll tax in state | −.276 | .265 | .30 | −.352 | .270 | .19 |
| Deep South | −.538 | .289 | .06 | −.596 | .308 | .05 |
| Black population (logged) | .347 | .216 | .11 | .399 | .222 | .07 |
| NAACP branch members, end of 1959 (√) | .129 | .024 | .00*** | .100 | .023 | .00*** |
| NAACP youth council, end of 1959 | .767 | .316 | .02* | .620 | .329 | .06 |
| NAACP college chapter, end of 1959 | −.549 | .695 | .43 | −.569 | .701 | .42 |
| SCLC presence, early Feb 1960 | .082 | .547 | .88 | .337 | .562 | .55 |
| CORE, end of 1959 | −.089 | .698 | .90 | .049 | .706 | .94 |
| Sit-in, spring 1960 | .247 | .418 | .56 | −.195 | .414 | .64 |
| Alpha (overdispersion) | 4.410 | .402 | .00*** | 4.608 | .409 | .00*** |
| Spearman's rho | .857 | | | .821 | | |

N = 334.
coeff: coefficient s.e.: standard error p: p-value (two-tailed) *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

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TABLE 10B. *Determinants of Organizational Presence (i)*

| | NAACP Youth Council | | | | | | NAACP College Chapter | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2A: 1960 Charter | | | 2B: 1961 Charter | | | 3: 1960–61 Charter | | |
| **Logistic Regression** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** |
| Black unskilled % | .97 | .04 | .34 | .96 | .03 | .09 | .93 | .15 | .66 |
| Black unemployed % | .94 | .08 | .45 | .98 | .05 | .71 | .72 | .25 | .34 |
| Black college students (logged) | 1.03 | .20 | .88 | .82 | .14 | .25 | 12.26 | 12.15 | .01* |
| SRC presence | 1.04 | .65 | .95 | 1.32 | .69 | .60 | 55.60 | 140.32 | .11 |
| Black % of county | 1.02 | .03 | .39 | .96 | .02 | .07 | 1.57 | .47 | .13 |
| Black % of county (squared orthogonal) | 1.00 | .00 | .65 | 1.00 | .00 | .81 | .94 | .04 | .09 |
| Poll tax in state | .48 | .27 | .20 | .15 | .08 | .00*** | .01 | .02 | .07 |
| Deep South | 2.01 | 1.22 | .25 | .63 | .32 | .36 | 4.93 | 9.83 | .42 |
| Black population (logged) | 1.13 | .45 | .75 | 3.08 | 1.31 | .01** | .07 | .10 | .08 |
| NAACP branch members, end of 1959 (√) | .94 | .03 | .05 | .97 | .03 | .27 | .90 | .09 | .31 |
| NAACP youth council, end of 1959 | 7.43 | 5.20 | .00** | 2.77 | 1.37 | .04* | 1,130 | 3,991 | .05* |
| NAACP college chapter, end of 1959 | 1.40 | 1.23 | .70 | N/A (perfectly predicts no charter) | | | .01 | .02 | .07 |
| SCLC presence, early Feb 1960 | 3.32 | 2.40 | .10 | .25 | .25 | .17 | 11.60 | 21.80 | .19 |
| CORE, end of 1959 | 1.51 | 1.27 | .63 | .79 | .76 | .81 | .01 | .02 | .08 |
| Sit-in, spring 1960 | 2.57 | 1.70 | .15 | .57 | .34 | .35 | .24 | .43 | .43 |
| ROC area | .854 | | | .799 | | | .993 | | |

N = 334 (321 in model 2B).
odds: odds ratio s.e.: standard error p: p-value (two-tailed) *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

TABLE 10C. *Determinants of Organizational Presence (ii)*

| | SCLC Presence | | | CORE Chapter | | | | | | SNCC Delegate | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 4: Dec 1961/Feb 1962 | | | 5A: Nov 1960 | | | 5B: June 1962 | | | 6: Oct 1962 | | |
| **Logistic Regression** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** | **odds** | **s.e.** | **p** |
| Black unskilled % | 1.05 | .05 | .39 | .91 | .12 | .45 | 1.00 | .05 | .95 | 1.02 | .05 | .66 |
| Black unemployed % | 1.00 | .12 | .97 | 1.22 | .29 | .41 | .97 | .10 | .77 | 1.05 | .08 | .57 |
| Black college students (logged) | .71 | .20 | .23 | .98 | .53 | .97 | 1.50 | .42 | .15 | 3.48 | .87 | .00*** |
| SRC presence | .83 | .70 | .83 | 12.43 | 36.44 | .39 | .92 | .75 | .92 | 2.57 | 1.62 | .13 |
| Black % of county | 1.03 | .05 | .57 | 1.44 | .30 | .08 | .89 | .04 | .00** | 1.00 | .03 | .89 |
| Black % of county (squared orthogonal) | 1.00 | .00 | .30 | 1.00 | .01 | .51 | 1.00 | .00 | .60 | 1.00 | .00 | .22 |
| Poll tax in state | 2.96 | 2.22 | .15 | .00 | .01 | .04* | .13 | .11 | .01* | .70 | .39 | .53 |
| Deep South | .89 | .86 | .91 | 11.78 | 20.54 | .16 | 2.57 | 2.03 | .23 | 5.31 | 3.77 | .02* |
| Black population (logged) | 1.23 | .65 | .69 | .01 | .02 | .07 | 2.41 | 1.16 | .07 | .30 | .13 | .01** |
| NAACP branch members, end of 1959 (√) | 1.08 | .04 | .05* | 1.53 | .33 | .05* | .99 | .03 | .62 | 1.03 | .03 | .18 |
| NAACP youth council, end of 1959 | 3.59 | 3.43 | .18 | 6.95 | 16.59 | .42 | 1.28 | 1.05 | .76 | 13.29 | 9.58 | .00*** |
| NAACP college chapter, end of 1959 | .03 | .05 | .04* | .00 | .01 | .07 | .14 | .18 | .12 | 1.90 | 1.78 | .49 |
| SCLC presence, early Feb 1960 | 467.14 | 654.22 | .00*** | .76 | 1.56 | .89 | 3.63 | 3.32 | .16 | 1.83 | 1.40 | .43 |
| CORE, end of 1959 | 1.61 | 2.13 | .72 | 121,464 | 577,047 | .01* | 23.96 | 24.02 | .00** | .12 | .13 | .05* |
| Sit-in, spring 1960 | 3.95 | 3.48 | .12 | 2.08 | 3.54 | .67 | 1.48 | 1.27 | .65 | 1.04 | .74 | .96 |
| ROC area | .952 | | | .997 | | | .921 | | | .941 | | |

N = 334.
odds: odds ratio s.e.: standard error p: p-value (two-tailed) *** p < 0.001, ** p <0.01, * p < 0.05