THE POLITICS OF UNION DECLINE:
BUSINESS POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND
RESTRICTIVE LABOR LEGISLATION, 1938 TO 1960

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers how business groups mobilized politically to deal with the “labor question” that exploded within various regions of the U.S. during the 1930s. I extend organizational, political, and cultural framing perspectives on social movements to address how a seemingly ascendant union movement suffered such a series of political setbacks during a period of unparalleled strength. Drawing on event history techniques as well as historical case study methods, I analyze the surge of restrictive labor legislation that spread across states between 1938 and 1960, and especially the growth of the Right-to-Work movement that sought to limit union activity and contain labor to a narrow geographic space. The analyses speak to the enduring question for political sociologists and social movement scholars of how social movements and their opponents affect the political process. Event history results reveal that business and labor organization are meaningful for policy adoption in their own right. Political opportunities, and the presence of sympathetic law-makers in particular, are also influential in determining where and when social movement actors may be successful in securing favorable legislation. Just how business and labor actors attempt to sway policy, however, is more complex. Findings indeed reveal distinct regional variation in the unfolding of Right-to-Work struggles during these pivotal years, and suggest that there are multiple routes to policy change. Historical case studies of representative anti-labor campaigns extend these insights further, and inform our understanding of how social movements matter. The cases suggest a number of mechanisms though which social movements and countermovements may influence the political process, and point to the importance of framing in particular. The historical insights also extend the quantitative findings
by bringing focus to, and illustrating the importance of, the interaction of these contenders at a
more proximate level in addition to their presence or absence across states. This study advances
social movement perspectives by probing the political mobilization and cultural work of more
elite actors, employers, and their associations, and their bearing on a range of movement
processes. The project also provides an important historical window into the political relations of
business groups and labor unions in the U.S., and demonstrates the relative success of employer
efforts to curtail labor organization.
Dedicated to My Parents
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study examines how business groups mobilized politically to reshape the New Deal to their advantage, and particularly how they dealt with the “labor question” that exploded on the scene in the 1930s. The turbulent decade saw the birth of the modern industrial union movement and the emergence of labor as a major social movement actor. The extraordinary combination of progressive labor legislation and widespread worker insurgency proved a formidable threat to business prerogatives and prompted first fierce resistance, and then concerted political mobilization on the part of employers. Beginning with the conservative resurgence at the end of the 1930s and accelerating after World War II, business forces mobilized at the state-level and were successful in agitating for an array of legislative restrictions on unions, including, but not limited to, intensely contested Right-to-Work laws that diminished labor’s financial and organizational capacity. These political battles, that would eventually peak in the late 1950s, established a diverse set of union rights across states and helped shape the uneven geographic distribution of union organization and worker representation that persists to this day in the United States.

How did a seemingly ascendant union movement suffer such a string of political defeats during a period of tremendous growth and numerical strength? The forceful countermobilization of business groups during this period was indeed quite unexpected. Commenting on the increased power of unions at the end of World War II, C. Wright Mills (2002:3[1948]) saw the labor movement as a new force to be reckoned with, suggesting that labor leaders were the
“strategic actors” of their time, leading “the only organizations capable of stopping the main drift toward war and slump.” Such was the prominent view among observers in the mid-1940s. Yet, even as Mills was writing, the new legislative gains of unions were under attack and, within just over a decade, labor was clearly on the retreat as business-led political efforts were successful in containing unionism to a limited geographic and industrial space.

Organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as many regional and state-based groups waged extensive political campaigns to curb the growth and power of labor unions. These organizations initially sought restrictions on successful union organizing tactics, but by the mid-1940s they turned their attention to so-called Right-to-Work laws that banned the union shop and other union security arrangements. Such laws substantially increased the costs of collective action for labor unions and diminished their strength at the bargaining table and beyond. After winning an election unions were then legally bound to collectively bargain for wages and benefits and to process grievances for all workers covered by the contract, but in a Right-to-Work state unions could not compel all workers to eventually join (and contribute financially).

Labor organizations had always sought some form of union security as protection from market fluctuations and employer hostility. Many activists recalled all too well the employer mobilization following the first World War that decimated unions. Fearing a similar outcome, labor – represented first by rival Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and American Federation of Labor (AFL) segments in the 1940s and 1950s, and then by the merged federation, the AFL-CIO, in the late 1950s – would eventually mount formidable campaigns to counter Right-to-Work and other business-driven initiatives.

As I illustrate in the following chapters, Right-to-Work and other business political mobilization in the states were not limited to the South, or to where labor was trying to gain a
foothold. As these campaigns intensified and gained national prominence in the 1950s, for example, they were increasingly fought in the industrial heartland – the very center of union strength. This encroachment forced unions to develop a sophisticated campaign apparatus to counter business mobilization, and there were some promising efforts undertaken by labor during these years. Yet by 1960 some nineteen states had Right-to-Work laws on the books. These political arrangements, which would change little in the following decades, discouraged union organizing efforts, and tipped the balance of power in the workplace further in the direction of employers. The labor movement, having since turned inward, abandoned any attempts at a new Southern organizing drive and mostly steered away from the burgeoning civil rights movement and the New Left mobilizations that would follow.

In this project I examine the political mobilization of business groups and labor unions following the New Deal and the quite unexpected setbacks for the union movement during this period. These political struggles were carried out at multiple levels. Notably at the national level was the Taft-Hartley act of 1947, which proved to be a major setback for labor unions. My focus here, however, is on the business agitation and restrictive labor legislation that spread across states. I pay special attention the various strategies that business groups and unions employed as they sought to influence the political process. Just how business actors mobilized to restrict unionism, how they framed labor problems, and the extent to which unions were able to mount a response, varied considerably across time and place. Consequently, these battles offer an ideal testing ground for the enduring question for political sociologists and social movement scholars of just how social movements and their opponents affect political change and public policy.

Somewhat remarkably, however, social science scholarship has been silent on the labor-management struggles of the era. Outside of the voluminous literature on worker insurgency in the 1930s and related New Deal policy formation, researchers have been slow to address
subsequent political struggles between business groups and the labor movement and, arguably, labor’s greatest political failures. This is unfortunate. A greater understanding of these events can not only advance sociological perspectives on social movements and contentious politics, but also provide needed insight into the collective action and political mobilization of business groups and labor unions in the U.S.

*A Pocket of Neglect*

Despite considerable scholarship on labor upheavals of the New Deal period (Bernstein 1960; Dubofsky 1994; Manza 2000), and the stagnation and decline of the union movement in the postwar era (Clawson and Clawson 1999; Goldfield 1987; Cornfield and Fletcher 2001), little is known about the political processes that helped shape American labor policy and the geographic and industrial patterns of union organization that have persisted over the last half century. The dearth of scholarship on these political battles may be due in part to an overriding focus on two themes in the literature on class relations and labor organization in the United States: the “labor-capital accord” and the “American exceptionalism” thesis.

For many scholars, the bleak circumstances that unions face today mark a departure from an accord that existed between large firms and the labor movement during much of the postwar era. As the argument goes, major corporations came to accept unionism in principle and, in exchange for a disciplined workforce, provided sizeable increases in wages and benefits through relatively stable bargaining relationships (Brody 1980; Brueggemann and Brown 2003; Rubin 1986). These relationships between workers, unions, and employers, it is argued, held relatively stable with the extraordinary economic growth in the two decades following World War II. It unraveled in the 1970s when increased economic competition from Europe and Japan threatened
corporate profits, prompting considerable business mobilization including increased political activity and intransigence toward unions (Akard 1992; Clawson 2003).

This framework steers questions to the factors upholding the accord and those prompting its unraveling, and the varied consequences for workers and their organizations. Such a view, of course, necessarily downplays political struggles between labor and management in the 1950s. Business mobilization to rollback labor’s New Deal gains, which took off in the late 1930s, is accepted as part of the consolidation of the union movement, although the details are rarely probed. Recent scholarship, however, calls question to the extent of the accord (Fones-Wolf 1994; Lichtenstein 2002). While certainly meaningful for workers and unions, especially in core industries, the accord was relatively short-lived and limited in scope, perhaps masked by the tremendous economic expansion of the period. Importantly, it did not prevent business interests from targeting the state to diminish labor organization through the 1950s.

Another popular framework for addressing labor issues roots its questions in why workers never developed an independent political party as in Europe. The classic American exceptionalism argument, in searching for reasons for the relative absence of working class political organization, turns away from the political process entirely. Instead, emphasis is placed on the minds and values of workers themselves, the considerable institutional differentiation and status divisions among them, and the supposed widespread proletarian conservatism in the United States (Gordon, Edwards, and Reich 1982; Lipset 1961, 1986; Perlman 1928). Seymour Martin Lipset (1986) and others have suggested that traditional American values are incongruent with class consciousness and support for a strong trade union movement, although research still reveals a relatively broad and stable reservoir of public support for unionism dating back to the New Deal (Cornfield 1999; Freeman and Rogers 1999). Workers in the United States, it is also
argued, are deeply divided along lines of race, ethnicity, and occupation, which fragments and weakens collective political efforts (Form 1995).

These arguments are not without merit, yet rarely go further to probe how such social cleavages, values, and identities are played out in political struggles between workers and employers. This literature also overlooks what is perhaps the most exceptional feature of American labor relations – the fierce resistance to labor organization by employers and their associations (Kimeldorf 1999; Griffin, Wallace, and Rubin 1986). Considering the conservative trajectory of the American labor movement, Voss (1993) acknowledges this point, noting that conservative institutions like the American Federation of Labor were the only ones that could withstand such elite repression. Yet whether the focus is on the conservatism of individual workers or their institutions, serious attention is not given to the dynamics of business-labor politics.

Literature on the accord and exceptionalist features of American unions typically neglect the full extent of labor political activity and, in doing so, miss an important point: labor organizations, willing or not, were forced into the political process as their rights became embedded in the state and business interests mobilized to retrench them.2 Scholarship on labor has thus been slow to examine this important period of political setback (but see Stepan Norris and Zeitlan 2003). This is compounded by a tendency in political sociology to focus on the insurgency of less powerful groups and the episodes of progressive legislation that flowered in the 1930s and 1960s. I will argue that we can learn much by examining the rollback on the labor movement’s New Deal gains and by probing the various strategies elite actors employed to curb unionism.
**The Utility of Social Movement Explanations**

While much of the prevailing literature on American labor relations turns away from the political process entirely, scholarship on social movements and their ability to influence public policy has expanded tremendously over the last three decades (Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1998). Resource Mobilization, Political Opportunity, and Cultural Framing perspectives have brought scholarly focus to the interplay of movement strategy and the structural constraints/opportunities posed by the political arrangements that these groups encounter, and are useful for our purposes here.

Following William Gamson’s (1975) classic *The Strategy of Social Protest*, some three decades ago, scholars have increasingly questioned how social movements and their opponents affect a variety of outcomes including success in the political arena. Classic resource mobilization scholarship (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977) identifies a number of characteristics important for protest mobilization that should also be meaningful for political outcomes. Many scholars, building on these insights, argue that the presence or extent of formal social movement organization, or viable movement infrastructure, enhances the ability of these actors to influence the political process (Andrews 2001; McCammon et al. 2001). Formal organization, it is argued, enables movements to pursue multiple mechanisms of influence – be it directly through institutionalized strategies such as lobbying, or indirectly through the pressure and public awareness generated with more disruptive, protest tactics.

The political opportunity tradition, while not discounting organization, instead points to a shifting constellation of forces external to movements themselves that may provide incentives for groups to mobilize and that will affect their success in doing so (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Tarrow 1998). Following this premise, considerable empirical research demonstrates how divisions among economic and political elites, the presence of powerful allies, and the repressive
capacity of the state can all critically influence social movement mobilization and success (Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003; McAdam 1982). Favorable political circumstances may signal to movements or their opponents an increased likelihood of success and thereby encourage mobilization (Tarrow 1998), or alternatively, and as Meyer and Minkoff (2004) suggest, such political arrangements may enable ongoing mobilization efforts to proceed farther than they otherwise would have. In either case, social movement success is profoundly shaped by the receptivity of political elites to their cause.

The importance of organization on the one hand and opportunity on the other, are, of course, not mutually exclusive. Many would argue that for movements to succeed politically, there needs to be some combination of viable organization and favorable political alignments. Amenta’s political mediation model (Amenta 1998; Amenta and Halfman 2001; Amenta and Young 1999) explicitly points to such a configuration, arguing that social movement organizations that target the state are likely to enact change only when their mobilization aligns with favorable political circumstances and state allies that are sympathetic to their goals. The recent work by Soule and Olzak (2004) likewise emphasizes the interrelations of social movement organization, opportunity, and public opinion as crucial for successful political mobilization. This complex, multi-causal view of social movement outcomes coincides with recent scholarship that seeks to identify the more nuanced mechanisms through which actors target the state and affect political change (e.g., Andrews 2001). One important mechanism through which movements attempt to persuade political decision-makers and broader publics is that of framing.

Considerable time and resources are spent by social movements and their opponents as they engage in ideological battles to win the support of the voting public and political decision-makers. Social movement theory on framing speaks to this issue, pointing to the signifying
activity of movements, where actors construct and package meaning for potential participants, opponents, and broader publics (Cress and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986). A key insight of this literature is that just how movements present themselves and their cause to external audiences may be crucial for success. When advocating for social policy, for example, movements must create effective frames that call attention to their particular issue, attribute blame and a probable culprit, and that offer a credible alternative to remedy the situation.

Whether conceptualized as diagnostic and prognostic framing (Cress and Snow 200), or narrative facility (McVeigh, Welch and Bjarnason 2003), the implication is that social movements, and all political actors, must be adept at generating “plausible stories” that convey their message in a way that resonates with political decision-makers. Yet they must also deploy frames in way that successfully counters or neutralizes the claims of their opponents (Hewitt and McCammon 2004). Thus, movements and their opponents are often locked in battles over the framing of key policy issues. Like other protest strategies then, where for instance Doug McAdam (1983:736) has described the tactical innovation of social movements and the adaptation of their opponents, we see a similar interaction in regards to framing, where social movements and their opponents attempt to counter each other’s claims in “almost chess-like fashion.” Such battles may indeed be influential for the outcomes of political contests.

The framing activities of social movements are rooted in objective circumstances and are certainly tied to both social movement organization and dimensions of political opportunity, each of which may shape the extent to which claims are actually heard and how they are received. Taken together, then, resource mobilization, political opportunity and cultural framing arguments suggest a dynamic view of social movement activity. This view takes seriously the strategic interaction between movements, their opponents, and the state, and the particular messages these actors promote. The challenge for social movement scholarship, then, is to specify how these
features matter in relation to one another for movements and their ability to affect political change. While such structural and cultural features of contentious politics are no doubt interrelated, empirical analyses have been slow to synthesize these perspectives, often due to data and analytic limitations. Blending these foci requires a flexible methodological strategy that adequately captures broad shifts in political circumstances as well as the more nuanced efforts of local actors to influence policy. Encouragingly, recent work shows the benefits of such an approach (see for example McCammon et al. 2001).

Social movement explanations are admittedly still limited in important ways. Empirical research has tended to concentrate on particular types of movements. We know a good deal about mobilization among aggrieved groups, and successful attempts at that (Burstein and Linton 2002). Much less is understood about those movements that fail, or the countermobilization of elites and other actors, including employers and their associations (but see Isaac 2002). Many social movement researchers moreover, wrote off labor as a viable actor, instead seeing it as the epitome of an “old,” bureaucratized, and dying movement. Perhaps this view of the official labor movement, predominant when the study of social movements emerged as a core sociological subfield in the 1980s, also steered researchers away from crucial historical questions of labor and business mobilization.

The selection bias toward studying successful challengers, at the neglect of a whole range of mobilization campaigns, provides only a truncated view of social movements in the political process. The limited comparisons afforded by this focus diminish causal claims regarding the actual impact of various dimensions of organization, opportunity, or the framing appeals made by movement actors. These deficits have prompted calls for analysts to consider a wider range of actors, and alternative forms of political struggle across diverse social contexts (Amenta and Halfman 2000; Einwohner 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Meyer and Staggenborg
The argument being that we can learn more by utilizing a broad, variegated testing ground than we can by considering the activities of a single movement or legislative episode in isolated fashion.

If social movement scholars are guilty of focusing on only a limited range of social movement challengers and contexts, labor scholarship has been surprisingly slow to apply lessons from social movement theory to employment relationship and labor-management struggles. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Dixon, Roscigno, and Hodson 2004; Griffin, Wallace, and Rubin 1986; Isaac and Christiansen 2002), few scholars have explicitly integrated social movement perspectives with problems of labor and employer mobilization. This project extends the aforementioned social movement perspectives to address business and labor political mobilization and the quite unexpected rollback of the union movement’s New Deal gains. By examining the strategic interaction of these parties and pertinent policy outcomes across varying temporal and sociopolitical contexts, this research contributes to, and extends contemporary debate on social movements and politics.

An Outline of the Project

The goals of this research are to both advance our understanding of the longstanding questions surrounding the role of social movements, their opponents, and the state in ongoing battles to shape public policy, and to provide an important historical insight into the trajectory of the modern American labor movement. As is clear from the discussion above, business and labor political mobilization during this period was complex. The strategies these actors employed, and the receptivity of broader publics and political decision-makers to their claims, varied considerably across time and place. No one singular process is likely to explain the unfolding of this mobilization across states. Such complexity underlies my theoretical and analytic approach.
In chapter 2, I turn to the historical context in which my story unfolds and outline the shifting balance of worker militancy, labor organization, and business political mobilization from the end of the New Deal through the heightened period of agitation extending to 1960. Such attention to historical detail could, arguably, detract from developing generalizeable sociological explanations of social movements and political change. I argue, in contrast, that probing the historical complexities of the case grounds theoretical expectations in the real world constraints and opportunities that these actors faced, and can thus better capture the dynamic, social movement and political processes that I seek to explain. Digging into these complexities, as Griffin (1995:127) argues, is necessary not only to “get the history right,” but more importantly, to “get the sociology right.” Chapter 3 thus evaluates resource mobilization, political opportunity, and cultural framing arguments in light of historical business political mobilization and the varied union responses. The historical and theoretical insights gleaned from this discussion suggest a complex, multi-causal approach to social movements and politics – one that emphasizes the importance of general patterns of social movement organization and opportunity, but also the particular strategies and tactical exchanges of movement actors at a more proximate level.

In chapter 4, I outline a multi-method analytic strategy to tackle the problem of business political mobilization and labor setback. I describe how the combination of quantitative analyses of the spread of restrictive labor legislation across states and detailed historical case studies of substantively important campaigns can help us understand the interplay of organization, opportunity, and framing dynamics for social movements and their ability to influence public policy. Chapters 5 through 7 then offer empirical assessments of the business and labor political mobilization during the period. Following the quantitative, event history analysis of policy adoption, I turn to historical case studies of Right-to-Work campaigns in Texas in 1947 and Ohio
in 1958 – cases that are representative of the range of mobilization, and successes and defeats, during this important period, and that are useful for understanding the multiple mechanisms social movement actors employ to influence the political process.

I integrate insights from the historical case studies and quantitative analysis in chapter 8. Here I return to the longstanding questions guiding research on social movements and politics, and outline how the extension of social movement perspectives to problems of labor and employer mobilization advance our understanding of both contentious politics and unionism in the U.S. These historical processes indeed hold very real consequences for the relative leverage of workers and employers, contemporary labor organizing efforts, and ongoing struggles between social movements and business actors.
NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. This study focuses on the political battles between employers and labor unions that spread across U.S. states. The consequences of these struggles were certainly meaningful. Industrial relations researchers demonstrate the negative effects of Right-to-Work laws on union density (Elwood and Fine 1987; Moore 1998). Such laws increase the costs of collective action for unions and diminish union organizing activities. Importantly, and as I illustrate in this project, these laws served to contain labor’s ambitions at a moment when many saw union triumph as probable. Many of the early state restrictions on labor unions, and organizing activity in particular – laws that followed the New Deal (and prior to Right-to-Work) – were later overruled and did not have the enduring impact of Right-to-Work laws. These early setbacks nonetheless forced labor unions divert resources from organizing and political advocacy to mount expensive court challenges.

2. The empirical literature on declining union membership, moreover, focuses primarily on structural forces such as changing occupational structure, deindustrialization and the globalization of production (e.g., Bell 1970; Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Lange and Scruggs 1998), and less so on the agency and political mobilization of unions and employers.
Employers have always mobilized to counter gains in labor organization. In the United States, these efforts have taken various forms that include transforming the labor process, outsourcing work, forming capitalist militias, and calling on the state and professional strikebreakers to quell uprisings (Cowie 1999; Griffin, Wallace, and Rubin 1986; Isaac 2002). The New Deal profoundly altered the opportunities available to business in these disputes. The Wagner Act, passed in 1935 and upheld by the Supreme Court in 1937, provided federal backing for unionism and ruled many of the favored employer tactics illegal. This meant that the state was now a prime arena for struggles over worker organization, as the New Deal had indeed “thoroughly politicized all relations between the union movement, the business community, and the state” (Licthenstein 1989:121-122).

In this chapter I provide an overview of business political mobilization to curtail labor movement power and the varied responses of unions from the late 1930s to 1960. My primary focus will be the political struggles that spread across states during this period, and particularly the growth of the Right-to-Work movement – a movement that sought to reverse labor gains at the state level by banning the union shop. In the more than two-decades following the Wagner Act and the upheavals of the 1930s, unions were indeed met with intense political mobilization on the part of business groups and an array of restrictive labor laws throughout the states. These developments illustrated the possibilities and limits of labor as a social movement actor in the
U.S. They also offer us an important case with which to evaluate the core explanations of social movements and contentious politics posed by political opportunity, resource mobilization, and cultural framing analysts. Following a brief description of the union gains under New Deal legislation, I detail the varied business responses and particularly the increased mobilization immediately following World War II. I discuss how unions were slow to counter this mobilization, but that as the broader political ambitions of the labor movement were tempered in the postwar years they would eventually develop a sophisticated campaign apparatus to deal with the mounting Right-to-Work battles of the 1950s. I conclude by discussing the implications of these struggles for contemporary unionism and employment relations.

*Labor Relations and New Deal Legislation*

To understand the varied business responses to unionism following the New Deal, it is worth recalling just what transpired in labor relations in the 1930s. The National Recovery Act (NRA) of 1933 was the early New Deal response to the social and economic crisis of the depression that directly affected labor. The NRA sought to rationalize production and put people back to work by easing anti-trust restrictions on companies and putting the coercive power of the state behind industrialists to unite competitive firms in trade associations (Bernstein 1970). But in return the companies needed to provide workers with minimum wages, restrict child labor and, most importantly for unions, section 7(a) provided federal backing of workers’ rights to join and organize independent trade unions.

In some competitive industries, such as coal, this provided the opportunity unions needed and organizing took off. Other industries, however, did not experience such a surge. As workers mobilized to demand their new rights, most employers steadfastly refused to accept collective bargaining. This led to upheavals in some unlikely places in 1934. Nearly a half million textile
workers walked off the job from Maine to Alabama, agricultural workers in California battled commercial farm interests, and general strikes unfolded in Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. The NRA was clearly limited in terms of protecting workers’ rights and was ruled unconstitutional in May of 1935. With no labor policy and having witnessed the upheavals of the previous year, Roosevelt had little choice but to support the National Labor Relations Act sponsored by Senator Robert Wagner of New York. The seemingly radical bill explicitly encouraged collective bargaining and trade unionism and ruled a host of employer strategies illegal. A new, progressive congress passed the radical bill over the steadfast opposition of business, with key support from some conservative Southern democrats (Goldfield 1989).1

Employers, of course, resisted or defied the Wagner act too. But unlike the experience under the NRA, a shifting constellation of factors helped extend labor rights to most private sector workers. As conservatives mobilized against Roosevelt politically, and defied his labor policy at the enterprise level, the President formed a greater alliance with the nascent Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and its leader John L. Lewis. After failing to capitalize from the uprisings of 1934, Lewis had pulled other dissenters out of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to organize production workers. He also bankrolled the next year’s presidential campaign. The political alliances paid off. Union militants staged the historic sit-down strike at General Motors, and rather than using the state apparatus to squelch the uprising – the governor of Michigan used the national guard to protect the strikers from vigilantes. General Motors might have looked to the state to break the strike in the past, but as Dubofsky (1994:139) notes, “1937 was not 1922, or 1919, or 1914, or 1894, or 1877. Now, instead, Democratic Governors and a Democratic president preferred to promote unionization and collective bargaining rather than break strikes.” Within weeks of the Flint settlement, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee reached an agreement with the nation’s largest steel companies. With labor militancy and
industrial warfare abound, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Wagner Act much to the surprise and dismay of the business community.

While much New Deal policy was objectionable to business interests, the events of early 1937 made clear to employers just how the state could be used to transform the economic and social order in favor of subordinate groups. After the Supreme Court ruling, an activist, progressive NLRB began using its newfound legitimacy to advance the interests of workers, and especially the new CIO unions, much to the objection of business elites, Southern politicians, and even the AFL. This was undoubtably the high point of the decade for organized labor. Less than a year following these historic gains, the CIO was considerably weakened as unemployment decimated mass production industries and their new unions. Meanwhile, concerted business opposition to the New Deal and its labor beneficiaries mounted.

**Conservative Mobilization in the States**

Seeing little prospect initially in dismantling Roosevelt’s labor policy, many employer associations began to target labor throughout the states. Nearly all business segments favored the repeal or modification of the Wagner Act and sought to curb union rights in one way or another, and small business groups were often more fiercely opposed to labor and the New Deal. The efforts of state and local employer associations backed by National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Chamber of Commerce were influential in ejecting pro-labor administrators from several industrial states and pushing for restrictive statutes on unions in the late 1930s (Wilcox 1957).

The face of anti-labor mobilization in the early years was that of small-business groups and reactionary organizations, although much of their activity was supported by larger financial interests. West coast conservative mobilization was spearheaded by growers’ associations. Some
of this activity involved the organization of citizens groups to engage in vigilante attacks against farm-workers and their organizers. As Pichardo (1995) demonstrates, these organizations, especially the notorious Associated Farmers, were supported in large part by major industrial interests. On the political front, along with the Merchants and Manufacturers Association of Los Angeles, they mobilized to enact several city ordinances restricting picketing and placed similar state-wide referendums on the ballot in California, Oregon and Washington (Millis and Brown 1950). The Oregon referendum that passed in 1938 outlawed, among other things, any boycotting, picketing, or striking except in disputes directly related to wages, hours and working conditions. It was invalidated two years later by the Oregon Supreme Court. It nevertheless had a chilling effect on the labor movement in that state, hampering organizing activities and weakening the bargaining position of many unions (Millis and Brown 1950:319).

In the industrial heartland the NAM was implicated in financially supporting citizens committees and back-to-work movements in areas affected by work stoppages (Millis and Brown 1950), while similar groups, with elite backing, emerged in the region and pursued political ends as well as more direct union resistance strategies (see Millikan 2001). In the South, the hysterical anti-New Deal Christian American Association out of Texas “found” the anti-union movement in the early 1940s and, according to Green (1979:61), “did more than any other organization to awaken the South to the danger of a unionized workforce.” Their particular target was the CIO, who they deemed committed to a “Marxian Tax Program that will TOTALLY communize America” (Marshall 1967:241).

The anti-labor mobilization carried out across states in the late 1930s and early 1940s was led by reactionary organizations like Christian American, as well as state and regionally-based employer associations like the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Southern States Industrial Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and state affiliates of the NAM. The anti-union message
these groups promoted was not a particularly sophisticated one. Indeed, most claims made against unions centered on communism, corruption, and un-Americanism (Green 1979; Marshall 1967; Pichardo 1995) – themes that had not changed considerably from the drives against unionism in previous decades (Bendix 1956; Bernstein 1960).

Most of the early legislative agitation concerned restrictions on union activities and tactics since the Wagner Act contained no such limits. Because Supreme Court rulings in the late 1930s and early 1940s (especially the 1940 Thornhill decision) protected peaceful picketing from legislative attack, many groups pushed for “antiviolence” statutes that fell within the policing powers of states and were similarly able to limit picketing (Cohen 1948). Texas was a pioneer of early anti-labor legislation that spread across many Southern states during the war years, with employers drawing on both extremist and corporate responses to the labor question. While many of the restrictive laws passed during this period proved constitutionally dubious and were later overturned, they nonetheless diverted union resources from organizing and pursuing a broader political agenda to challenging provisions in court. Notably, these efforts extended beyond the supposedly union-resistant South and into areas where unions were more established. Figure 2.1 shows the geographic distribution of these early restrictions. All figures and tables are presented at the end of their respective chapters.

A longer lasting element to come out of the early agitation were so called “Right-to-Work” laws that barred union security agreements. In a 1941 labor day editorial William Ruggles, an editor at the Dallas Morning News, called for a constitutional amendment for the open shop, declaring it a fundamental issue of the right to work. The Christian American Association operating out of Houston, and one of the most extreme of the early anti-labor groups, was intrigued by Ruggles’ use of the term and asked for permission to take up his cause. He
encouraged them to use the “right-to-work” label and they were the first to champion open shop political efforts using right-to-work as a full blown slogan (Gall 1994; Green 1979: 61).

Right-to-Work was a complicated issue for labor. Historically unions had attempted to restrict employment to union members in order to maintain viable organizations and to protect themselves from employer hostility and market volatility (Griffin, Wallace, and Rubin 1986). This always prompted fierce employer resistance. For many craft unions the “closed shop” was used as a device to maintain racially segregated organizations. Yet with the passing of the Wagner Act, after a union won an election they were legally bound to process grievances and bargain for wages and benefits for everyone in the collective bargaining unit. The implications of this became clear for the new industrial unions. If they were to wrestle concessions from the largest and most powerful employers in the world, not to mention organize new ones, they needed powerful organizations with all members contributing financially. Thus the new industrial unions as well as the AFL affiliates pushed hard for union security arrangements, often for “union shop” contracts, where after a probationary period all employees in the unit became dues-paying members. By forbidding such arrangements, Right-to-Work laws increased the costs of collective action for unions, limiting their strength at the bargaining table and diminishing their capacity to engage in politics.

In short, these laws went a long way toward determining whether or not a state would have a strong labor movement. They were particularly damaging to unions that were not well established but that sought to organize, and thus would become a popular anti-labor strategy for employers and their associations. As I discuss below, Right-to-Wok advocates promoted a powerful individual rights theme that unions were slow to counter. For a brief period during World War II, the government supported weak union security provisions in basic industry. This
backing and the wartime economy proved to be a boon for organized labor, and aroused considerable opposition from many business segments.

The Wartime Landscape and Business Reorganization

World War II stimulated incredible growth for unions. Yet employers redoubled their opposition during this period and, as business historian Howell John Harris (1982) argues, they were able to “recover the initiative” in the immediate postwar years. On the one hand the wartime state forced employers in basic industry to accept limited forms of union security and to obey the results of union elections. At the same time labor was losing political influence within the fractured New Deal coalition, and found itself besieged by intensive business political mobilization in the postwar years (Dubofsky 1994).

After Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt established the National War Labor Board (NWLB), with far greater scope than any of the previous defense boards and with jurisdiction over the union security issue. Unions had pledged not to strike throughout the defense effort and, in return, the NWLB granted a “maintenance of membership” form of union security (to last through a contract) in June of 1942 to unions in basic industry (Lichtenstein 1982). Workers in organized plants were required to join the union through the length of the contract. The practical impact of this for the financial stability of unions is hard to overstate. The new industrial unions which rose dramatically to power in the late thirties were decimated by unemployment and were incredibly weak financially, something that transferred directly to their fortunes at the bargaining table. With the booming wartime economy and maintenance of membership union security provisions, CIO unions now had the resources to organize the new defense plants being built in Texas, Southern California, and other areas far removed from the industrial heartland.
The expansion of unionism into previously unorganized areas with the backing of the NWLB alarmed local elites who perhaps rightly feared an erosion of their power (Amberg 2004; Millis and Brown 1950). In the South this was inextricably tied to race. CIO organizing in the South no doubt challenged the race-based political economy of the region, although it is contested just how integrationist the new industrial unions were (see for example Zeitlin and Wheyer 2001; Zieger 1995). Interracial solidarity among workers was of course far from assured during the 1940s. At least some progressive labor leaders, however, recognized the necessity of this organizing to establish formidable class-wide coalitions. Thus any CIO movement in this direction drew the ire of Southern politicians and employers (Lichtenstein 1989). While the older, more conservative AFL gradually moved to the left on race issues, it was unable to persuade many of its own members. As a result found difficulty in forging class-wide coalitions in response to business mobilization, particularly within the South.

As union growth far from traditional strongholds aroused considerable opposition, organized business was undergoing an important transformation. Business as a whole had suffered substantial criticism during the depression years as workers joined unions in increasing numbers and looked to the Roosevelt administration, not their employers, for leadership (Roscigno and Danaher 2004). A key focus of business in the 1940s thus became public perceptions. Employers turned to sophisticated public relations efforts in an attempt to restore their legitimacy and counter the rise of unionism.

The NAM, for example, hired opinion researchers who suggested that their claims were overly simplistic and too easily subverted by labor (Fones-Wolf 1994). Indeed, their anti-union message had changed little in the past four decades (Bendix 1956:266). The claims mounted against unions in the late 1930s and early 1940s, often spearheaded by the NAM and smaller
reactionary organizations, had railed against corrupt “labor-leader racketeers,” “labor dictators,” and relied on the standard themes of unions as being foreign, communist or somehow un-American (see Amberg 2004; Brewer 1970; Marshall 1967) – all of which had been rehashed from previous eras (Bernstein 1960; Griffin, Wallace, and Rubin 1986). Importantly, the NAM nearly doubled its research staff during the war years and developed a sophisticated research and public relations apparatus. This enabled them to make claims resisting labor and the New Deal, and back them up with a coherent argument rather than the steadfast opposition to unionism and nothing else. The NAM also crafted arguments that moved closer to the center, likely resonating with more mainstream values. It no longer opposed unions in principle, but instead supported individual employee rights and labor relations in the “public interest” (Workman 1998: 311-312).

Following the war, when anti-labor momentum picked up steam, mainstream employers did mobilize politically and with a refurbished and more polished message. Figure 2.2 provides an illustration of this approach.

This fit well with the growth of the Right-to-Work movement. Recall that far-right groups had originally championed these efforts in a tirade against all New Deal provisions. By the end of World War II, however, more mainstream actors joined the fight. As Gilbert Gall (1988:35-36) describes, a shift had taken place by 1946: “Previously, right-to-work propagandists had substantial ties to extreme right-wing politics...Now mainstream political conservatives had clearly seen the usefulness of right to work in weakening unionism and had picked up the torch.” Indeed mainstream organizations now campaigned for the issue, and the NAM, whose claims at times veered to the far-right, now tried to capture the political center by arguing for labor relations in the public interest. This reorganization was forcefully expressed at the national level.
where efforts to enact what would become the Taft-Hartley act got underway. Yet this carried over to local campaigns as well.

The reorganization of business and the re-framing of the “labor question” was carried out in the states where nearly every state legislature considered labor restrictions in the immediate postwar years (Canak and Miller 1990; Millis and Brown 1950). This was part of the broader business agenda to “sell-free enterprise” and to recoup its losses in both public image and authority in workplace relations that it had suffered from depression, progressive federal legislation, and an ascendant labor movement (Fones-Wolf 1994; Harris 1982). Whereas labor (according to the NAM’s own polling research) had been able to subvert the early simplistic anti-union claims by business groups, the new message proved harder to counter.

Just as business groups began to mobilize across states to roll back New Deal labor law in piecemeal fashion, the labor movement was splitting in half. Rather than waging any coordinated response to legislative attacks in the late 1930s, state labor federations were equally concerned with expelling now rival CIO unions. Moreover, AFL State Federations and CIO Industrial Union Councils did eventually deal with the attacks, and had a moderate level of cooperation. The response was often after the fact, however, and framed too simplistically. In addition to the sometimes crippling divisions within the labor movement, both AFL and CIO federations hedged their bets on the backing of the federal government in these disputes. This strategy failed in the postwar years as labor found that Truman was no FDR, and the political climate of 1947 was not that of 1935 or 1937. Importantly, this nationally-focused strategy left state federations on their own to deal with the growing legislative assault, where local organizers often lacked the expertise necessary to match the coordinated business campaigns.
Labor’s response was thus mixed and hampered by the divisions between the federations from the beginning. The AFL opted for a legal strategy, countering most anti-labor statutes in court. From the late thirties through 1947, however, the AFL offered little assistance to local labor movements on the front lines. The AFL’s chief legal counsel Joseph Padaway actually boasted that the early right-to-work amendments of Arkansas and Florida would never hold up in court. Yet as many of the early right-to-work efforts were placed on the ballot, state federations lacked the necessary experience to wage single-issue public campaigns. The situation was most acute in the regions where unions were growing at a remarkable rate, and thus arousing considerable employer opposition, but were not yet well established. The belated efforts of the AFL in 1947 to wage an “all-out war for the preservation of the life of free trade unionism in America,” still offered no real assistance to their state affiliates (AFL 1947).

The CIO similarly had no coordinated strategy to counter Right-to-Work and growing legislative attacks in the immediate postwar years. Beginning with the Southern organizing drive, Operation Dixie, national CIO staff were pretty much divorced from the state Industrial Union Councils in the South and their political apparatus, keeping local officers removed from the most talented CIO leadership. This was done originally to keep the organizing separate from the CIO Political Action Committee (PAC), which was an easy target for Southern conservatives (Griffith 1987). This strategy, however, posed major organizational problems as Right-to-Work activities picked up in the region. An official with the Textile workers union actually questioned whether or not the drive to organize the South had “hastened this legislation” (in Gall 1988:41). In the early 1940s the CIO had coordinated with left-leaning organizations such as the Highlander Folk School and Southern Conference for Human Welfare (Honey 1993; Korstad 2003). These organizations waged public relations campaigns in the South where legislative action was
mounting, challenged the poll tax, and attempted to counter the varied corporate and extremist responses to labor that had spread throughout the region, including early Right to Work efforts. But the CIO abandoned many of these coalitions in the immediate postwar years to avoid being labeled communist.

Neither wing of the labor movement devoted sufficient attention or resources to Right-to-Work in the early years. In the midst of the anti-labor mobilization of 1947, CIO general council Lee Pressman still had to warn members of the executive council of the importance of mounting state campaigns (CIO Executive Committee 1947). Labor unions, of course had a lot on their plate during these years. This included the major labor organizing drives, battles over the shape of the postwar welfare state, and their own internal problems. Yet the inattention to state activities was in contrast to business mobilization, which was carried out at multiple levels. Sociologist Robert Lynd (1946) noted the sophisticated grass-roots campaigns that business groups were running throughout the states and rural areas, on “main street USA,” and urged unions to do the same. He argued that labor needed to go beyond defensive strategies and to articulate a coherent labor vision that could align with various civic movements.

Union movements were slow to catch up in this regard, often mounting belated, defensive campaigns. Most unions had no systematic public relations apparatus to draw on by this point, although both the AFL and CIO had experimented with limited radio programming (Pomper 1960). Some commentators of the time pointed specifically to the limits of the labor response, arguing that their claims were too simplistic: “Labor publicists haven’t yet learned that there is no merit in calling names...The words fascist, reactionary, phony, scab, Tory, and so on are used far too often” (Davis 1947:25). Many of these themes were deployed in heated state Right-to-Work campaigns in the immediate postwar years, where labor’s best responses often amounted to
inverting the Right-to-Work slogan to “right to scab” or “right to starve,” while attributing all anti-labor political mobilization to sinister, sometimes fascist influences (Gall 1988; Polakoff 1955; Wade 1976). Unions had no convincing alternative to the Right-to-Work slogan and its new backers that proclaimed to support individual employee rights.

It was not completely expected that local union movements would be so ill-equipped to deal with the intensified business-led campaigns. After all, unions emerged out of World War II in a strong position. The peak year for union density in the United States came in 1946, when more than one-third of the non-agricultural workforce belonged to unions – a peak to be reached again in 1953 before continuing its long slide to the present (Troy 1965). Fortune magazine, no friend of labor, did not foresee any formidable resistance to unionism in 1946, even proclaiming that the complete unionization of the South was inevitable (Goldfield 1997). C. Wright Mills (1948) argued that labor leaders were the “new men of power.” Yet labor unions experienced numerous political setbacks during the immediate postwar years and were overwhelmed by the redoubled mobilization of business groups.

Following the war workers raced to keep up with inflation and the nation witnessed its largest strike wave in the winter of 1945-1946. The Southern labor organizing drives launched in the spring of 1946 would fail miserably. These events combined with the economic problems of reconversion to provide fertile ground for conservative activists. The landslide in the midterm elections that year offered legislators a “mandate” for change, especially in labor relations. For Lichtenstein (1989:122-123), these years proved to be a crucial turning point, “when a still powerful trade union movement found its efforts to bargain over the shape of the postwar political economy decisively blocked by a powerful remobilization of business and conservative
forces.” These efforts, he argues, contained labor’s ambitions and limited their economic program to “a sort of militant interest group politics.”

Business mobilization was extensive and the political fallout for labor was severe. Ten states passed Right-to-Work laws in 1947 prior to the enactment of the Taft-Hartley act at the national level. Figure 2.3 displays the geographic distribution of Right-to-Work laws through 1947.

Much of the mobilization involved a broader reaction to the New Deal and wartime restrictions. Texas, an early pioneer in anti-labor legislation, was perhaps the epicenter of state activity in that year. The legislature passed nine restrictive laws on unions, including a Right-to-Work bill. The setbacks for labor and New Deal progressivism in the region were not a foregone conclusion. Labor, after all, had made major gains in the South, and especially Texas during the war years (Marshall 1967). The CIO-New Deal coalition even captured control of the state democratic party for a brief period between 1944 and 1946, and the postwar organizing drive posed a real challenge the one-party, closed political system that dominated the region (Amberg 2004; Green 1979). Yet local labor activists could not counter the extensive business mobilization, and lost badly.

Following a wave of restrictive laws at the state-level, the eightieth congress passed the Taft-Hartley act over President Truman’s veto in June of 1947. The act has been well documented (see Dubofsky 1994; Licthenstein 1989; Millis and Brown 1950; Tomlins 1985), but is worth noting here in relation to the Right-to-Work movement. The act restricted a number of union activities, including secondary boycotts, and allowed for “employer free speech” during union election drives. Union leaders were required to take an anti-communist oath – something that increased intra-union battles and intensified the raiding of communist-led unions. It formally
outlawed the closed-shop where unions could determine hiring. Importantly, and given the success of Right-to-Work efforts in the states (some fourteen states had right-to-work provisions prior to Taft-Hartley), conservative congressional leaders pushed for the inclusion of section 14(b), which ceded jurisdiction to states in the regulation of union security. This affirmed their rights to pass and enforce right-to-work laws. It also insulated the state laws from court challenges, which until this point had been the primary counter-strategy of the AFL and to a lesser degree the CIO.

In addition, the new law required unions operating under union security agreements (in non right-to-work states) to hold an NLRB certified election ensuring that a majority of workers approved. After this election process they still needed to get the employer to sign off on it, which was a struggle in and of itself (Berkowitz 1955). The government dropped this requirement in 1951, but for the three years for which it was in effect, unions won upwards of 97 percent of all elections.

‘The Labor Dynamo Slows Down:’ Narrowing the Agenda in the Postwar Period

Unions lost much of their edge and social movement vitality in the postwar years. Political Scientist Samuel Lubell (1951:179-180) contrasted his visit to a United Auto Workers (UAW) local in 1940 with the same union eight years later after the election of Harry Truman as president: “When I first visited Chrysler Local Seven...the scene was one of belligerent activity. Bulletin Boards bristled with photographs of police clubbing strikers and of tear gas riotings.” Just eight years later, “The strike photographs had come down from the bulletin boards and had been replaced by idyllic snapshots of the union’s annual outings and sporting events.” Lubell uses this to illuminate the changes in the broader labor movement, noting that “the dynamic near-
revolutionary surge...which brought such industrial giants as General Motors and U.S. Steel to the bargaining table, is now gone. The labor dynamo has slowed down.”

Labor’s ambitions in the political arena and for broader social welfare policies, much of which had been tempered in the immediate postwar years, came to a halt with the presidential election of 1948. Just a year earlier many union leaders had sought replacements for Truman on the democratic ticket, but when Henry Wallace announced his third party bid for the presidency, mainstream CIO unions jumped behind Truman. Following the surprise victory, however, union influence within the democratic party actually waned. With no effective party vehicle to exert pressure on the state, most unions looked to private collective bargaining as the way to ensure social welfare provisions for their members (Lichtenstein 1989). The generous five-year contract signed between General Motors and the UAW in 1950, dubbed the “Treaty of Detroit,” convinced many analysts that unions ambitions for social welfare had been reduced to a narrow, employer-based system.

Following the political setbacks of 1947 and the dawning of cold war politics, the communist issue exploded within the CIO. At the peak of CIO power in the late 1940s, more than a quarter of the membership, or over one million workers, were represented by so-called communist dominated unions (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Many of the unions at the “center” and “right” of the federation, including the UAW and CIO president Phillip Murray’s own united steel workers began raiding the membership of communist-led unions. These activities intensified following the failed Wallace presidency bid, which divided CIO unions even further. This was formalized in the purges of 1949-1950 when the CIO expelled eleven of its own member unions for being under communist control (Zeiger 1995).
The expulsion of the communist-led unions from the CIO amounted a loss of nearly one million members, including some of the most forceful advocates for civil rights and gender equality within the federation. Much research now suggests that these unions were indeed more egalitarian, bargained for better contracts, and were even more democratic than their counterparts (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003; Zeiger 1995; Zeitlin and Wheyer 2001). As such the CIO emerged from the 1940s with a less progressive outlook on politics, civil rights, and organizing. Still it is unclear how this affected their dealings with the Right-to-Work issue. These damaging, highly public divisions no doubt limited the extent that the CIO could provide a coherent voice in politics. As noted earlier, to the extent to which the CIO dropped coalition efforts with left-leaning partners, and completely removed their Southern organizing drive – and its best and brightest talent – from its local political mobilization, these divisions left local unionists in a poor position to deal with mounting business campaigns.

At the end of the decade the labor movement had lost much of its social movement edge, and many of the rights embedded in the Wagner Act passed some fifteen years earlier were now entirely absent or greatly diminished. The political landscape had shifted to the right and the political ambitions of unions had certainly narrowed by this point. New Deal social policy stumbled as well. Rather than completing the project of the 1930s, the New Deal “failed and was redefined,” as an uneven or “two-track” welfare state emerged that gave considerable leeway to the states. Commenting on the dismantling of these provisions in the 1940s, and especially the cornerstone work relief program, Amenta (1998:192) notes that “By the end of the decade, “the right to work” meant not the right to a job, provided in the last instance by the government, but the ‘right’ not to join a union.”
If the moment for progressive politics had expired, and unions themselves were now much less ambitious, business advocates of Right-to-Work were not satisfied. In the early postwar years Right-to-Work drives extended to the northeast and mid-Atlantic states, much closer to the heart of CIO power. Campaigns surfaced in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Delaware. Unionists began to fear that these laws signaled to employers an opportunity to oppose collective bargaining. Seeing the need for more coordinated political action, the AFL formed Labor’s League for Political Education (LLPE) in 1948, which paralleled the CIO’s PAC (Zeiger 2002). Labor for its part did mobilize politically in 1948, and scored some significant victories. In addition to the surprise Truman victory, and a more favorable congress, labor came out on the winning end of three public Right-to-Work referendums in New Mexico, Massachusetts and Maine, while losing efforts to repeal existing statutes in Arizona and North Dakota. Aided by the legislative gains of the previous year, Right-to-Work statutes were repealed in Delaware and New Hampshire in 1949. A bid to remove the Right-to-Work law in Tennessee that same year failed.

At the national level unions launched a major drive to repeal the Taft-Hartley act that would have voided state Right-to-Work laws. Labor stumbled tactically however. In going for an all or nothing repeal, they were slow to accept a compromise bill, that was soon blocked by conservative Southern democrats anyway. Another setback came in 1949 when the Supreme Court ruled in Lincoln Federal Labor Union v. Northwestern Iron and Metal Company, that state Right-to-Work laws were constitutional and fell within the policing powers of states (Sultan 1958). The AFL’s legal strategy, which it had relied on almost exclusively in Right-to-Work battles, now fell through. With no movement on Taft-Hartley at the national level, the best labor could do was fight off Right-to-Work from expanding further.
From 1950 to 1956 labor political activity at the state-level improved, but was still relatively uncoordinated and most union activity still concentrated on national efforts. Unions were on the losing side in six states while labor held off business groups in five other key battles (Sultan 1958). There were some promising signs in the early 1950s. In 1951, congress passed a bill that no longer required unions to hold NLRB union shop elections in those states that allowed them. Unions won 97 percent of the more than 46,000 union shop elections held between 1947 and 1951 (Berkowitz 1955). And during the 1952 steel crisis, the Wage Stabilization Board (WSB), like the NWLB a decade earlier, granted the steel workers a union shop in basic steel in exchange for wage moderation.

On the whole, however, labor found little luck in targeting congress for national reform. Further efforts to repeal Right-to-Work and the Taft-Hartley act at the national level were met with little support within the democratic party and certainly no support from the new republican administration. In 1953 the CIO and AFL launched uncoordinated repeal efforts at the national level. The CIO got no results from working with democratic allies in congress, while the AFL’s attempt to negotiate with the Eisenhower administration fell-through soon thereafter. While local unionists had long urged for a greater focus at the state-level, both national federations would soon see this area as the lone possibility for stemming the tide of Right-to-Work.

Labor Politics Following the Merger

In 1955, George Meany, the president of the newly merged AFL-CIO, attempted to curtail business mobilization by engaging in high-level negotiations with long-time adversary the National Association of Manufacturers. When conservative employers formed the National Right-to-Work Committee (NRTWC) in 1955, unionists feared that the NAM, the Chamber of
Commerce, and the NRTWC would launch a coordinated assault on unions in the states – not a far off possibility, given the revived activity in the states, and that many in the business community railed against the newly merged labor movement as an irresponsible labor monopoly.

Meany, in a speech to a NAM conference in December of 1955, sought to win concessions on the Right-to-Work issue by promoting a conciliatory, pro-business approach. He proclaimed to the audience that business and labor had much in common: “I stand for the profit system...I believe in the free enterprise system completely. I believe in management’s right to manage.” The only thing to disagree upon between labor and management, he continued, “It is merely for us to disagree, if you please, as to what share the worker gets, what share management gets...” (Meany 1955).

This accommodationist pitch on the part of the official labor movement was of little use. Private talks with NAM president Charles Sligh broke down. While some business moderates viewed the ALF-CIO merger as a positive step toward “responsible unionism,” historian Fones-Wolf (1994) argues that a much larger conservative segment of the business community feared the consolidated federation, thinking it would prompt renewed organizing drives, militancy, and greater power in politics and at the bargaining table. Thus the NAM embarked on a new public relations campaign to expose the abuses of “big labor.” At the top of their list was compulsory union membership and the Right-to-Work issue. Here the NAM drew on conventional themes. They sought to protect the rights of the individual employee from irresponsible labor leaders.

Given little success in negotiations, and revived Right-to-Work activity in the states, labor made a concerted attempt to rejuvenate grass-roots activism and political mobilization. The new Committee on Political Education (COPE) from the merged federation provided the infrastructure to carry out voter registration drives, member education and, importantly, to
counter the increasing state-level agitation over Right-to-Work. Many unionists feared in the mid-1950s that conservatives at the local level were mobilizing to restrict labor unions with an enthusiasm similar to that of the immediate postwar period and Taft-Hartley. Now Right-to-Work campaigns were also aided by an official mouthpiece in Washington in the NRTWC.

Even prior to the AFL-CIO merger and the formation of COPE, both federations began to reconsider their political strategies in regards to Right-to-Work. The CIO had always favored a national level strategy, which is somewhat understandable given that the federation emerged and grew tremendously with the aid of favorable federal labor policies. But the CIO’s influence within the democratic party appeared to be waning and Southern democrats were able to limit the support the party provided for labor reform issues. This was evident with the repeated failures on Taft-Hartley reform. The CIO now realized that activism at the local level was necessary to fend off Right-to-Work and that local organizations needed considerable assistance to reorganize and to become viable.

To address the problem the CIO coordinated meetings with state Industrial Union Councils to assist them in developing political action programs and grass-roots strategies to counter Right-to-Work. In 1954 the federation devoted an entire issue of its research publication, *Economic Outlook*, to the Right-to-Work issue. The AFL too began to take state level politics and Right-to-Work more seriously. It published a series of articles on RTW in its journal, the *American Federationist*, over the course of 1955 – highlighting successful strategies for fighting off Right-to-Work and potential avenues for repeal campaigns.

By the mid-1950s then Right-to-Work emerged as more of a national issue. Previously, groups such as the NAM and the Chamber of Commerce, worked through their state affiliates and provided funds and public relations assistance to state Right-to-Work efforts. Now they worked
actively to persuade national organizations such as the American Bar Association and the American Legion to take a stand on the issue. The religious community began to fit prominently in the Right-to-Work struggle. To the dismay of the business community, however, religious organizations primarily sided with labor, especially the Catholic church. They contended that union efforts were consistent with their mission of social justice (Fones-Wolf 1994). The NAM indeed feared that Right-to-Work laws were coming under “emotional attack – not only from organized labor but also by religious leaders in all three major faiths and of course by all ‘liberals’ in every walk of life” (NAM 1955:2). While this was one group that tended to favor the union side, both business and labor groups would actively court religious and other community groups in the more sophisticated campaigns of the post-merger years. Both sides would now also draw on television spots as part of their Right-to-Work campaign strategies (Fones-Wolf 1994; Pomper 1960).

While state federations still had to deal with the merger in piecemeal fashion (many state labor movements did not formally merge for another 2 - 3 years following the national merger in 1955), Right-to-Work forces had stepped up their action in early 1956 as campaign activity surfaced in Kentucky and Washington, and unions in Louisiana attempted to repeal the law that had passed two years earlier. In Louisiana AFL, CIO, and Machinists political wings conducted voter registration drives and set up political clinics for union activists. These grass roots efforts proved successful as several anti-labor state legislators lost reelection bids, and the new government passed a repeal bill for Right-to-Work. This strategy, labor organizers hoped, would become a model for other states (Canak and Miller 1990).³

Unions scored a major victory in Washington state in 1956. The NRTWC worked with local employer associations in the state to put a Right-to-Work initiative on the ballot for the
November election. Unions started their efforts early and were able to convince election officials in the state that “Right-to-Work” was a misleading slogan – the ballot initiative instead received the neutral title “Initiative 198.” This preparation, and awareness of the powerful individual rights message that anti-union groups employed, no doubt aided the efforts of the Washington labor movement. The Right-to-Work slogan was hard to overcome. Indeed most unions were slow to develop an effective counter-strategy as most people outside the union movement were unfamiliar with the specifics of these laws yet embraced basic notions of individual rights. While there is no systematic public opinion data at the state-level for Right-to-Work, private polling by both business and labor groups suggests that the message was indeed a potent one, and while few understood just what Right-to-Work was, a majority supported it on a simplistic level (Aaron 1953; NAM 1955).

It was thus crucial for the labor movement to craft an effective public counter-message to Right-to-Work. And labor unions could not rest on the positive developments of 1956. Right-to-Work supporters agitated throughout the states, succeeding in placing an initiative on the ballot in Kansas for the following year and passing a statute in heavily industrialized Indiana. By mid-1958 several states had placed Right-to-Work laws on the ballot for the fall election. Right-to-Work activists used the negative publicity generated from the national McClellan committee hearings on labor racketeering to sway public support toward their cause. Seeing this momentum, some congressional conservatives even began pushing for a national Right-to-Work law.

Perhaps most damaging for organized labor was the Right-to-Wok success in Indiana. This was the first victory in a heavily industrialized and unionized state and provided conservative activists with a model of success for the area. Again the NRTWC worked with state employer associations to establish an Indiana Right-to-Work Committee to run the campaign in
that state, and began its work well-prior to the 1957 legislative session. A key focus was to tie negative publicity from strikes, especially violence in strikes, to the union security issue. Here the INRTWC hired public relations specialists and published pamphlets, took out newspaper and radio ads, and ran a speakers bureau to generate interest in the issue. Particular attention was payed to a strike where an infant was injured – although it was not clear by whom. The INRTWC engaged in intensive lobbying, linking the Right-to-Work campaign to these unsightly incidents, and the racketeering allegations from the McClellan committee. The Indiana labor movement, still attempting to sort out responsibilities after the merger, was blind-sided by the smooth-running, well-funded operation (Kahn 1970; Whitney 1958).

Many conservative activists believed that the expansion of Right-to-Work into the heavy manufacturing areas was not only a springboard for increased mobilization, but also the rewards of a long campaign to establish a conservative base to counter labor and liberalism. As the head of the INRTWC expressed, “Business organizations have worked long and hard to spread the gospel of conservativism. Our new Right-to-Work law could not have become a reality without such seed-planting” (in Fones-Wolf 1994:266). The Indiana case no doubt gave life to new conservative activism. Sensing the possibility for expansion, the NRTWC coordinated with state organizations to secure public votes on Right-to-Work in California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Ohio and Washington. If this was not troubling enough for union activists, the NRTWC had expanded into Illinois and even Michigan, where it began an advertising campaign. Right-to-Work activity had expanded to the heart of industrial union power, indeed, into Michigan, the birthplace of the UAW and, arguably, the modern industrial union movement some two decades earlier.
The encroachment of Right-to-Work into the industrial heartland, and its momentum that threatened to engulf the union-strong states, prompted mobilization by the liberal industrial union wing of the national labor movement, especially AFL-CIO vice president Walter Reuther. Long feuding craft and industrial activists coordinated activity, and for the first time since Right-to-Work campaigns took off in the early 1940s, the union movement in 1957 created a formal organizational structure devoted to problem (Fones-wolf 1994). This special subcommittee sought to stimulate state-level anti-Right-to-Work organizations and to help establish labor-friendly citizens’ committees and other coalition possibilities. In addition, labor worked with prominent liberals to form a citizens group, the National Council for Industrial Peace led by Eleanor Roosevelt and Herbert Lehman, to educate on Right-to-Work and to counterbalance the NRTWC.

Early in 1958 Walter Reuther argued to industrial union activists that Right-to-Work must be tied to a broader struggle of progressivism versus reactionary politics. He pointed to Right-to-Work forces as having the broader agenda of slowing labor mobilization for social welfare and other progressive issues. Simply fighting Right-to-Work on a purely “negative, defensive basis” would be a crucial error. “We must make this fight on a positive basis in which we put all these issues in their proper relationship, one to the other, and then equate them with the forces pushing the ‘Right-to-Work’ laws” (in Gall 1988:105). Thus in addition to assisting with the nuts and bolts of forming organizations, supportive citizens committees, and seeking out liberal-labor coalition possibilities, labor now sought to put Right-to-Work within a more sophisticated framework than involved the social and public welfare – something that union activists could have used in the early years, when mostly inexperienced local officers and organizers resorted to last-ditch, defensive campaign efforts.
The 1958 campaigns required considerable public outreach by labor. The limited understanding of the issue outside of union circles and the compelling slogan of Right-to-Work were compounded by the anti-union publicity generated by the McClellan committee hearings on union racketeering. The NAM, while now staying behind the scenes, encouraged member employers to submit evidence of corruption to the committee, packaged the more sensational committee material into ready-made publicity kits for its local affiliates, and produced a film on union corruption and violence titled “Trouble, U.S.A.” (Fones-Wolf 1994). These developments did not help labor’s cause. As one observer noted on the possible effects of the McClellan hearings on support for Right-to-Work, “The slogan that no one ought to be forced to pay dues to Jimmie Hoffa has appeal” (Meyers 1957:389). The AFL-CIO sought to counter the negative publicity by adopting a code of ethics and expelling some of the most notorious unions, including the Teamsters. Meanwhile, Right-to-Work continued to gain steam as a national issue. The nation’s colleges and universities adopted it as a the national debate topic for the 1957-1958 academic year.

Major corporations publically backed Right-to-Work in several of the battleground states in 1958. As Canak and Miller (1990) argue, while larger industrial interests financially supported Right-to-Work campaigns in the 1940s and early 1950s, they most often worked from behind the scenes and were less vocal as not to arouse labor militancy in their own plants. In the 1958 campaigns, however, the Boeing corporation led efforts in Kansas as well as Washington state, the General Electric corporation was active in California and Ohio, as was Armco steel (Miller and Ware 1963; State Labor Proceedings; Taft 1968). At least some business executives representing major corporations feared the merged AFL-CIO and its political efforts and were thus more apt to publically support the mounting Right-to-Work efforts. L. R. Boulware (1958:
587) of the General Electric corporation urged his colleagues that politics was indeed the “businessman’s biggest job” in 1958, and encouraged activism at all levels of government. While the 1950s are known more for the spread of consumerism and mass culture than capital-labor conflict, business groups did fear the prospects of a united labor movement and mobilized politically to limit its influence. Daniel Bell (1960:220) argued that the Right-to-Work agitation reflected the “status anxieties” of business rather than any real class interests, yet for a major segment of the business community, and certainly for all of the labor movement, these political struggles and their consequences were very real.

In two gubernatorial campaigns, high-profile republicans tied their election fate to Right-to-Work. Republican Senator William Knowland of California even ran in the primary to unseat incumbent GOP Governor William Knight – using the Right-to-Work issue as the key difference between the candidates. The Right-to-Work initiative campaign gained considerable publicity and would be the second most expensive political campaign in California history (Taft 1968).

In the industrial heartland, Ohio emerged as the key battleground state for Right-to-Work nationwide. Republican Governor William O’Neill campaigned actively for Right-to-Work, pinning his reelection hopes on the issue. And Right-to-Work activists in the heart of union strength had good reason to be optimistic given the recent success in Indiana (Kahn 1970; Miller and Ware 1963).

With extensive campaigning, the coordination of several state initiatives, and the national involvement of both employer and labor organizations, 1958 proved to be a turning point in the Right-to-Work movement. In almost all of the elections, the vote was decidedly in favor of labor and this carried over into political gains as well. Right-to-Work initiatives were defeated in every state except Kansas. Labor-backed candidates scored remarkably well in the midterm elections.
too. Labor-backed candidates won twenty three out of thirty U.S. Senate races and major gains were made in the states (U.S. News 1958). Those candidates that hinged their efforts directly on the Right-to-wok issue lost miserably in California and Ohio.

Several things were remarkably different in 1958 than in previous Right-to-Work drives, especially in relation to the late 1940s. First there was a rationalized, national campaign apparatus to deal with the coordination of Right-to-Work efforts and to provide financial and in-kind resources to state affiliates. Secondly, there was a notable change in strategy and message. Knowing what they were up against, labor expanded its message beyond a simple trade union issue. In all of the campaigns, the themes of a broader struggle of progressivism versus reactionary politics were presented to the voters. Labor tied their welfare to that of the public.

Unions also engaged in extensive coalition work. As noted earlier, both business groups and unions actively courted the church and other civic organizations beginning in the middle part of the decade. In the industrialized states labor also looked increasingly to the NAACP, minorities, and other liberal allies to engage in campaign activity. In California the state-fed belatedly began printing flyers in Spanish and English, and also worked with the NAACP. These efforts promoted a working class activism that seemed rare for the decade. In the Ohio campaign, for instance, activists enrolled some 200,000, mostly working class voters. Labor, it seemed, had developed an effective counter-strategy to the mounting Right-to-Work campaigns of the decade (Gall 1994; Miller and Ware 1963).

Conclusion
The decisive wins for labor deterred Right-to-Work advocates from again coordinating campaign activity on such a large scale, and prevented Right-to-Work from engulfing the heavily
industrialized states. Despite the enthusiasms generated from this union renewal, the labor movement would not mount systematic Right-to-Work repeal drives, nor would they launch another Southern organizing campaign. Both business and labor groups had developed an effective repertoire to draw on in these struggles, and further changes in Right-to-Work would become more difficult.4 While the events of the late fifties helped turn the AFL-CIO’s political apparatus, COPE, into a fairly effective political force for labor and liberal issues (Greenstone 1969), the congressional gains of 1958 had no immediate payoff. The McClellan committee hearings would culminate in the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959 – the last major piece of federal labor legislation for the twentieth century. The act required the federal government to monitor the financial affairs of unions. By the end of the decade the advance of unionism was contained to a narrow geographic and industrial space, although perhaps still not to the liking of the business community. As the 1960s dawned and the Civil Rights movement took off, much of the official labor movement became more insular. Labor found it difficult to create and sustain broad, class-wide coalitions (Jacobs and Dixon 2005), and often found itself in conflict with New Left causes (Freeman 1993).

As a consequence of the political struggles described here, we now have diverse union rights across the United States. The resultant uneven geographic pattern of union organization and worker representation has obvious implications for stratification, wages, and the leverage workers and employers are able to exert in the employment relationship. As capital flight accelerated in the postwar era, the Right-to-Work South provided a safe-haven (often first stop) for runaway shops. This ensured that any postwar “accord” between labor and management would be an especially narrow and short-lived one. The wave of organizing in the public sector in the 1970s workers was less pronounced or entirely absent in Right-to-Work states as
employees and unions found it difficult to build viable organizations, not to mention win rights for new classifications of workers. The relative capacity of unions to engage in politics and to mobilize for social welfare provisions, unemployment insurance, and minimum and living wage standards no doubt follows this uneven pattern of organization – something that is of no small consequence given the decentralized welfare state in the U.S. with considerable leeway to the individual states.

The interaction between business and labor groups in the political process following the New Deal was complex. Just how business interests mobilized to restrict unionism, and labor’s responses, varied considerably across time and place – ranging from reactionary organizations promoting racist ideologies that linked unionism, communism, and racial equality, to more sophisticated strategies championed by mainstream business actors, particularly after World War II, that framed anti-unionism within a discourse of individual rights. Business groups were able to capitalize on the economic difficulties associated with postwar reconversion and the more general political drift to the right while unions were slow to counter the powerful individual rights theme that Right-to-Work advocates promoted. In terms of framing, there was indeed a considerable lag time for unions to catch up to the activities of their adversaries. By the time labor did devote sufficient energy and resources to dealing with the Right-to-Work issue, some nineteen states had these laws on the books.

In chapter 3, I show how explanations of social movements and politics can provide a flexible conceptual scheme to address these developments and, are indeed useful for understanding a wider range of contentious politics than what is typically explored in the literature. I synthesize insights gleaned from this history with resource mobilization, political opportunity, and cultural framing perspectives in order to tackle the important and concrete
question of labor decline at a pivotal historical movement, but also to advance our understanding of the enduring problem of how social movements and their opponents affect political and social change.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1. Some conservative Southern democrats actually supported the Wagner Act because it excluded agricultural workers, and thus did not challenge the race-based political economy of the region (see Domhoff 1987; Dubofsky 1994). Following the upholding of the act in 1937, Southern democrats and Northern republicans formed a relatively solid anti-labor political alliance.

3. Material on state labor federations’ reactions to CIO organization are from the state legislation files, American Federation of Labor Records, housed at the historical society of Wisconsin.

3. The Louisiana labor movement made a trade off in the repeal bill by accepting the exclusion of agricultural workers. This did not sit well some activists who saw great promise in the recent organizing among mostly minority workers in the sugar fields (Canak and Miller 1990). This compromise strategy to win the Right-to-Work repeal likely limited the extent of any labor-minority coalition work in the state just civil rights activity began to percolate.

4. In the last four and a half decades only four states have passed Right-to-Work laws and there has been one repeal. As unions found it harder and harder to engage in politics in Right-to-Work states, the prospects for repeal became increasingly bleak. Repeal attempts at the national level have been ineffective. Where unions are somewhat established, they have been mostly successful in countering Right-to-Work attempts by drawing on the lessons from the campaigns of the late 1950s and forging broad, liberal-labor coalitions (see Gall 1994).
Figure 2.1 States (shaded) Passing Early Restrictions on Union Organizing Tactics, 1938 - 1947.
Source: *Annual Digest of State and Federal Labor Legislation.*
Figure 2.2 Business Appeals for Right-to-Work
Source: National Association of Manufacturers Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.
Figure 2.3 States (shaded) With Right-to-Work Laws in 1947.
Source: *Annual Digest of State and Federal Labor Legislation*
CHAPTER 3
THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Three decades ago William Gamson’s (1975) *The Strategy of Social Protest* challenged scholars to think seriously about how social movements affect political and social change, and just when less powerful groups are likely to succeed. This work contributed to an emerging resource mobilization framework that suggested that protest movements and their participants were more or less rational political actors. This perspective suggested that social movement mobilization and success could be explained by variations in organization and resources and by movement strategy itself.

Since then scholarship in this area has expanded tremendously. Alongside resource mobilization, political opportunity and cultural framing approaches have emerged as core perspectives on social movements. In this chapter, I critically evaluate these explanations in light of the business and labor political mobilization of the 1940s and 1950s. Each camp has sought to advance the longstanding question for political sociologists: namely, how do social movements and their opponents affect political change? Yet despite the development of social movement perspectives and the emergence of social movement studies as a core subfield in the discipline over the last two decades, there is still considerable disagreement on just how social movements matter. Empirical efforts in this regard have been limited by the selection bias in social movement research toward studying the more successful challengers. Little of this work, moreover, fully considers the role of elites as meaningful actors in their own right, as
countermovements or targets of challenging groups, and their bearing on a range of social movement processes.

I will argue that no one perspective adequately explains the politics of social movements, especially when considering the complex struggles described in the previous chapter. Correspondingly, I pay special attention to recent literature that attempts to synthesize insights from each of these perspectives. The complexities of the historical case at hand, moreover, highlight the shortcomings of extant social movement perspectives, and suggest directions for theory extension. The integration of these organizational, political, and cultural approaches to social movements with the historical experience of unions and employers underlies my analytic strategy for the project.

Resource Mobilization, Political Opportunity, and Contemporary Social Movement Scholarship

Contemporary scholarship on social movements is distinctive in so much as it marks a clear break from early collective behavior arguments. Collective behavior theorists saw protest movements as often irrational, spontaneous, and temporary outbursts. Grievance or strain versions of the argument attributed this activity to the breakdown of traditional societal roles, where dislocated individuals looked to movements to reorient themselves. Functionalist versions like Neil Smelser’s (1962) linked certain societal dysfunctions to different types of protest activity (see also Turner and Killian 1959). While others pointed to deprivation as the root of contentious activity (Gurr 1971). These arguments made few connections between conventional politics and protest activity, and had little to say about movement outcomes or their efficacy in the political process. Somewhat surprisingly, the upsurge of labor in the 1930s and its subsequent political struggles drew little attention from these scholars (but see Korhnhauser et al. 1954).
The movements of the 1960s encouraged a new wave of scholarship on collective action. As Tarrow (1998:15) notes, the previous generation of scholars associated with the collective behavior tradition were influenced by the frightening real-world events associated with Stalinism and fascism. But arguments stressing the irrationality of protest movements and their participants were hard to reconcile with the new cycle of protest that saw thousands of young people participate in the civil rights and anti-war movements.

The resource mobilization framework emerged partly out of this disconnect. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1973, 1977) argued that movements and their participants were indeed rational and, at least in advanced capitalist societies, that resources and organization were the necessary ingredients for protest activity. In this view, grievances and deprivation were ever-present and, alone, were not sufficient for any sustained mobilization. Instead, they emphasized the professional nature of contemporary social movements and their reliance on paid staff, formal leadership, and sophisticated media strategies. The resource mobilization approach shifted attention to the dynamics and tactics of social movements themselves, indeed to the agency of social movement actors. Thus, for Tilly (1978), the central questions surrounding collective action were how challengers acquired resources and made them available for mobilization. In this view, protest activity was just politics by a different means, and formal Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) were arguably more effective for these purposes than loosely structured, decentralized entities.

Underlying the focus on the organizational aspects of social movements was the belief that SMOs were potentially effective political actors. Gamson’s (1975) landmark study analyzed a sample of 53 historical social movement challengers in the United States. He defined social movement success in terms of acceptance and tangible gains, and found the more successful challengers to be those that had formalized organizations, that employed unruly and sometimes
violent tactics, and that had non-displacement or reformist goals. Here, formalized organizations provided challenging groups with a combat readiness needed to deal with resource-rich opponents and the state. Conversely, relatively informal groups, or those that were deeply divided or fractionalized, were ill-equipped to deal with sometimes fierce repression and were thus less successful in securing new gains. The study set off a flurry of research on social movement effectiveness and was itself extensively re-analyzed (see especially Goldstone 1980; and Frey, Dietz, and Kalof 1992). The main thrust of Gamson’s study, however, remains central to the field and to our understanding of social movements and politics – the presence of supportive SMOs can influence an array of outcomes, including policy, and that social movement strategy is meaningful in this regard. Unfortunately, in the three decades following this work, few have attempted to analyze a such a broad sample of social movement challengers. Much of this is of course due to practical data constraints and the sheer resources needed to compile such an exhaustive sample. The result, however, is that scholarly attention has instead been limited to a narrow range of mobilization campaigns and SMOs, and usually successful ones at that (Burstein and Linton 2002).

Along with the focus on formal SMOs, the emerging resource mobilization perspective pointed to financial resources, external sponsorship, and third party support. In their classic study of farm-worker movements, Jenkins and Perrow (1977) show how unionization efforts did not succeed until they received external support from labor and liberal interest groups. For Oberschall (1973), the internal characteristics of movements such as the social networks connecting participants and potential activists were especially important. To successfully “bloc recruit” and mobilize in mass, movements had to tap into preexisting networks of individuals that shared similar identities and experiences. Interpersonal ties and interactional processes among potential activists are thus important components of what some have termed social movement
mobilizing structures (e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Such resources, whether in the form of financial support and external sponsorship, leadership, expertise, internal organization and networks, or volunteer commitment, are argued to be critical for explaining variations in protest activity and success across mobilization drives (Andrews 2001; Gamson 1975; Jenkins 1983).

This approach to social movements, however, did not sit well many scholars. Some veterans of the enthusiasms of the 1960s were left cold by the economic references to “movement sectors” and “entrepreneurs,” prevalent in early work, while some questioned the central premise that organization spurs protest. McCarthy and Zald’s (1973, 1977) early statements, for example, suggested that social movement entrepreneurs could willfully generate protest activity.1 Piven and Cloward (1977) offered perhaps the most compelling early alternative to resource mobilization. They analyzed various poor peoples’ movements and, drawing from Michels’ (1912) “Iron Law of Oligarchy” thesis, argued that formal organization and SMOs often squeezed the “life-blood” out of these efforts. Subordinate groups’ main leverage of power, they argued, lay in their ability to spontaneously disrupt the normal routine of elites. Formal organization and SMOs, rather than providing challengers with a combat readiness as Gamson’s work suggested, more often channeled such attempts toward institutional politics where they were less effective.

While Piven and Cloward’s thesis represents an important challenge to resource mobilization, the hypothesized relationships between organization, protest, and political success have nonetheless found considerable empirical support (Andrews 2001; Soule and Olzak 2004). Moreover, studies show that the consequences of social movement formalization or professionalization are complex and variable (Zald and Ash 1966), that it is not necessarily dire for challenging groups (Staggenborg 1988), that declining, bureaucratized SMOs may indeed revitalize themselves (Isaac and Christian 2002; Voss and Sherman 2000), and that it may be the interaction between
SMOs and other more proximate features of collective action that is most pressing for mobilization and success rather than the presence or absence of formal organization (Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Dixon, Roscigno, and Hodson 2004; Snow and McAdam 2000).

If SMOs were not the conservatizing agents that Piven and Cloward suggested, others called question to elite involvement in, and sponsorship of, mobilization campaigns. Aldon Morris (1984), in particular, questioned the extent of external sponsorship fueling the Southern civil rights movement. He argued that the early mobilizations that gave rise to the civil rights movement did not succeed because they were spontaneous outbursts that were able to disrupt the routine of elites as per Piven and Cloward, nor because they were able to garner the support of influential northern elites as standard from resource mobilization arguments. Rather, protest took off and became a force because its organizational backbone was deeply embedded in the black community – especially the black church – and resonated culturally with the daily experiences of Southern blacks. For Morris (1984), localized movement centers that drew on pre-existing organization and indigenous resources were the base of the Southern civil rights movement. In contrast to the highly bureaucratized NAACP, localized movement centers were able to target activities to address grievances unique to their own communities. These organizations were also flexible and in a better position to innovate tactically since they did not need to clear activities with a national office. Institutions such as the black church and to a lesser extent the black colleges thus provided an organizational base that undoubtedly aided the coordination of protest, and which offered ready networks of potential activists that facilitated “bloc recruitment” and the ability to mobilize in mass (Oberschall 1973).

Indigenous social movement organization and resources may be important for a number of reasons. Campaigns characterized by this base are arguably less likely to be coopted or channeled toward the interests of elite sponsors (McAdam 1982; Jenkins and Eckardt 1986). The
localized resource base, moreover, need not put social movement challengers at a severe
disadvantage. Studies have found that resource-poor organizations may overcome material
deficits through creative strategies that rely more heavily on the skills of organizers and
movement leaders than external sponsorship (Cress and Snow 2000; Ganz 2000).

The importance of indigenous, localized resources raises questions when considering
social movements with federated structures such as the labor and civil rights campaigns of the
twentieth century. The localized movement centers that Morris (1984) describes are undoubtably
better than national SMOs at tapping into existing solidarities among potential participants and
coordinating events. Yet such localized centers are often in a poor position to counter the more
sophisticated political or media campaigns launched by elites, or business associations in the
labor case. Recall that local unions were unable to match the advanced political and public
relations campaigns launched by business associations in the immediate postwar period. It was
not until the national labor federations realized the threat posed by business efforts at the state-
level that they offered meaningful assistance to local activists. That the labor movement was
deeply divided through much of this period certainly did not help, but the lack of national
assistance was crucial.

The foregoing discussion suggests that it is the sometimes uneasy combination of highly
formalized organization and more localized or indigenous movement organizations and centers
that enables challengers to have a degree of combat readiness (Gamson 1975) necessary to
counter the political mobilization of elite opponents and the autonomy and access to networks of
potential activists necessary to turn out supporters in mass (Morris 1984; Oberschall 1973). To
date, Andrews’ (2001) *Movement Infrastructure* model offers the most thorough treatment of
these relationships. Drawing on civil rights and anti-poverty initiatives in Mississippi, Andrews
suggests that social movement challengers will have the greatest impact, particularly on policy,
when they are both deeply embedded within informal community networks and have a formal organizational apparatus to advance claims in the political process.

As noted above, ties to activists through informal, community-based networks make the movement less likely to be coopted and may provide challengers with a broader range of tactical options, while the formal structure offers some legitimacy and allows movements to pursue more routine mechanisms of influence such as lobbying and negotiation with political elites. Indeed, in some instances SMOs may begin to look much like interest groups, where they gain more routine access to the political system and shift their focus toward lobbying and electoral politics accordingly. In addition, Andrews argues that a diversity of leadership (formal and informal) allows movements to reach multiple audiences and, again, facilitates the use of both mass-based and more routinized tactics. Thus, movements that have a mixture of these leadership, organizational, and resource-base characteristics have a strong movement infrastructure and “greater flexibility that allows them to influence the political process through multiple mechanisms” (Andrews 2001:776).

I will discuss the mechanisms through which movements and their opponents affect political change in more detail in the following pages. First, though, it is worth summarizing the contribution of resource mobilization and organizational approaches to social movements, and the implications for the case of labor and business mobilization following the New Deal. Many of the same characteristics that early resource mobilization theorists identified as important for social movement emergence and protest are argued to be equally meaningful for movements’ ability to influence the political process. Contrary to Piven and Cloward’s (1977) thesis, considerable research shows that the presence of supportive social movement organizations can aid protest mobilization (Jenkins 1983; McCammon 2001; Morris 1984) and, indeed, influence policy (Andrews 2001; Gamson 1975; Soule and Olzak 2004). Moreover, challengers with
formalized organizations and that are not deeply fractionalized are more likely to be combat ready, or equipped to counter the actions of their opponents. Finally, challengers that combine formal organization and ties to local, informal networks of potential activists and supporters are more likely to be successful in affecting change.

It is important to clarify that much of this research does not fully theorize the action of movement opponents outside of the state, especially elite actors. Elites, including employers and their associations, are assumed to be important for movement sponsorship and as potential allies but are rarely considered to be meaningful actors in their own right. Pichardo’s (1995) research on elite-driven mobilization during the 1930s provides an important exception, and suggests some logical extensions that can be made in this regard from existing resource arguments. The most straightforward implication is that the presence and extent of countermovement organizations should likewise be meaningful for political change. Organizations of economic elites, in this case, may resemble more of the interest group version of the SMO, as they likely have greater access to political decision-makers and employ more routinized tactics. Still, movement opponents may need to expand this repertoire, particularly when SMO gains threaten their standing. This possibility was illustrated in the previous chapter where business associations expanded their political activity and innovated tactically as they sought to recoup their losses from years of progressive politics and labor ascendance. Research on more recent corporate mobilization points to the importance of formal organization (Prechel 1991) and the expansion of the standard tactical repertoire to counter liberal initiatives (Akard 1992). As I will argue momentarily, it is the interaction and tactical exchanges of movement and countermovement organizations that may be especially crucial for political change, and that is in need of closer examination.
A considerable body of research, however, emphasizes the factors external to movements themselves that may influence social movement emergence and mobilization. Political Opportunity explanations, while not discounting the role of organization, point to the shifting constellation of forces in the surrounding environment that alter the costs of collective action for social movement actors, paying close attention to the interactions between movements and the state in the political process (Tarrow 1998). This perspective is closely associated with the resource mobilization framework and many of the same authors are linked to both traditions (e.g., Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978). The premise is that the political system is often closed to challenging groups, which need some “window” to mobilize. It follows that favorable political circumstances that may increase the likelihood of successful protest should encourage, or provide incentives for, mobilization.

In his pioneering work on the American civil rights movement, Doug McAdam (1982:41) detailed the influence of political opportunities on protest, noting that “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities.” Scholars have since identified numerous dimensions of political opportunity that should be meaningful. These typically fit within four broad categories and include system openness, electoral stability, elite allies, and state capacity for repression, and are divided between volatile or dynamic opportunities and those more stable features of the political and economic environment that may pattern movement activity (Andrews 1997; Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003; McAdam 1982).

Dynamic opportunities include divisions among political or economic elites, critical events or favorable legislation, and support from influential allies. Mobilization is argued to be more likely when activists have increased access to the political system and allies within it. Tarrow (1998) argues that such opportunities may signal to organizations or potential activists the
increased likelihood of successful protest, and thus provide incentives for mobilization. McAdam’s (1982) research, for example, illustrates how cold war foreign policy forced political elites to support civil rights reforms at home, which encouraged African American protest activity. Civil rights organizations saw greater prospects for successful protest as elites relaxed their stance on these issues. Others have shown how allies within the state, party competition, divided governments, and close electoral contests may increase the leverage of movement organizations and facilitate protest (Costain 1992; Jenkins 1985; Meyer 2004). Moreover, early, initiator movements in a cycle of protest may create opportunities for other groups to mobilize at a later point, by providing a blue-print for mobilization and sometimes taking the brunt of repression (Minkoff 1995; Tarrow 1998).

More stable features of the political environment, sometimes termed structural opportunities, also affect the prospects of challengers. These sometimes include the repressive capacity of the state, and the stance of the state toward challengers. Kitschelt (1986) distinguishes between strong and weak states and open and closed systems. Weak, decentralized states like the U.S. should arguably facilitate more protest because there are more venues to target (national and local, legislative and judicial systems, etc.). At the same time, weak states will not have the capacity to implement radical social change, so that the impact of movements may be more incremental. Alternatively, strong centralized states, while less permeable for protest movements, will have greater capacity to implement change. These structural features are often used in cross-sectional analyses that seek to explain why similar movements take varying trajectories in different places, while the more dynamic or volatile dimensions of political opportunity, discussed above, are typically implemented in longitudinal studies of a single movement. Unfortunately, the varying usages of political opportunity concepts leads to a
sometimes confusing state of affairs where various studies employ the same terms to capture very different factors (see for example Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

Other inconsistencies still plague political opportunity explanations. Many have shown, for example, how movements or uprisings emerge as political opportunities are contracting or entirely absent (Einhower 2003; McCammon 2001). Moreover, scholars have had difficulty distinguishing political opportunities that pattern the emergence of movements from those that influence movement outcomes (see Andrews 2001; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). In regards to movements emerging in the absence of opportunity, some have returned to concept of threat as an impetus for mobilization (Goldstone and Tilly 2001). Threats to protest movements, as Tilly (1978) first noted, are negative sanctions that may increase the costs groups expect to incur from not taking action. Some have found empirical support for a threat effect, although there is not consensus on how it operates across mobilization campaigns.2

In addition to threat, the interaction of movement groups and their opponents may alter the political opportunities available to SMOs and influence mobilization and strategy accordingly (Isaac 2002; McAdam 1983; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Staggenborg 1993). Following McAdam’s (1983) early work on tactical innovation and adaption, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) argue that social movement gains will generally stimulate opposition activity, and to the extent that movements and their opponents are operating in the same venue (e.g., national politics), they will develop similar organizational structures. The give and take between movements and their opponents then is a crucial determinant of the pace of insurgency and the extent to which either side may take advantage of shifting political opportunities (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

What about distinguishing the opportunities meaningful for the emergence of social movements from those that influence movement success? Recall that political opportunity
explanations assume that protestors and SMOs make rational calculations about their prospects for success. Openings or “windows” in the political system – real or perceived – may signal the increased likelihood of success and thus encourage protest. Similar processes, it is argued, affect movement influence. Thus, movement allies within the state, or a favorable partisan composition of government should likewise aid a movement’s ability to affect policy (Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Soule and Olzak 2004). But some question the basic premise of the political opportunity framework and its utility for explaining movement outcomes at all (Jasper and Goodwin 1999).

Many, for example, argue that political opportunity is either too vague (Amenta and Young 1999), so that the concept “is in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up every aspect of the social movement environment” (Gamson and Meyer 1996:275), or that it is too narrowly defined and that “opportunity structures” can and should be applied to other relevant social institutions beyond politics and the state (McCammon et al. 2001; Schurman 2004).

Critiquing political opportunity for being too vague, Amenta et al. (2001) question why social movement perspectives do not rely more heavily on well-tested conceptions of the state developed in political sociology (see also Jenkins 1995). Given the shared concern over power arrangements and the distribution of socially valued goods, why not turn to literature on the state? Amenta and colleagues (Amenta 1998; Amenta and Halfmann 2000), taking this route, have developed a related Political Mediation argument that has gained wide usage by social movement scholars (e.g., Cress and Snow 2000; McVeigh et al. 2003). The political mediation variant has its roots in state-centered and historical institutionalist explanations of social policy (Amenta and Skocpol 1986), but extends these arguments by explicitly considering the strategies of challenging groups.

The basic idea is that neither the resources and the relative strength of social movements, nor the political context in which they operate, is sufficient alone to secure favorable policy
outcomes. Rather, it is the interaction of social movement challengers and specific political arrangements that affects the likelihood of success. The analytic focus is shifted from which political system characteristics may matter for movement outcomes to the particular alignment of social movement challengers and political opportunities that are most influential. Amenta and colleagues have refined this theory on various social spending outcomes at both the national and state levels. In explaining Works Progress Administration wage rates across states, Amenta and Halfmann (2000) show pro-spending social movements to be more successful in democratic polities (non-southern states), when there are pro-spending parties in office, and where political parties are not organized on a patronage basis.

This argument is distinct from other political opportunity explanations by identifying the specific configuration of political context and social movement mobilization that will lead to favorable policy enactment, and by advocating a compatible methodological approach for this logic in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Political Mediation arguments, however, were developed to examine social spending outcomes and do not fully theorize the role of oppositional movements, or economic elites outside the state. These arguments therefore need to be expanded to address the realities facing many movements (e.g., extensive countermobilization).

Some scholars, however, question whether more nuanced political arguments are the best route for explaining social movement success. McCammon et al. (2001:51) argue that the focus of political opportunity explanations on electoral politics and formal state structures “is simply too narrow an approach to understanding the full range of opportunity structures that foster movement success.” They suggest looking to society-centered approaches to political decision-making (class, racial, feminist, etc.) for identifying other pertinent openings for challengers, and to use the simpler term “opportunity structures” that can be specified more concretely within the context of individual social movements. In their study of women’s suffrage movements,
McCammon and colleagues find that “gendered opportunity structures” influenced suffragist success. In addition to opportunities stemming from formal political dynamics, suffragist’s political efforts benefitted from changing gender relations and societal views about the appropriate role of women. Others in this vein have pointed to “industry opportunity structures” (Schurman 2004) or economic accords (Rubin 1986) that provided incentives for groups to mobilize.

Where do the various attempts to refine political opportunity leave us, and which opportunities pattern movement success? Meyer and Minkoff (2004:1461) argue that is necessary to distinguish both “political opportunities for whom,” as well as “for what.” For the former, the same political circumstances are not going to be meaningful for all challenging groups or even all of those on the left, not to mention the broader spectrum of mobilization campaigns. The crucial task for political opportunity analysts, they argue, is to separate “constituency specific factors from broader changes in the political environment, including economic and political instability writ large.” In specifying “opportunities for what,” moreover, Meyer and Minkoff suggest that government support is the key factor for movement success in the political arena. Similar to political mediation arguments then, movements are unlikely to be successful in the absence of sympathetic state officials or representatives.

The implication from the varying critiques on political opportunity theory is that analysts would do well to consider the effects of both movement-specific opportunities (McCammon et al. 2001; Meyer and Minkoff 2004) and potential conditional relationships between SMOs and pertinent political arrangements (Amenta 1998; Amenta and Halfmann 2001) on policy change. The recent study by Soule and Olzak (2004) on Equal Rights Amendment ratification is noteworthy by considering each of these possibilities, and the authors find empirical support for both. Resource mobilization and political opportunity accounts thus provide a good start for
understanding when movements may matter for political change, including the efforts of business and labor organizations, but important questions remain.

Mechanisms of Influence, Cultural Blindspots, and the Framing Alternative

While the aforementioned perspectives – and their respective foci on SMOs and the political environments these groups encounter – undoubtedly improve our understanding of movement emergence and success, they are limited in important ways. First, arguments purporting the efficacy of social movements have been slow to identify just how movements matter (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). That SMOs or favorable political circumstances may matter under certain circumstances has indeed gained wide acceptance among movement scholars in recent years. A more vexing question, however, is just how movements and their opponents affect change, and the specific mechanisms through which these groups may, for instance, influence policy. A second major deficit of both resource mobilization and political opportunity theories has been the almost complete neglect of a range of cultural processes, and their influence on movement outcomes in particular. As social movement scholars increasingly recognize, cultural processes critically influence organizational trajectories, the ability to mobilize, and movement success (Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Roscigno and Danaher 2001, 2004). Explanations of social movements and policy adoption would thus do well to consider how cultural processes and framing appeals in particular may matter for movements and their opponents in the political process (e.g., McCammon et al. 2001).

In addition to these limitations, social movement analyses have been limited to a somewhat narrow range of mostly successful mobilization campaigns (Burstein and Linton 2002). Surprisingly, scholars have often overlooked labor as a viable social movement actor. Social movement scholarship also ignores the role of elites (such as corporations, business associations,
etc.) as meaningful actors in their own right — this despite the consistent role of business actors as opponents or targets of both contemporary and historical social movement challengers, and their considerable influence on a range of social movement processes (e.g., Pichardo 1995).

In what follows, I evaluate recent literature on the mechanisms through which social movements influence the political process. One important way movements attempt to persuade political decision-makers and broader publics on key policy issues is through framing. Here I turn to the cultural framing perspective — a literature which fills an important void in existing scholarship — and its implications for social movements in the political process. The integration of organizational, political, and cultural approaches to social movements suggests a focus on not only the presence and extent of both movement and countermovement organization, but especially their interaction and, indeed, the *framing battles* between movements and their antagonists and what they hold for policy adoption.

When considering political success and policy change, it is necessary to theorize how social movements influence political decision-makers. While there is still disagreement on just what constitutes movement *success* and how to appropriately measure social movement outcomes (e.g., Earl 2001), I follow recent scholarship that focuses on institutional/political outcomes when considering politically oriented movements (e.g., Andrews 2001; McCammon et al. 2001). In the case at hand, the explicit goals of business group mobilization efforts were to curtail labor growth and power through political restrictions, and these political outcomes are thus an appropriate indicator of success. The following discussion then largely focuses on how various mechanisms of influence pertain to policy adoption. In this regard, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) argue for a move away from static models that assess *if* organization and resources and/or political opportunities matter, to search for mediating mechanisms that alter the relationships
between SMOs and policy outcomes, and therefore better address the question of just how social movements matter.

Disruption and Persuasion have been offered as two broad categories of mechanisms through which social movements may influence the political process. The former suggests that the social movement challengers, given little access to the political system, are only able to bring elites to the table by disrupting the public order (Lipsky 1968). Disruptive protest can thus create “negative inducements to elite bargaining.” This premise informs Piven and Cloward’s (1977) work on poor people’s movements. Gamson’s (1975) classic study, moreover, points to the “success of the unruly,” where those challengers that employed violent tactics enjoyed a higher success rate. Another version of this argument posits that dramatic events may mobilize third-party support, who in turn bring pressure to bear on political elites (Santoro 2002). The sight of Southern officials attacking civil rights protesters, for example, arguably solidified third-party support for the movement.

In one of the most sophisticated treatments of the disruption hypothesis and potential mechanisms of influence, McAdam and Su (2002) disentangle the effects of violence initiated by protesters from violence by police against demonstrators in their study of the U.S. antiwar movement and war-related policy. Their findings on congressional voting patterns, however, are somewhat counterintuitive. The most extreme and disruptive forms of movement-initiated protest decreased voting activity on the war but increased the likelihood of pro-peace voting outcomes. Conversely, protests featuring police violence increased the pace of congressional roll call votes on the war, but decreased the likelihood of pro-peace voting outcomes. The effect of disruption across social movement campaigns is thus somewhat unclear, and may vary by both the intensity and target of disruptive protest and/or violence.
The second broad mechanism of influence for social movement challengers is persuasion. Certain social movement activities may help draw attention to their key issues. Rather than disrupting the public order, less-disruptive forms of protest may serve to communicate movement goals or grievances to a broader audience, and sometimes influence public opinion on movement issues (Burstein 1999). Santoro (2002) argues, for example, that following dramatic events whereby violence against protesters may generate third-party support, conventional politics take hold and public opinion, as suggested by political scientists and classic democratic theory, guides political activity on movement-related issues. SMOs thus go to considerable lengths to educate and persuade the voting public and political decision-makers on their key issues. An increasing body of social movement research hones in on these processes, and the framing activities of movement actors in particular.

Framing refers to the “the process by which movement actors engage in interpretive work to produce and maintain meaning for movement participants, potential supporters, as well as antagonists” (Hewitt and McCammon 2004:152; Snow et al. 1986). Frames, then, are the product of this interpretive work. The framing literature fills an important void in social movement research by pointing to the cultural work of SMOs and how it matters for a range of outcomes. Recall that early proponents of resource mobilization and political opportunity explanations downplayed the social psychological and cultural dimensions of protest activity, often viewing grievances as ubiquitous or non-problematic. Critics demonstrated to the contrary, however, that social movement participation is not solely attributable to the efforts of social movement organizers or to the instrumental motives of individuals (Taylor and Whittier 1992), and that social movement success in the political arena is not adequately explained by resources, organization, and favorable political circumstances alone (McCammon et al. 2001).
Recent work advances this discussion by pointing squarely to social movement culture, including the interactions and practices within SMOs that help shape collective identities and framing appeals – factors that are shown to be meaningful for social movement mobilization, development, and survival (Armstrong 2003; Benford and Snow 2000; Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Roscigno and Danaher 2001). Moreover, research on framing in particular suggests its importance as a social movement tactic. Indeed, a key insight of the framing literature is that just how movements package ideas and present their cause to external audiences may be crucial for success (Cress and Snow 2000; McCammon et al. 2001).

In their seminal work on the topic, David Snow and colleagues (Snow et al. 1986:464) outlined frame alignment processes that are necessary for social movement recruitment. Frame alignment in this scheme refers to the “linkage of individual and SMO interpretative orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary.” Specific alignment processes that are meaningful in this regard include (1) bridging, whereby SMO claims may target likely adherents, (2) amplification that clarifies particular movement issues for a broader audience, (3) frame extension that effectively broadens movement claims to attract a wider audience that may not be directly motivated by issues central to a particular SMO, and finally (4) frame transformation, which refers or the redefining of ideas or institutions so that the world view of activists may be reshaped.

Frame alignment, in one form or another, is argued to be essential for social movement recruitment. This scheme, moreover, can be extended to a range of SMO activities beyond recruitment, including political outreach and mobilization. But why are some frames successful for these purposes while others are not? The answer for Snow and colleagues lies in frame resonance, or the extent to which movement claims strike a responsive chord with potential
activists. Social movement frames that are *culturally resonant* will obtain some fit with mainstream societal values. Applied to social movement recruitment and mobilization, effective frames must resonate with established cultural practices of potential members. In their public demands, too, successful SMOs will draw on themes that tap into widely held values.

Cultural resonance is an appealing concept, and for good reason. SMOs, and all political actors, no doubt spend considerable time and energy crafting appeals in ways that will resonate with a large audience. Yet there are some obvious limitations to this approach, and therefore question marks surrounding the link between framing and social movement success. First, analyzing the *fit* between societal values and the frames of SMOs proves to be a sticky process. Secondly, the framing objectives of SMOs extend beyond achieving resonance with certain populations. Finally, framing does not occur in isolation. Rather, framing occurs in the context of interaction between SMOs, countermovements, authorities, and broader publics. In regards to assessing whether frames are culturally resonant, there are difficulties in determining just what constitutes widely shared values and whether or not the frames advanced by SMOs have these properties. The problem becomes assessing the fit, and avoiding the methodological fallacy of attributing success or cultural resonance to a frame because a movement achieves some desired outcome, i.e., the frame is culturally resonant because it is successful. In addition to the clarification of resonance or the fit of the frame, researchers must, of course, account for other relevant factors that may be associated with the movement outcome in question.

SMOs, moreover, do not always seek resonance in their framing activities (Ferree 2003). As Snow et al. (1986) detail, SMOs may seek radical change, and to *transform* existing ideas and institutions. In their study of recruitment in suffragist movements, Hewitt and McCammon (2004) show that the most successful frames simultaneously resonated with cultural norms and challenged the status quo, achieving balance. To this point, SMOs and movement leaders must
also be adept at advancing frames that are *broad* enough to speak to multiple audiences. A useful historical example of this is the early civil rights movement. As Morris (1984:60) describes, Martin Luther King overcame status divides within the civil rights movement partly by using “metaphors that communicated to the ‘cultured’ and educated as well as the uneducated and downtrodden. He coherently wove together the profound utterances of ditch-diggers, great philosophers, college professors, and floor-scrubbing domestics with ease.”

Such characteristics of frames, in addition to resonance, are shown to be important for recruitment and social movement cohesion, although other factors may be more pressing when considering political mobilization. In the political process it is argued that social movement actors must be adept at crafting plausible stories that effectively call attention to the importance of their issue. The potential impact of social movement framing in this regard is consistent with mainstream public policy research (e.g., Burstein 1991). In this view, policy emerges from a competitive process through which social movements, political representatives, and various contenders attempt to generate interest and support for their particular issue (McVeigh et al. 2003). Especially important for Cress and Snow (1996, 2000:1078-79) are *diagnostic* and *prognostic* framing processes, where movements focus attention on their particular issue or grievance and identify a likely culprit, and then propose a specific remedy and plan of action. *Coherent* and *articulate* diagnostic and prognostic frames – those frames that “clearly specify what is problematic and in need of amelioration and identify the culpable agents or institutions,” and “what needs to be done in order to remedy the diagnosed problem” – are shown to be more successful in this regard.

These insights provide a useful guidepost when considering the claims put forth SMOs in the political process, and offer potentially more concrete categories than the sometimes vague idea of resonance. Others have conceptualized this as a problem of *narrative facility*, where to
influence policy, “political actors must not only define a particular problem, but they must also offer a diagnosis of the problem and make a convincing case that the policy they are advocating will serve as an effective remedy” (McVeigh et al. 2003: 843). In either case, however, the framing efforts of SMOs do not occur in a political vacuum. Rather they are part of larger sphere of contentious politics that includes movement opponents, authorities, and bystanders alike. Elites, political decision-makers, and movement antagonists strategically craft frames to advance their political agendas (Campbell 2002). Just as SMO gains may stimulate oppositional activity (McAdam 1983; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), the framing activities of SMOs are likely to evoke counter-frames from their opponents. While some point to the “dialogic nature” of interaction between SMOs and their antagonists (e.g., Ferree 2003), few scholars explicitly theorize these processes. One exception is the work of Hewitt and McCammon (2004:150) on framing and recruitment. SMOs, they argue, “must consider the arguments of their opposition and attempt to respond in ways that undermine them.” Neutralization, countering or negating the claims of oppositional groups, is offered as a crucial component of collective action frames.

We can extend this argument here as these processes undoubtably apply to political outcomes as well. McAdam’s (1983:736) work on tactical innovation and adaptation suggests that when social movement challengers have sufficient organization, the pace of insurgency becomes an issue of strategy. Mobilization is then critically influenced by “(a) the creativity of insurgents in devising new tactical forms, and (b) the ability of opponents to neutralize these moves through effective tactical counters.” These exchanges, in almost “chess-like fashion,” also occur as movements struggle over packaging ideas and presenting their cause to various publics and political decision-makers. SMOs must continually counter the claims put forth by their opponents in the political process, and these framing battles may indeed be crucial for success.
Scholars acknowledge the give and take between movements and their opponents over the presentation of key issues, and similar exchanges in other venues (e.g., presidential politics) draw considerable attention. Yet framing research has been slow to examine these exchanges as meaningful in their own right, instead focusing on the integrity of frames, typically those produced by a single movement and their development over time. By drawing on McAdam’s tactical innovation and adaptation thesis, we can put the analytic focus squarely on the interaction and tactical exchanges (framing battles) of movements and countermovements in the political process. This discussion suggests that first, framing offers a crucial mechanism through which social movements and their opponents attempt to persuade political decision-makers and influence policy (McCammon et al. 2001). Given viable organization or favorable political circumstances, social movements must still be adept advancing claims in the political process. Secondly, success may be shaped by the extent to which social movements carry out core diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks, including their ability to advance coherent frames that clearly identify a problem, culprit, and solution (Cress and Snow 2000; McVeigh et al. 2003). Finally, and in addition to the coherence of particular frames, the ability of social movements to counter the claims of their opponents and to adapt to innovations in opponent framing will be influential for their ability to affect political change.

Theory-History Synthesis

While framing offers an important mechanism of influence, it is certainly interrelated with various dimensions of social movement organization and political opportunity – all of which may go along way toward shaping what claims get heard and how well they are received. A key task for social movement researchers is to begin to disentangle how these features may matter in relation for political mobilization. That is, how do these factors help us understand how social
movements and their opponents matter for political and social change? And what is an appropriate analytic strategy to tease out these relationships?

I now briefly return to the insights of resource mobilization, political opportunity and cultural framing arguments, and what they hold for the case of business group mobilization, union response, and state-level political restrictions following the New Deal. An increasing body of work points to the importance of formal SMOs in terms of both protest mobilization and the political process (Amenta and Halfmann 2000; Andrews 2001; Soule and Olzk 2004; Soule 2004). Many of the same characteristics that early resource mobilization theorists identified as meaningful for protest are also shown to be meaningful for political influence. And for good reason. Political outreach and mobilization no doubt requires organization and a strong movement infrastructure. Much of this research, however, focuses primarily on subordinate group challengers and neglects the activity of countermovements and especially elite-based organizations. An important question then, is how does the presence and extent of business and labor organization impact the adoption of restrictive labor laws across states during this important period? Expanding the testing ground beyond a single legislative episode, and considering the influence of both movement and countermovement organization across states and over time can inform existing resource-based and organizational arguments in this regard.

But just how do movements and countermovement organizations matter for policy adoption? In some instances these organizations may evolve into interest-group actors, where they may influence policy adoption directly through more routine access to the political system, negotiation with political elites, and lobbying. This scenario might occur where movement or countermovement presence is especially strong, or particularly lopsided in relation to their opponents or other policy advocates. Of course, SMOs or their opponents may also form
programmatic alliances with political parties. Recall that labor unions were able to forge such a relationship with New Deal democrats in some locales, although this partnership proved fleeting.

In a less formal connection, and as the political mediation thesis suggests, SMO presence and political mobilization may only prove meaningful when there is government support for movement goals. The focus here is on the particular alignment of social movement organization and political system characteristics in regards to policy adoption or implementation (Amenta 1998; Soule 2004). This view would suggest that it was the combination of business political mobilization and republican party resurgence in the late 1940s and 1950s that provided a context favorable for legislative restrictions on labor unions. Political opportunity research, at the same time, reminds us to take seriously “opportunities for whom” in this regard. While political opportunity and related mediation explanations have been applied to many mobilization campaigns, little work in this area has considered employer-employee struggles. In the analysis that follows I thus ask *how do political opportunities, especially partisanship, and more specific alignments of business group mobilization and government support affect the adoption of restrictive labor laws?*

Framing, as the previous discussion suggests, offers an important mechanism of persuasion for SMOs and other political actors. And here *framing battles* between movements and their opponents should be important. But what influences success in these battles? Certain characteristics of frames should be important (e.g., coherence) as well as the flexibility of SMOs and their ability to adapt to the counter-frames of their opponents. Importantly, framing is rooted in objective circumstances. The ideas and packages of meaning advanced by SMOs do not appear out of the blue. Then how might framing be tied to broader dimensions of social movement organization? Recall that formal organization provided challengers with a combat readiness when it came to interaction with elites. Those challengers that have a strong movement
infrastructure, moreover, will be able to pursue multiple mechanisms of influence. These organizational characteristics are influential for framing (Clemens 1996; Rhollinger 2002) and the framing battles between movements and opponents. First, movements that are deeply divided or fractionalized will have difficulty putting forth a coherent voice in the political process. The divisions in the labor movement early on were crippling in terms of coordinating any substantial response to business political efforts, including the framing of the Right-to-Work issue. Indeed, because advancing claims in the political process likely requires resources and considerable organization, we can expect that the extent of business and labor organization, and their cohesion, will be meaningful for their ability to engage in framing battles and to get their voice heard.

How does organization shape the ability to adapt to tactical innovations in framing? One possibility is that more indigenous social movement organization will be more flexible, less bureaucratic, and therefore better able to adapt tactically. Although this is not consistent with the labor experience, where local union activists were in dire need of national expertise in political outreach and campaigning in the early years. Here these local activists were slow to counter in any meaningful way the new individual rights message of business, instead attributing business efforts to “sinister” or “fascist” influences. Framing sometimes requires considerable resources, and indeed research into what claims work and what do not. Contrary to the work of Oliver and Johnston (2001), considerable resources were poured into sophisticated framing efforts prior to the age of the sound bite, indeed, in the case at hand. That the National Association of Manufacturers relied heavily on opinion researchers when molding their claims against labor unions, as described in the last chapter, is just one important example. This suggests that, similar to the movement infrastructure model, some combination of formal (national) SMOs, and organization on the ground may provide movements with the necessary expertise and support to successfully engage in framing battles. Given these insights and the historical experience of
Considering the influence of framing, and the framing battles between business and labor organizations, on policy change represents an important extension for social movement scholarship. While we are beginning to understand the framing efforts of subordinate groups (Cress and Snow 2000; McCammon et al. 2001), far less is known about elite actors and the interactions between movements and their opponents in this process. Applied to the case at hand, the combination of resource mobilization and framing insights provides a useful conceptual scheme for evaluating business and labor activity in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as extending existing approaches to social movements.

As is clear from this discussion, there are often multiple routes to policy change, and social movements and their opponents may pursue multiple mechanisms of influence. These political processes are complex and are not adequately explained by a single perspective, nor are they likely to be captured by one methodological approach. Rather, we benefit by drawing from historically grounded organizational, political, and cultural approaches to collective action. These approaches and their respective foci are no doubt interrelated, but empirical efforts have been slow to synthesize these perspectives, often due to data limitations. Integrating these approaches requires a flexible methodological strategy that can assess the impact of both broad dimensions of social movement organization and political opportunity, as well as the more nuanced strategies of more local actors. This proves to be a labor-intensive task, although those studies that employ such an integration show its fruitfulness (e.g., McCammon et al. 2001). In what follows, I examine the effects of business and labor organization and political opportunity on policy
adoption, as well as the framing efforts and interaction of these actors at a more proximate level, and what they hold for the adoption of important labor policy. The next chapter outlines the multi-method strategy that I employ to tackle these questions.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

1. This proposition was largely abandoned after analysts such as Morris (1981) and Staggenborg (1991) demonstrated that the civil rights and abortion rights movements respectively were initiated by non-professional activists.

2. Van Dyke and Soule (2002) find that diminishing manufacturing and agricultural employment – previously options for less-skilled white men – contributed to militia formation in part because of the threat these changes posed to the economic livelihood and privilege of certain groups. See also Pichardo (1995) for the effect of threat on mobilization.

3. Social movement success has become a sticky term since movement goals are often contested and may change over time. For politically oriented challengers, those groups that make claims on the state in one way or another, relevant institutional outcomes such as policy adoption and implementation offer the best way to assess movement influence. That being said, isolating any movement impact on policy requires the analyst to account for the interests and actions of a range of other important figures, including state actors and countermovements (Andrews 2001).

4. Literature on collective identity is particularly well-suited for addressing why individuals may participate in social movement campaigns to begin with, and how activists maintain solidarity in the face of fierce opposition. Especially central are identity construction processes that build on the day-to-day experiences and the shared grievances of potential activists (Fantasia 1988; Gamson 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1992). While both collective identity and framing perspectives speak to the cultural processes associated with social movement participation, the framing literature also pays special attention to the public claims advanced by movement actors and is thus a useful scheme when considering the political battles between social movements and their opponents.

5. Oliver and Johnston (2001) critique the framing literature as conflating framing with ideology.
The latter they argue is a concept rooted in political struggles over values and beliefs, whereas framing refers to the narrow packaging and “marketing” of ideas or sound bites by social movement organizations. I follow Snow and Benford (2001) and others that see framing as a core task for social movements (historical and contemporary). In this view SMOs draw heavily on, and tap into, existing ideologies and cultural resources as they wage claims for recruitment, outreach, as well as distinctly political purposes.
CHAPTER 4
DATA AND ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Literature on social movements and politics demonstrates that SMOs and their opponents can indeed affect political change and public policy under certain circumstances. But these political processes are complex, and there are often multiple routes to policy change. My goals here are to assess the impact of business and labor organization, and the political opportunities and constraints facing these actors on the adoption of important labor policy across U.S. states during the 1940s and 1950s. Equally important are the more nuanced mechanisms through which business and labor actors attempted to influence policy at a local level, and the framing battles over Right-to-Work occurring within states. Addressing these questions, however, requires diverse data sources and a flexible methodological strategy.

I employ quantitative event history analysis of policy adoption and also undertake two historical case studies of Right-to-Work campaigns for these purposes. This multi-method approach allows me to assess whether or not movement and countermovement organization matter for policy adoption, as well as just how these actors may influence change – illuminating processes of contention in distinct political contexts. In this chapter I first describe the quantitative and qualitative data that I draw on to address these questions as well as my data collection procedures. I then turn to the quantitative methods, the criteria guiding the selection of historical case studies and, finally, I discuss how the integration of these quantitative and historical approaches can advance explanations of social movements and contentious politics.
Data

For the quantitative analysis of policy adoption, I assembled a data set of the pertinent economic, social, and political characteristics of U.S. states, and key dimensions of business and labor organization during the 1940s and 1950s. I collected much of the data from familiar, published historical sources, but have also pieced together material through my own archival research. Event history analysis, which I discuss in detail momentarily, allows me to assess the impact of key explanatory variables on the likelihood of state policy adoption. My focus here is on the policy outcome in question and the key explanatory variables as suggested by social movement theory.

All data for the event history analysis are state-level. My dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether or not a state adopted a Right-to-Work law in a given year. Table 4.1 displays the states that adopted Right-to-Work laws between 1944 and 1960. Twenty-two states adopted Right-to-Work laws during these years. The first state-level campaigns were launched in 1944, with Florida and Arkansas becoming the first Right-to-Work states. 1960 marks the end of the peak period of activity, after which point labor strength and organizing efforts were largely contained to a narrow geographic space. The reader will note an early peak of activity in 1947, with nine states adopting Right-to-Work. This state-level activity was so successful that congressional conservatives wrote in protections for states to pass and enforce these laws in the national Taft-Hartley Act, which was adopted later that same year. The federal protections insulated Right-to-Work from legal challenges and stimulated business activity around the issue. Right-to-Work efforts throughout the states would accelerate in the 1950s. Yet while several high-profile campaigns were waged in many of the heavily industrialized states during the late 1950s, only Indiana and Kansas adopted Right-to-Work in the years between 1957
and 1960. Data on Right-to-Work come from the *Annual Digest of State and Federal Labor Legislation* published by the U.S. Department of Labor, and are supplemented by Gall (1988).

**Business & Labor Organization**

Resource mobilization and related organizational approaches suggest that the presence and extent of social movement organization should be meaningful in its own right for policy adoption. A limitation of this research, however, is that few analyses include measures of both movement and countermovement organization (but see Soule and Olzak 2004). I am thus careful to include measures of business and labor organization across states. But measuring business organization presents some practical difficulties. Business associations rarely provide access to their own records and, if they do, materials are seldomly preserved or are heavily censored. Indeed, as business historian Thomas Cochran bemoaned some time ago, “Business men have not left large collections of ‘public papers’ deposited in libraries for perusal by graduate students” (in Harris 1982:205). What more, the government did not keep track of business associations that were active in labor politics during this period.

One group that was deeply concerned with business political activities, however, was organized labor. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), in correspondence with its state affiliates, kept tabs on the political activities of business groups in every state of the union. The State Legislation Files of the AFL, which are housed at the Historical Society of Wisconsin, offer details on particular employer associations active in labor politics – those organizations that sought to limit labor activity through legal restrictions and who were the primary advocates of Right-to-Work. These files, filled with the notes and reports of organizers and AFL officers in the states, are organized by individual state and are thus useful for constructing a measure of where employer associations were active in labor politics. Drawing from these state legislation
files, and supplemented by my readings of the Affiliate Records of the National Association of Manufacturers, housed at the Hagley Historical Archives, I constructed a measure of *Employer Mobilization*.¹ This is a dichotomous indicator of whether or not there were employer associations active in labor politics in a given state as this activity took off in the 1940s. The measure is cross-sectional as these records were limited to the 1940s. While this could raise concerns about organizations forming in the later years of the sample, it nonetheless provides an accurate picture of where such associations were well-established, had experience in labor politics, and often had long-held ties to political elites.² Such organization, consistent with resource mobilization accounts, should positively affect the adoption of Right-to-Work. Table 4.2 provides descriptions, coding, means and standard deviations for these key explanatory variables as suggested by social movement theory.

The composition of certain types of employers in a state may also be important for policy adoption. While most employers favored restrictions on labor during this period, small and large employers faced different constraints. Small employers in particular faced more competitive markets and were less able to pass on increased costs to customers (Jacobs 1978). It is for this reason that small employers often formed the activist core for anti-labor activities (Gall 1988). States may thus be more likely to pass Right-to-Work laws where these smaller enterprises are predominant. I assess this possibility by including a measure of enterprise size, indicated by the annual percentage of manufacturers in a state employing fewer than twenty workers. These data are from the *Census of Manufacturers* (various years).

The extent of union organization should also be meaningful for the likelihood of policy adoption, and I include measures of union organization and activity across states. I employ the standard measure of union strength in union density. This is the percentage of non-agricultural workers in a given state belonging to labor unions. More union workers in a state provides a
larger activist base to engage in political outreach and education, but also means greater financial resources for labor organizations to draw on in these efforts. These data are from Troy (1957, 1965), and I use linear interpolation to generate values for the years in which they are not available.

Union activity should also be important for the adoption of Right-to-Work laws. I include a measure of organizing activity in the percentage of workers in a state that are involved in union elections. Recall that the early impetus for Right-to-Work among employers was to counter the tremendous wartime growth of unions. And as employers advanced claims regarding the need to contain or restrict labor unions, increased organizing activity likely provided Right-to-Work advocates with ample ammunition. Increased organizing activity, and the major Southern labor organizing drives of the immediate postwar period no doubt provided an easy political target for conservative activists. These data are derived from the *Annual Report of the National Labor Relations Board* (various years) and *Employment and Earnings*.

**Political Opportunities**

Favorable political circumstances, and especially governmental support for movement causes, are argued to be crucial for social movement success. But the same political system characteristics will not be meaningful for all social movement challengers or their opponents. It is therefore important to consider and take seriously the issue of “opportunities for whom” when designing political opportunity measures (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). In the case at hand, republicans were the party of Right-to-Work. Acknowledging some regional variation – such as the labor stance of conservative Southern democrats – republicans were the most forceful advocates within state legislatures for Right-to-Work and other restrictions on unions (Gall 1988; Sultan 1958).
Business political mobilization for Right-to-Work certainly had a more favorable audience in states dominated by the republican party. I thus included a continuous measure of republican party strength, the percent republican of a state’s legislature. This annual measure is lagged one year, and is derived from Burnham (1992) and the *Congressional Quarterly Guide to Elections* (1975).

In addition to current partisan composition, and as social movement theory suggests, the institutional legacy of a state or its stance toward particular social movement challengers may have important ramifications for the success of SMOs. States that have taken a progressive stance toward labor relations in the past, for example, may be less likely adopt restrictions on unions and Right-to-Work in particular. Likewise, those states that moved to restrict unions in a prior era may also be more inclined to pass Right-to-Work laws. Such legacies may persist in part because of enduring relations between challengers/opponents and state officials. Following World War I, for example, several states attempted to limit radical labor organization and the Industrial Workers of the World in particular by passing anti-syndicalist laws. These laws were often invoked in the decades following to curb labor conflicts or uprisings. I thus include the presence of an anti-syndicalist law to capture the historical legacy of a state on labor relations. These data come from the *Annual Digest of State and Federal Labor Legislation, The Book of the States*, and Witte (1932). As described previously, several states also attempted to limit union organizing tactics and picketing following the upsurge of labor in the 1930s and prior to turning to Right-to-Work. Yet these restrictions may not reflect an enduring relationship or stance of a particular state toward unionism. Many of these legislative restrictions, for instance, were quickly overturned. While I opt not to include such restrictions in the analysis for these reasons, I nevertheless return to them briefly, and their place in business and labor struggles in the next chapter.
Alternative Explanations and Controls

Several other factors that do not follow from social movement predictions may nonetheless be associated with the passage of Right-to-Work, and therefore need to be accounted for. Many scholars, for example, suggest that policy-making at the state-level is profoundly influenced by the activity of neighboring states (Berry and Berry 1990; Leight and Jenkins 1998; Soule and Zylan 1999). Such geographical diffusion occurs as states, often in competition for scarce economic resources and employment, attempt to mimic each other on key policy issues. I therefore include a variable of the percent of neighboring states that have adopted a Right-to-Work law. Others have pointed to urbanization or industrialization and economic indicators for policy innovation and adoption (Walker 1969). In this view the least industrialized or most rural states are arguably more likely to restrict unions, and this is consistent with the historical record. The aforementioned enterprise size measure likely captures industrialization. I therefore include a control for the percent of a state’s population residing in urban areas. These data are from the Statistical Abstract of the U.S. (Various years) and the Historical Statistics of the U.S. (1975).

Importantly, race has figured prominently into labor and class organization in the U.S., and certainly during the period in question. Racial divisions and competition in workforce, not to mention deep divisions in the labor movement, limited concerted political activity on the part of unions and hindered their ability to form class-wide coalitions, while employers often used substitution threats to stymie organizing efforts (Brown 2000; Jacobs 1978). For these reasons I control for the size of the minority population by the percentage of a state that is African American. Unfortunately these figures are only available through the decennial census and therefore must be interpolated for the non-census years.

In some states, Right-to-Work advocates took their cause directly to the voters through the initiative referendum process. Because this process may differ considerably from legislative
efforts, I include a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a state held a public vote on Right-to-Work in a given year. As described previously, there were certainly regional differences in business political mobilization, union responses, and the historical legacy of labor relations. The political arrangements in the one-party, democratic South, for example, do not fit the pattern of republican advocacy for Right-to-Work. I am therefore careful to control for region, and the ex-confederate states of the South in particular. I also take these differences into account in my modeling strategy. In addition to these factors, time itself may be meaningful as certain periods proved to be more or less hospitable to the labor cause. I take this seriously and discuss the numerous ways of treating time and its effects momentarily. I provide descriptive statistics for these controls and a correlation matrix of all variables used in the analysis in Appendix A.

Notably absent from this discussion are any measures pertaining to public opinion on the Right-to-Work issue. Unfortunately there are no systematic state-level figures for this period. Informal and private polling by both labor and business groups in various states nonetheless suggests that a majority often favored Right-to-Work on a simplistic level, but at the same time citizens did not know what the laws actually entailed (NAM 1955; Aaron 1958). The phrase itself was no doubt consistent with mainstream values on individual rights. At the same time the lack of understanding on the specifics of the Right-to-Work debate arguably increased the importance of business and labor organization for political outreach and education, and indeed for the framing of this policy issue.

The measures described here will allow us to examine if SMOs, countermovements, and political opportunities matter for policy adoption across a variegated testing ground. The application of resource mobilization and political opportunity perspectives to labor-management struggles, moreover, represents and important extension for social movement research.
Qualitative Data

It is necessary to dig a little deeper, however, in order to understand just how these actors influence policy. For this reason I undertake two historical case studies of Right-to-Work campaigns in Texas in 1947 and Ohio in 1958. For these cases I am especially interested in the public battles over Right-to-Work, and how business and labor organizations framed the issue and interacted with each other in the political process. Because my focus is on the processes of contention, I generate historical narratives of these particular cases in order to shed light on the interplay between social movement organization, opportunity, and the particular strategies of business and labor actors. Generating historical narratives necessarily brings the focus to the key actors involved in these struggles, and can thus inform our understanding of the Right-to-Work story itself. Yet this approach is also undoubtably important for theoretical purposes, as it better captures the more processual and framing elements of mobilization that recent social movement scholarship has sought to address.

What kinds of data and evidence are useful for these purposes? I turn to archival materials that include publications, correspondence, political flyers, and advertisements produced by business and labor organizations themselves, as well as materials from state officials, and key observers of the time. These types of data speak to social movement strategy, how groups presented their cause to external audiences, and how these efforts were received by lawmakers and broader publics. Unlike the quantitative indicators described above then, these data are well suited for capturing the framing activities of business and labor groups and thus useful for illustrating key mechanisms through which these actors attempt to influence policy.

Assembling the qualitative materials entailed consulting various labor, business, and political collections housed at several historical archives across the U.S. These sources were identified first through existing historical scholarship and from the key national organizations
involved in Right-to-Work. Gilbert Gall (1988) provides the only full-length historical treatment of Right-to-Work in the U.S. From this work I was able to identify a number of relevant regional and state sources. I also turned to the records of the AFL-CIO, at the George Meany Center in Silver Spring, MD, and the National Association of Manufacturers, housed at the Hagley Archives in Wilmington, DE. More than any others, these two organizations were the most consistent national advocates on each side of the Right-to-Work debate.

From these records I was able to identify other key advocates and potential sources. I followed an iterative process of identifying historical sources and existing scholarship, which in turn pointed me to other relevant materials and sources, and so on. In many cases the materials that I examined were incomplete, sometimes damaged or destroyed, or were simply not useful for my purposes. The records of business organizations, as noted earlier, were fewer in number and generally less accessible than labor-related materials. Still other records I encountered forced me to broaden my conception of Right-to-Work and who the relevant actors were. While it is impossible to completely exhaust all evidence relevant to these political processes, I am confident that this data collection process, carried out on and off over the better part of three years, has allowed me to assemble and examine the best available information on the issue for my two historical cases.

For the Texas case I draw from several collections housed at the Texas Labor Archives at the University of Texas at Arlington. These include news clippings maintained by labor organizations and several labor newspapers, as well as the papers of the Texas State Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Texas State Industrial Union Council (CIO). I also look to Texas Industry, the official publication of the Texas Manufacturers Association. The TMA was the key state employer association involved in Right-to-Work and labor politics. On the whole, however, there are fewer preserved materials of employer organizations. I therefore also turn to state records,
including the House and Senate Journals for the state of Texas, and newspaper coverage in the state’s major dailies. Where possible, I supplement this with existing historical scholarship, including two historical dissertations on labor (and its adversaries) in Texas (Mullennix 1955; Polakoff 1955). The combination of all of these sources provides a detailed picture of business and labor mobilization, their political strategies, and public claims.

The Ohio case – a decade later and with the active participation of both national and state organizations on each side of the debate – has substantially more records to draw from. Particularly useful were the records of District 6 of the United Mine Worker at Ohio University, the Ohio AFL-CIO papers at the Ohio Historical Society, and the Charles Baker papers at the Walter P. Reuther Archives at Wayne State University. Because the Ohio case involved an initiative referendum process and public vote, there was a heavy focus on advertisements and campaign flyers. These materials, in addition to other publications of business and labor organizations, and newspaper coverage of the campaign, are used to piece together the narrative of Right-to-Work activism in Ohio. For both historical cases, I also look to the publications of key national actors such as the AFL, CIO, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, and other national periodicals.

To be sure, the records of Right-to-Work advocates and opponents may at times exaggerate their own importance or influence in the political process. I am thus careful to evaluate these materials in light of relevant scholarship on business (Fones-Wolf 1994; Harris 1982), labor (Dubofsky 1994; Lichtenstein 1982), and the insight of key observers of the period (Lynd 1946; Meyer 1960; Sultan 1958). This notwithstanding, these data present the best material with which to evaluate the strategies, public claims, and interaction of business and labor in the political process. I describe all of these primary and secondary data sources in Appendix B.
Methods

Given these diverse data sources – data that allow me to capture the impact of social movement organization and political opportunities, as well as more proximate strategies of business and labor actors – I now turn to the methods and case-selection criteria that I employ. Following other quantitative analysts of policy adoption (Leight and Jenkins 1998; McCammon et al. 2001; Soule and Olzak 2004), I use discrete time event history analysis to assess the factors that influence the passage of Right-to-Work laws across states and over time.

The unit of analysis is the state-year. After arranging the data in this format, discrete time methods allow me to examine the influence of key state-level variables as suggested by social movement theory on the hazard rate of Right-to-Work. The hazard rate in discrete time methods is the probability of a given state adopting a Right-to-Work law in a given year provided that it has not done so already. Once a state adopts Right-to-Work, it is then excluded from the analysis in the following years as it is no longer at risk of passing the law. The dependent variable of whether or not a state adopts Right-to-Work is thus scored 0 in the years prior to adoption, 1 in the year of passage, and it is dropped in the following years. Because the very first Right-to-Work campaigns were waged in 1944, I allow states to become “at risk” of adopting a Right-to-Work law in the year immediate following, beginning in 1945 (Arkansas and Florida are omitted, as they were the first states to adopt Right-to-Work). It is at this point that activists in all states were aware of Right-to-Work as a viable option for targeting labor. Following this periodization, the data set contains 532 state-year observations.\textsuperscript{4}

Discrete time methods are appropriate for multiple reasons. First, the event of interest, whether or not a state adopts Right-to-Work, can only occur in discrete (annual) time-units. The measurement of time here is relatively inexact and thus not appropriate for continuous time event
history methods. Instead, what matters is the particular legislative session/year in which the event occurs. In addition, the data set contains a number of “ties” because several states passed Right-to-Work in the same years. Discrete time methods are better at handling such tied events (see for example Allison 1995). Finally, this method is also very flexible at incorporating time and its effects into the analysis.

Discrete time models can be estimated easily in Stata, and expressed as a logistic regression:

\[
P = \frac{\exp(x_i \beta)}{1 + \exp(x_i \beta)}
\]

where \(P\) is the probability of adopting Right-to-Work, \(x\) is the set of time-varying and time-constant covariates for state \(i\), and \(\beta\) is the set of coefficients and includes the constant. Time can be incorporated as an independent variable. Just what form time may take (linear, log, etc.) is both a substantive and empirical decision for the researcher, and something that I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter. The discrete time event history estimates generated form these models are equivalent to logit coefficients. They can be interpreted as the effects of explanatory variables on the log-odds of a state adopting Right-to-Work. Using the familiar odds ratio and likelihood transformations, we can then discuss the effects of social movement organization and political opportunity on the likelihood of policy adoption, independent of a host of controls. Anything that one can do on the right hand side of the equation in a standard regression is also applicable for the event history models. I am thus able to include interaction terms between various dimensions of social movement organization and political opportunity, as the political mediation variant of opportunity theory would suggest. Because repeated state observations are not likely to be independent, I use the cluster command in Stata to cluster standard errors by state, which provides a more conservative estimation (Soule and Olzak 2004).
Case Selection and Historical Analysis

As described earlier, the quantitative data and event history techniques alone do not tell the entire story. This approach is especially lacking when considering processes of contention and the mechanisms through which these actors influenced policy within states. I thus turn to specific Right-to-Work campaigns in Texas and Ohio. I follow Amenta’s (2003:94) assessment of historical analysis that, above all, what separates historical studies from other approaches is not a particular technique or a focus on the past, but rather that the researcher “situates the study within the relevant historical contexts, takes a sophisticated approach to historiography, thinks seriously about issues of process, timing, and historical trajectories, and gains a deep understanding of the cases.” Equally important is that we select cases that lend themselves to theoretically important questions, and thus have some theoretical portability. And, for this study, cases that can tell us something that the quantitative analysis does not. But how can the campaigns in Texas and Ohio in particular advance our understanding of social movements and politics? And how does the integration of event history and qualitative historical approaches help in this regard?

I first detail the substantive/historical and theoretical guideposts for the selection of these particular cases. The are of course several strategies to choose from for single or comparative case designs. The extended case method and the “least likely” case approach offer two possibilities for crafting the single historical case-study. In the extended case method, the goal is to develop an ethnography or historical narrative to highlight major gaps or contradictions in existing theory (Burawoy et al. 1991; Isaac 2002). Researchers typically examine cases that appear to be an anomaly relative to existing explanations. The case is then used as vehicle to reconstitute or extend existing theories as opposed to falsification or verification. Case designs that fall into “least likely” categories can also serve for theory building (Rueschmeyer 2003). Researchers may select a deviant case that appears least likely to fit some theoretical expectation,
making the plausibility of their proposed account all the greater. A single case can then serve as a powerful conservative test of a particular argument. Michel’s *Political Parties* (1912) is often cited as a prime example of such an approach, wherein he convincingly detailed the oligarchic tendencies of the German Social Democratic Party – anti-democratic tendencies in the party argued to be the staunch *advocate* of democracy.

Alternatively, and when considering comparative case designs, Mill’s (1974[1843]) logic of agreement and difference has provided a base for identifying necessary and sufficient causes of particular outcomes (Mahoney 2004). The method of agreement compares cases that share a similar outcome but differ along certain key dimensions; the method of difference compares cases that have divergent outcomes but may share a range of other similarities. Following this logic researchers may build typologies to assess whether certain cases follow theoretical predictions of necessary and sufficient causation. All of these approaches, critics charge, suffer from the “small-N” problem (Lieberson 1991). That is, they attribute causal relevance to a number of factors from a single example, or small number of comparable cases. It is partly for this reason that scholars are increasingly using these strategies in combination with other methods.

My approach does not fit neatly into any one of these designs. Yet the appropriateness of the various strategies for case selection must be considered relative to the empirical questions and larger theoretical aims of the project. Recall that my goals here are twofold: 1) to advance explanations of social movements and politics by applying them to a broader (and rarely analyzed) range of political struggle, and by taking seriously the mechanisms of influence that may play out at a more proximate level, and 2) to shed light on the political relations of unions and employers, and the wave of unexpected setbacks for labor at a pivotal moment in U.S. history.
Pertaining to social movement explanations and mechanisms of influence, scholars are still grappling with just how movements and their opponents may matter for political change. There is little agreed upon here other than that this presents an important shortcoming for existing social movement explanations. My intent then is not theory verification or falsification. I do not seek to confirm whether coherent or articulate framing is necessary for policy adoption, but rather to illustrate how framing and the tactical exchanges between business and labor may matter (in relation to organization, and opportunity) for policy change, and to show how these processes unfold in distinct political contexts. And, I seek to do this in a way that complements the quantitative analysis of policy adoption. While my approach shares the goal of theory extension with the extended case method, the criteria for selecting historical cases differs considerably in accordance with the substantive and theoretical purposes of the project.

First, for substantive and historical purposes, I look to campaigns in Texas and Ohio to provide insight on the range of mobilization processes, and outcomes, in Right-to-Work struggles during the 1940s and 1950s. These particular cases capture the two main phases of business mobilization and labor response. The events in Texas during the late 1940s offer a combination of corporate and extremist political responses to the “labor question,” and mark an important turning point after which more moderate voices prevailed on the business side in these disputes. For labor, too, this marks an important juncture. Emerging out of World War II in a relatively strong financial position, labor unions were met by a powerful remobilization of organized business in the workplace, and in national and local politics. Texas was perhaps the center of this state-level agitation, and certainly a key area for union organizing efforts were unions to become a truly national force in the postwar era. As such it provides an important window into the critical early wave of business political mobilization and labor setback.
Right-to-Work struggles intensified in the 1950s, as did the focus on state politics for business and labor organizations. Ohio in 1958 was the key battleground state for Right-to-Work. By this point both business and labor organizations had developed sophisticated approaches to the Right-to-Work question. And business organizations, having had recent success in areas where unions were well established, waged several high profile campaigns in the heavily industrialized states. The efforts in Ohio would have made considerable business inroads in the heart of industrial union strength. Instead, the 1958 campaigns, and especially Ohio, proved to be a major setback for Right-to-Work advocates nationally. This setback forced Right-to-Work backers to narrow considerably their ambitions. In addition, and unlike the Texas case, the Ohio campaign was waged through the initiative referendum process. Business and labor groups took their cause directly to the public.

The two campaigns considered here capture the key phases of Right-to-Work activity, legislative and more direct mobilization processes, and can therefore tell us something about the political relations of business and labor during the 1940s and 1950s – relations that we cannot capture with the quantitative data alone. Finally, both Ohio and Texas and the outcomes of their respective Right-to-Work battles, proved crucial to the status of labor unions and their political capacities in the postwar era.

But there are also theoretical reasons for selecting these particular cases. To advance social movement perspectives on the mechanisms through which SMOs may affect political change, and the contentious battles between social movements and their opponents in the political process, we must select cases where there was indeed a public struggle that we have some historical record of. For practical purposes, moreover, it is the especially contentious cases that have left a record of struggle to evaluate. Not all states and political campaigns afford this option. In some cases – both in states where Right-to-Work laws were passed and where they
were not – the outcomes, and the likelihood of a highly public, contentious battle over the issue, were shaped in part by prior struggles. Specifically, the historical relations between the contending parties and the political establishment in a given state went a long way toward determining where public battles emerged over Right-to-Work.

If we think of these political struggles along a continuum, as depicted in Figure 4.1, there are cases at the margins where the legacy of SMO repression or success precluded much contention over the issue. Where labor organization was minimal, or prior defeats had left it politically impotent, business interests were able to advocate for Right-to-Work, and with little public resistance on the part of unions or the liberal community. In such cases we are unlikely to see, for example, extensive framing battles. Instead, Right-to-Work is passed quickly, almost swept under the rug. An example of this type of case can be found in North Carolina, where organized labor, although growing during the 1940s, was still incredibly weak, and largely shut out of an already closed political system. Business and state repression of labor was especially severe following the upheavals in textiles during the 1930s, (Roscigno and Danaher 2004), and subsequent organizing efforts would end in failure (Griffith 1987). Unions were unable to mount much resistance to anti-labor political mobilization, and Right-to-Work was passed quickly and with little fanfare in early 1947.5

At the other extreme, prior labor victories ensured it a foothold in the political and social fabric of the state. In these cases Right-to-Work was not a politically viable option for business. Business interests surely advocated for it, but it was unlikely to go very far or receive much of a public airing. An example of this type is New York. In this case unions forged a programmatic relationship with the democratic party machine at the turn of the twentieth century, and this carried over into political successes in subsequent decades. Unions indeed enjoyed several pro-
labor legislative measures (Amenta et al. 1988), and fared much better than their counterparts in
other states during periods of anti-labor political mobilization. They were, at least to some extent, insulated from such activity (Freeman 2000). In contrast to these extremes, however, there are cases closer to the middle where there was indeed a public struggle over the issue, where the history of victory or repression did not preclude such contention, and where the outcome in question was not predetermined. I believe it is these cases where we can learn something about framing, and the more public battles in the political process. Texas and Ohio indeed come closer to the center, falling on each side of this continuum, and are thus useful for our purposes.

Table 4.3 displays business and labor characteristics, as well as social, political, and industrial descriptives for the two cases. As the reader will note, unions were considerably weaker in the Texas case. At first glance, Texas seems to lean toward the SMO-repression end of the continuum. The political system, too, was largely closed to labor. These limitations for unions, however, should not be overstated as they did not preclude considerable mobilization on both sides of the debate. Instead, the political system was under challenge and labor had made substantial organizational gains in the 1940s. Texas was rapidly industrializing with the flood of war industry to the state. Union gains soon followed. Union organization in the state increased by more than 225% during this period (Troy 1957). Political restrictions such as the all-white primary, moreover, were ruled unconstitutional, and a New Deal-liberal/labor coalition actually gained control of the state democratic party for a brief period in the mid-1940s. Indeed, V.O. Key (1949:260), in his classic treatment on Southern politics, saw Texas, with its rapid industrialization and the growth of labor, as the most likely case to break out of the regional, anti-democratic one-party rule. Key’s imagery captured this possibility. Even in east Texas, with its agricultural base, and race relations that more resembled the deep South, Key famously remarked that the “odor of the oil refineries settles over the cotton fields and makes scarcely perceptible the magnolia scent of the Old South.”
Change was in the air, and this was not lost on elites. Business interests, who were themselves well organized, saw their prerogatives threatened in the workplace and mobilized accordingly. Seeing these changes, the Texas Manufacturers Association, the largest employer-association in the state, reorganized in 1946 to make political mobilization a focus. They also enjoyed the support and expertise of national actors like the National Association of Manufacturers in these efforts. Local union activists, for their part, received virtually no assistance from the national labor federations. But political struggle there was. This particular case can thus shed light on the interactions and tactical exchanges between an ascendant, albeit divided, union movement and well-organized employers, at a moment when the stability of conservative one-party rule was at least starting to show cracks.

Labor was strong in Ohio. Yet they had never formed a programmatic relationship with the democratic party, and they had their share of public setbacks. Ohio was politically competitive and unions were not completely woven into the political fabric of the state. Despite high union density, labor political efforts had failed, for example, to defeat Senator Robert Taft in his reelection bid following the “slave-labor” Taft-Hartley act. In the mid-1950s a highly publicized and CIO-backed unemployment insurance overhaul failed to gain public support. Business interests, on the other hand, had gained momentum from political successes in neighboring, and also heavily unionized Indiana. Employers had thus begun to make inroads in the industrial heartland in their quest for more punitive restrictions on labor. Partly due to these developments, national labor organizations had come to realize the importance of state politics and Right-to-Work, and offered local activists much needed assistance with campaigning and the like. With national and local organizations involved on both sides of the campaign, and, for the first time in nearly two decades, a united labor movement, the Ohio campaign can provide a window into political conflict where subordinates and elites are somewhat evenly matched. In
this way the Ohio case may better capture the processes of tactical innovation and adaptation described by McAdam, and the notion of framing battles advanced here earlier – when social movement challengers are relatively well organized and the pace of insurgency then becomes a question of strategy.

Taken together, the two cases can illustrate how processes of contention, and the more proximate strategies of business and labor actors to sway policy, may unfold in distinct political contexts with varying dimensions of social movement organization. This design and the comparison of the events that unfolded in Texas and Ohio allows us to identify a range of mechanisms through which these actors may target the state. By selecting cases where there was indeed a contentious battle, we can learn something about ongoing public struggles over policy between social movements and their opponents. And these two cases in particular figure importantly into the history of the Right-to-Work conflict and the political relations of unions and employers in the twentieth century.

Digging into the struggles in Texas and Ohio complements the quantitative analysis of policy adoption, which arguably captures the impact of organization and opportunity across all contexts, including those where the legacy of repression or success precluded much of a public airing of Right-to-Work. Detailed historical narratives of important cases reveal the complexities of social movement mobilization and setback, and shed light on the real-world protagonists of these struggles. Particularly in light of recent attempts in social movement scholarship to get a handle on how social movement actors matter, the use of historical narrative here can advance our understanding of social movements and politics in a way that the quantitative approach cannot.

By linking these case studies with the quantitative modeling of anti-labor politics, we are better able to explain business political mobilization and the unexpected setbacks for labor, but also the more general dilemmas facing movements and their opponents in ongoing battles.
between to affect political change. The rest of the projects proceeds as follows. In the next chapter, I employ event history analysis to assess organizational and political approaches to social movements as they apply to the adoption of Right-to-Work laws across states. This is followed by historical case studies of Texas and Ohio respectively in chapters 6 and 7 – cases that speak squarely to the how of social movement influence. In Chapter 8 I integrate insights from the case studies with the quantitative event history results to show how they jointly extend perspectives on social movements and politics.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

1. I also consulted the files of the American Chamber of Commerce housed at the Hagley Archives, as well as secondary accounts of business and labor politics during the period (e.g., Canak and Miller 1990; Millis and Brown 1950).

2. The history of employer associations suggests they formed mostly at the turn of the twentieth century in response to labor growth (see Bernstein 1960) and in response to the labor upsurge of the 1930s. Given that numerous labor issues were debated in every state legislature during the 1940s (Millis and Brown 1950) – even in those states where labor was not particularly active – the AFL materials on employer associations involved in labor politics during the period likely captures the most prominent actors and undoubtably indicates a legacy of organized business political mobilization against unions in a given state. Finally, this is the best available measure of state-level employer organization during the period.

3. Nebraska and Minnesota both had non-partisan state legislatures during this period. In constructing republican strength measures for these states I have substituted the non-South mean for percent republican. As I describe in the next chapter, I have also taken several precautions in my modeling strategy to ensure that these values are not biasing the results. One potential alternative to the republican strength measure would be to use a measure of anti-labor political climate that would include Southern democrats as well. Because the Southern region has a somewhat unique legacy on labor relations (see Roscigno and Danaher 2004), and, at least during this period, does not fit neatly within the political opportunity tradition that typically focuses on open, democratic systems, I opt to instead control for the South as a whole, and then further explore the dynamics of Right-to-Work struggles within the region. I discuss this modeling strategy further in the next chapter.

4. For some of the analyses the data set has fewer observations because of the limited availability
of certain measures. I discuss the implications of this, and of alternative periodizations of the risk-set, in chapter 4.

5. Indeed, existing historical scholarship, media accounts, and the few local labor-related materials preserved from the period do not indicate much of a public battle over the issue or any substantial union response. Beyond surveying these sources, repeated queries with local historians and the state historical society also failed to turn up much case material.

6. This does not mean that business groups were not active. Organizations like the Associated Industries of New York certainly mobilized to curb union activities and to limit labor-friendly policies (AFL State Legislation Files n.d.). But the programmatic relationship between organized labor and the state democratic party precluded the most punitive of labor restrictions, like Right-to-Work, from being viable policy issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Right-to-Work Passage</th>
<th>State(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Arkansas; Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Arizona; Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Delaware; Georgia; Iowa; New Hampshire; North Carolina; North Dakota; Tennessee; Texas; Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Louisiana; Mississippi; South Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Right-to-Work Victories, 1944 - 1960.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description and Coding</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business and Labor Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Mobilization</td>
<td>Employer associations active in anti-labor politics in a given state (1=yes).</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Size</td>
<td>Percent of manufacturers employing fewer than twenty workers (0-100).</td>
<td>69.12</td>
<td>6.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Strength</td>
<td>Percent of non-agricultural employees belonging to unions (0-100).</td>
<td>28.49</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Organizing Activity</td>
<td>Percent of non-agricultural workers involved in union elections, lagged 1 year (0-100).</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Republican Legislature</td>
<td>Percent republican in state legislature, lagged 1 year (0-100).</td>
<td>43.74</td>
<td>29.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legacy on Labor Relations</td>
<td>State has anti-syndicalist law (1=yes).</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Key Independent Variables, Descriptive Statistics, and Coding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Texas–1947</th>
<th>Ohio–1958</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers Well-Organized</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assistance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Divisions</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labor Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Density</td>
<td>Low, Growing Rapidly (15%)</td>
<td>High, Stagnant (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assistance</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Divisions</td>
<td>Considerable</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political System</td>
<td>Closed, Under Challenge</td>
<td>Open, Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Employed in Manufacturing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% African American</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Urban</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Texas and Ohio Cases
Figure 4.1 Continuum of Political Struggle
CHAPTER 5

EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS OF POLICY ADOPTION:
ON THE DETERMINANTS OF RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS, 1945 - 1960

This chapter evaluates organizational and political perspectives on social movements as they
apply to the business and labor mobilization of the 1940s and 1950s, and the spread of Right-to-
Work laws across states in particular. The key questions are how business and labor
organization, and political opportunities affect the adoption of Right-to-Work laws across states
and over time. In addition, I assess whether it is the combination of social movement (and
countermovement) organization and favorable political opportunities, as suggested by political
mediation analysts, that matters for policy adoption.

Discrete time event history analysis allows me to assess the impact of key explanatory
variables as suggested by these varied perspectives on the likelihood of a given state adopting a
Right-to-Work law in a given year. Because we are able to account for business and labor
organization, shifting political opportunities, and a host of relevant controls across a broad testing
ground, such analyses have the potential of extending social movement perspectives to the
political struggles of labor and management. The results speak to the enduring political
sociological question how social movements and their opponents may matter for political change.
They also advance our understanding of the unexpected wave of setbacks for American labor
unions during these years.

The discrete time approach is appealing because it can easily incorporate time-constant
and time-varying explanatory variables, and can be estimated using familiar techniques such as
logistic regression. Because this technique assesses the impact variables on the likelihood of a state experiencing an event provided it is at risk of doing so, a key issue becomes the periodization of the risk-set, or deciding just when states become at risk. This a potentially tricky decision with the case at hand as there was no clear-cut starting point for Right-to-Work activism. Business interests, recall, had always resisted union security attempts, be it the closed shop, the union shop, or the maintenance of membership provisions that the federal government briefly supported during World War II. And, while the New Deal era thoroughly politicized the relations of labor and management, conservative activists did not coin the “Right-to-Work” slogan until 1941, and the first political campaigns were not waged until 1944. The national Taft-Hartley act passed in 1947 then solidified these early state efforts, insulating them from legal challenges.

I opt to start the data set in 1945 and continue through 1960, which marks the end of the peak period of mobilization on the issue. The beginning point then is the year immediately following the very first state campaigns and Right-to-Work provisions that were adopted Florida and Arkansas. By then activists and state officials elsewhere were aware of Right-to-Work and, indeed, it is at this point that we begin to see state campaigns spread across the country. That is, all states were then at risk of adopting Right-to-Work. This decision means that I omit Florida and Arkansas from the analysis as the very first states to adopt the law. To ensure that this decision did not bias the results, I ran models with alternative starting points, including 1942 (following the Christian American Association’s coining of the “Right-to-Work” slogan), 1943 (following the government’s endorsement of maintenance of membership union security provisions in basic industry), and 1944, and obtained similar results.¹

Another decision concerns how to deal with time and duration dependency. Because these models are estimated as a logistic regression, the baseline hazard of adopting Right-to-Work is constant with respect to time. But assuming that the baseline hazard is flat over time is
unrealistic when considering many political processes, and especially the Right-to-Work battles described here. Because I view time as meaningful in its own right, I opt to include a dummy variable for 1947. That year may indeed be somewhat idiosyncratic as nine different states adopted Right-to-Work laws. A combination of various factors, including economic problems associated with reconversion, provided an especially inhospitable climate for labor activists. Controlling for the 1947 period significantly improves the model fit and provides the most parsimonious and historically informed approach to the problem.²

Given these considerations, the analysis proceeds in two steps. I first analyze the effects of business and labor organization (and controls) on the adoption of Right-to-Work, followed by the inclusion of political system characteristics that political opportunity theorists suggest are meaningful. Following this discussion, I turn to regional differences and, more specifically the adoption of Right-to-Work laws in the South. All of the models that follow include standard errors clustered by state to account for the possibility that repeated state observations are not independent. The discrete time event history estimates are equivalent to a logit coefficient, and can be interpreted as the effects of explanatory variables on the log-odds of a state adopting Right-to-Work in a given year provided it has not done so already.³

The Passage of Right-to-Work Laws, 1945 - 1960

Table 5.1 displays discrete time event history estimates for business and labor organization on the adoption of Right-to-Work laws. The models in this table control for whether or not there was a public vote held on Right-to-Work, the percentage of a state’s population residing in urban areas, the percent of neighboring states with Right-to-Work, region (South), and time (1947). Model 1 reports, consistent with resource mobilization predictions, that business and labor organization appear to be meaningful in their own right for policy adoption. Employer mobilization positively
and significantly influences the likelihood of a state adopting Right-to-Work. Such employer organization increases the likelihood of a state adopting Right-to-Work by nearly three times. The relative composition of employers as indicated by enterprise size, by contrast, does not appear to be influential. Union organization, however, is quite important for policy adoption and exhibits the expected negative and significant effect on Right-to-Work. As expected, states with stronger labor movements are less likely to adopt Right-to-Work laws.

In model 2 I remove the control for the South and include a measure of minority presence indicted by the percentage of African American’s living in a state. These are introduced separately because minority presence and the South region are highly collinear during this period. The key organizational variables as suggested by resource mobilization accounts remain relatively unchanged in this model. Although enterprise size still does not exhibit any effect, and the inclusion of minority presence is not statistically significant. In model 3 I include a measure of union activity as well, in the percentage of workers in a given state that are involved in union elections (lagged). I include this because the highly publicized labor organizing drives in the postwar years often provided ample ammunition for conservative activists seeking restrictions on unions. While the union activity variable exhibits a positive effect, it does not reach statistical significance. This non-effect may be because the organizing drives centered on the South in particular – something I will discuss in more detail momentarily. In analyses not presented here, interactions between employer mobilization and union organizing activity, and region and union activity did not prove significant either. Interestingly, separate attempts to model the effects of strike activity on policy adoption likewise yielded no significant findings, as striking (unlike organizing activity) is associated with labor strength.

Of the controls that are associated with Right-to-Work, a public vote on the issue increases the likelihood of passage. This effect likely captures some of the organization and
whereithal necessary to get a Right-to-Work initiative to the voting stage to begin with. We also find that the control for the 1947 period exhibits a positive and significant effect, as several states adopted Right-to-Work laws that year. Minority presence does not exhibit a statistically significant effect, contrary to what racial competition arguments might expect. Right-to-Work was adopted in both states with large and small minority populations during these years (transformations of this variable did not alter the results). This notwithstanding, race often weighed heavily in the background, as we will see in the Texas case.

Model 4 presents a reduced equation that includes only the significant predictors from the previous models. The effects of business and labor organization, as well as the controls for 1947 and a public vote on Right-to-Work remain significant. The persistence of these results and their statistical strength suggest that business and labor organization are meaningful for policy adoption, and that this impact is quite robust. Employer mobilization increases the likelihood of Right-to-Work by nearly three times, independent of controls. Alternatively, each percentage increase in union organization decreases the odds of passage by approximately eight percent. Organization matters then, and for good reason. These are the groups that made Right-to-Work a public issue in the first place. Consistent with the history of Right-to-Work struggles, and with resource mobilization and organizational approaches to social movements, the presence and extent of business and labor organization is influential for the adoption of important labor policy. Such a presence is no doubt important for political outreach and education, and for more direct lobbying efforts. Yet we do not know how organization may matter after the inclusion of the political opportunity variables.

Table 5.2 adds political opportunity measures to the previous models. Model 1 includes a measure for republican party strength in the percent of a state’s legislature that is republican (lagged), and an indicator of whether or not a state has an anti-syndicalist law on the books to
capture a state’s legacy on labor relations. We find that republican strength positively shapes the emergence of Right-to-Work laws. The presence of an anti-syndicalist law is also positively associated with the adoption of Right-to-Work (p<.05). Considering the effects of partisanship, I also tried including a separate republican strength measure indicating whether or not republicans controlled the legislative and executive branches of state government. This measure exhibits a similar positive effect, but it does not improve the model fit or alter any of the results. I therefore stick with the continuous measure presented here.5

Those states with a legacy of restricting labor activity are also more likely to pass Right-to-Work laws during this period. Anti-syndicalist laws were originally passed to limit radical labor organization after World War I, but were subsequently invoked to quell a range of uprisings and labor conflicts in the decades following. In this way, the law captures a more general stance of a state toward labor. As described earlier, many states also sought to limit union organizing tactics, and picketing in particular, in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In separate analyses, however, I find that such early responses to the New Deal gains of labor are not statistically associated with the adoption of Right-to-Work laws. Many of these restrictions were quickly overturned, although they certainly increased the costs of collective action for labor unions that had to mount expensive legal challenges. Yet the presence of an anti-syndicalist law perhaps marks a more enduring approach to labor relations and thus best captures the stance of a state toward unions.

The results show that business and labor organization remain influential after the inclusion of political opportunities and controls. In addition, after controlling for republican strength, we see distinct regional variation and the emergence of the South (with conservative democratic rule) as significantly more likely to adopt Right-to-Work. The variables for a public vote on Right-to-Work and for 1947 remain highly significant.
Recall that the political mediation variant of this argument suggests that it is the alignment of social movement organization and favorable political circumstances that should matter for policy outcomes, rather than one or the other. Indeed, the strong version of this argument suggests that social movements are only successful when their presence coincides with favorable political circumstances and sympathetic state officials. For this reason I include an interaction term of employer mobilization and republican strength in model 2. Contrary to expectations, however, this does not prove meaningful for policy adoption. The inclusion of the interaction term reduces the magnitude of the employer mobilization coefficient to the point of non-significance. In model 3 I include an interaction term between employer mobilization and a state’s anti-labor political legacy. It similarly does not improve the model. In analyses not presented here, I experimented with other interaction terms for this purpose, including interactions between union organization and political opportunities. But these experiments, along with the results presented here, do not provide any support for the political mediation thesis as applied to Right-to-Work activism.

Model 4 presents a reduced model including only significant predictors. The prior relationships hold, as business and labor organization, and political opportunities significantly shape the adoption of Right-to-Work laws. The results presented in Table 5.2 suggest that political opportunities matter for Right-to-Work struggles both in the form of government support (favorable partisan composition) for the movement’s cause (Meyer and Minkoff 2004), and through a state’s legacy on labor relations. Indeed, a state’s stance toward labor, indicated by the presence of an anti-syndicalist law, increases the odds of Right-to-Work by approximately three times. Republican strength similarly increases the likelihood of Right-to-Work, with a one percent increase in the percentage of a state’s legislature that is republican increasing the odds of passage by two percent. While I experimented with several different dimensions of political
opportunity, such as divided governments and political competition, I found little support for these predictors.

Considering political opportunity explanations then, the results lend support for the effects of both dynamic (shifting partisan composition) and structural opportunities (state’s historical stance toward labor). Both of these, however, can be considered constituent-specific opportunities. They matter for the politics of labor and management, but do not necessarily (or are even likely to) hold for a broader range of social movement challengers and their opponents. Separate analyses that considered political opportunities writ large, including electoral competition, divided governments, and election-year politics indeed found no support for such predictors. The results are instead consistent with Meyer and Minkoff’s (2004) discussion of “political opportunities for whom,” and McCammon et al.’s (2001) findings regarding constituent-specific opportunity structures. Political opportunities narrowly applied to the case of business and labor mobilization are meaningful for Right-to-Work.

Interestingly, we do not find any support for the political mediation variant of opportunity theory. This explanation was developed on social spending outcomes in the 1930s and 1940s. And while it has been successfully applied to other mobilization campaigns (e.g., Cress and Snow 2000; McVeigh et al. 2003; Soule and Olzak 2004), it does not help explain the rollback on labor law following the New Deal. Rather, we find that favorable political circumstances, and business and labor organization matter independently for policy adoption.

The role of organization on each side of the Right-to-Work debate finds consistent support in the results presented here. To make this more intuitive for the reader, I present expected probabilities of Right-to-Work passage at different levels of business and labor organization in figure 5.1. The figures are generated from model 1 of table 5.2, holding all other variables at their mean. As the reader will note, the expected probability of passage is greatest in
scenarios with weak union organization and the presence of employer organizations active in anti-labor politics. This probability, however, is diminished where there is viable union organization, and is substantially decreased in areas with viable union organization and no employer mobilization.

Resource mobilization perspectives assume that organization is meaningful for social movement challengers and their ability to influence politics, and the results here certainly support this view. But how is the presence and extent of business and labor organization meaningful for this particular case? Andrews (2001) suggests that social movements with a strong infrastructure are able to pursue multiple mechanisms of influence, and are thus more successful in the political process. In the Right-to-Work struggles, employer associations both lobbied political representatives and engaged in more public political outreach, framing, and educational activities to alert employers and citizens to the dangers of unionism.

When state employer associations engaged in these political activities, they often did so with the support of national employer associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers, working through the National Industrial Council, who provided ready-made publicity kits, fact sheets on labor and Right-to-Work, and effective ways to present the business case to the public. Indeed, as sociologist Robert Lynd (1946:20) noted early on in regards to the localized efforts to curtail labor, “These things are not small-time efforts run by somebody’s secretary, but well-oiled parts of a total campaign.” Whether in regards to advertising, mobilizing their fellow employers, addressing workers directly, or more conventional political lobbying, state-based employer associations had a wealth of expertise to draw on from national organizations like the NAM, which had emerged from World War II with a revamped and more sophisticated approach to labor relations.
Labor organization was likewise important for political outreach and for countering Right-to-Work efforts. Union density was of course important for the amount of pressure labor could bring to bear on elected officials through lobbying, but organization also mattered for their ability to energize labor and non-labor constituencies alike. Unions undertook voter registration drives, political education and public relations campaigns to counter business efforts in several states (Derrickson 1955). But for much of the period in question, they did so without the expertise and commitment of the national labor federations. It was not until the mid-1950s that national CIO or AFL devoted considerable time and energy into the Right-to-Work issue and provided their state affiliates with any meaningful assistance.

Such disparities between business and labor organization were often reflected during initiative referendum campaigns. This is precisely the area where local union activists needed the organizational skills and expertise to engage in single-issue election campaigning. Recall that the effect of holding a public vote on Right-to-Work is consistently positive and significant. Prominent Right-to-Work activists like manufacturer Nathan Thorington attributed Right-to-Work successes in these public referendum campaigns to “positive proof” that Americans are against “forced-unionism” (Perkins 1956:12), although this may more likely reflect the greater skill and campaigning resources that business groups had to draw on in many of these battles.

There is no systematic public opinion data on Right-to-Work at the state level for these years, but we know from informal polling on the part of business and labor groups that the notion of Right-to-Work resonated with a majority but at the same time most did not understand what the laws entailed (Gall 1988; NAM 1955). Thus while we do not find a statistically significant interaction between employer/labor organization and a public vote on Right-to-Work, we know that employer associations, often with the assistance and expertise of nationally-oriented groups, entered such contests with a more sophisticated approach and message than their union
counterparts. Indeed, much to the delight of groups like the NAM, often the best that ill-equipped union activists in the states could do to challenge the business case for Right-to-Work was to invert the slogan to “right-to-starve,” or “right-to-scab” (AFL 1954; NAM 1955; Perkins 1956; Wade 1976).

Independent of a host of controls, including additional and alternative measures of industrialization and industrial mix, variations in business and labor organization are shown to be influential for the adoption of Right-to-Work laws in the 1940s and 1950s. These results lend support to resource mobilization claims that SMOs and their opponents are meaningful for politics in their own right. The anecdotal evidence discussed here suggests a number of ways in which these groups may matter for policy adoption, and is generally consistent with the movement infrastructure model that suggests movements will be better able to affect policy when they can pursue multiple mechanisms of influence. Although to discern just how business and labor actors mobilized, countered each others claims, and sought to influence policy we need to dig deeper into the historical cases, which I turn to in the following chapters.

The results also show support for political opportunity explanations as republican strength and a state’s legacy on labor relations exhibit significant effects. Yet it is important here to take regional differences into account. As described above, after adding political opportunity variables we saw that the South region stood out as significantly more likely to experience Right-to-Work. Because this region was so different than the rest of the nation along various political dimensions during this period – with conservative, one-party democratic rule – I explore these potential regional effects further.
Potential Regional Variation

Table 5.4 presents the effects of business and labor organization, political opportunities, and controls, when excluding the South region. The South is operationalized as the ex-confederate states. Enterprise size, showing no effect in previous models, is not included here. Nor is organizing activity, which more directly pertained to the South region during this period. The results from model 1 are again consistent with resource mobilization and political opportunity predictions. Although here the effects of business and labor organization are somewhat magnified. Independent of controls, non-Southern states with employer organization are more than four times as likely to adopt Right-to-Work laws. Each percentage increase in unionization decreases the odds of right-to-Work passage by approximately fifteen percent. Model 2 includes only the significant predictors and yields similar results. Business and labor organization, political opportunities, as well as the controls for a public vote on the issue, and for the 1947 period all significantly influence the adoption of Right-to-Work. Whether including the South region as a control variable, or eliminating it from the analysis altogether, both organizational and political approaches to social movements provide a useful scheme when considering the political relations of business groups and labor unions following the New Deal.

But what mattered for the adoption of Right-to-Work within the South? Republican strength was certainly not meaningful in this case, as the South was uniformly confined to one-party democratic rule during this period. Likewise, anti-syndicalist laws were largely a non-Southern phenomenon and, among the controls, the Southern states adopting Right-to-Work during these years did not do so by public vote. In addition to the political distinctions relative to other regions, unionization was lower across the South as a whole and most of the states in the region had employer groups active in politics. Indeed, there is little within-South variation on these key measures. All of the ex-confederate states adopted Right-to-Work during these years,
although Louisiana repealed their statute within this same period. The question posed here is what influenced the timing of these laws given the somewhat homogenous political system characteristics and limited union organization.

Table 5.4 presents discrete time event history estimates of the adoption of Right-to-Work within the South region. Given little variation in union and employer organization, these variables do not significantly influence the timing of Right-to-Work in the region. Rather, and as we see in model 1, the timing of these laws is influenced by union organizing activity as well as the percentage of neighboring states with Right-to-Work laws. The period control for 1947 also remains significant. Model 2 includes only the significant predictors and again shows organizing activity to be influential for the timing of these laws. The greater the percentage of workers involved in union elections in a given state affects the timing of Right-to-Work in the South.

The influence of union organizing activity on the timing of Right-to-Work can be thought of as the “Operation Dixie” effect. Recall that this was the CIO’s highly publicized postwar Southern labor organizing drive. Not to be outdone, the rival and more conservative AFL soon followed with its own attempt to bring “American unionism” to the region. The organizing drives themselves were failures. This despite the increase in unionization that the South had experienced during the war years with the influx of war industry.

Importantly for labor unions, these organizing drives were met not only with fierce resistance at the enterprise level but also in the political sphere. The drives became easy targets for conservative activists and politicians, who sought to derail the CIO as communist and in need of containment. While union activists complained that their organizing efforts were “hastening” Right-to-Work agitation, neither national labor federation was adequately prepared to deal with the problem. Anticipating the conservative backlash, the CIO divorced much of its political operation, and the CIO PAC in particular, from its organizing drive. This to avoid being labeled
yet this choice put local activists in a precarious position to deal with the political fallout, as more experienced union officials and national assistance were allocated to organizing efforts.

Such a disconnect existed between national organization and local political efforts that as the organizing drive continued to slide in the spring of 1947, many CIO executive board members were surprised to learn that several Southern states had already adopted Right-to-Work laws. The AFL for its part offered little real assistance to its state affiliates. We see here that rather than Right-to-Work laws being passed solely where unions were weak, they emerged at a critical moment when labor unions were trying to organize and become a force in the region. A moment, moreover, when many observers thought that unions would succeed. The efforts of labor in the South and the unfolding of Right-to-Work struggles there are of course complex, and in need of further investigation. But the results presented here offer an important contribution in this regard, showing that the timing of Right-to-Work in the region was significantly influenced by the postwar labor organizing drives.

In separate models (not reported here) I use an alternative measurement of region, including all of the Southern states in the census classification, and get similar findings. This classification includes peripheral and border states such as Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Oklahoma. The organizing effect remains positive and significant, and union and employer organization work in the expected directions and reach statistical significance at .10 (as the census classification provides more cases and greater variation in union and employer organization). Because of the historical import of the ex-confederate states, however, I focus the presentation and discussion on this smaller sample. While only providing a limited number of cases, this analysis begins to shed light on the political processes in a region that continues to be important for the fate of American labor unions.
By probing this regional variation we see that there are multiple routes to policy change. Business and labor organization are influential for policy adoption when considering these events as they unfold across all states. When accounting for the potentially idiosyncratic South, or removing it from the analysis altogether, organization and political opportunity are shown to be meaningful for Right-to-Work. The pattern is somewhat different when considering these processes within the South region only. Indeed, we see that the timing of these laws in the region is critically influenced by the focus of (and reaction to) the postwar labor organizing drives. Business and labor organization, undoubtably still important, do not exhibit statistically significant effects on the timing of Right-to-Work within the South. The findings provide a good start to explaining the wave of unexpected political setbacks for labor unions in the 1940s and 1950s, the importance of social movement organization and political opportunity in this regard, and the complex regional variation in these processes.

Summary

The results presented in this chapter lend support to, and extend, organizational perspectives on social movements and politics. The findings also point to the complexities of these political processes and suggest that there are multiple routes to policy change. The assumption underlying early resource mobilization arguments was that SMOs were potentially effective political actors that should be meaningful in their own right for policy adoption. More recent extensions of this perspective point to the multiple ways in which SMOs may affect politics, although the basic argument remains the same. The presence and extent of social movement organization is crucial. Yet to date few analyses take into account the effects of both social movement and countermovement organization, or take seriously the role of elites for a range of social movement processes (beyond their roles as allies or sponsors).
Considering the adoption of Right-to-Work laws across states and over time, the findings from the event history analysis show that business and labor organization, independent of a host of controls, are indeed influential. The presence of employer associations involved in anti-labor politics increases the odds of Right-to-Work by more than three times, while increased union organization significantly diminishes the political prospects for Right-to-Work advocates. The historical record suggests that organization mattered, on both sides of the debate, for the ability of these actors to engage in direct lobbying efforts as well as public outreach, framing, and political education. But these insights also suggest a complex relationship between national and local organization, and their resultant ability to engage in Right-to-Work struggles. These relations are in need of further investigation.

Importantly, political opportunity explanations also received support. Republican strength and the legacy of a state on labor relations both significantly influenced the adoption of Right-to-Work. Not surprisingly, the odds of Right-to-Work were greater where there was a favorable partisan composition and thus a greater percentage of lawmakers sympathetic to the business cause. Political opportunity perspectives have been criticized for focusing on a narrow range of mostly successful subordinate group challengers. Applied to a broader testing ground in the politics relations of business groups and labor unions across states, we see that, at least narrowly applied, political opportunity explanations help us understand part of the Right-to-Work story. Although here we do not find support for any conditional relationship between organization and political opportunity as predicted by political mediation variants.

These processes were no doubt complex, and varied somewhat by region. Considering the unfolding of events just within the South, the timing of Right-to-Work laws in this region were influenced by the focus of the postwar Southern labor organizing drives. As labor unions
sought to organize the region and become a truly national force, they were ill-equipped to counter
the political backlash that ensued.

The results presented here provide a good start to explaining the political relations of
labor and management during the 1940s and 1950s. Yet the event history analysis alone does not
tell the entire story. Indeed, given that organization and political opportunity are shown to be
meaningful across a broad testing ground, the key question becomes just how these actors
influence policy. Specifically, how might the framing activities of business and labor
organizations within states matter for political success? How, for example, do organization,
opportunity, and more proximate framing processes, or framing battles, matter in relation to one
another for Right-to-Work struggles? And how might the interaction and tactical exchanges of
these actors shape their ability to influence the political process? I address these questions, and
what they can add to the quantitative insights, with historical case studies of Right-to-Work
campaigns in Texas and Ohio.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

1. My sample ends in 1960, which marks the peak period of mobilization around Right-to-Work. States that did not experience Right-to-Work by the end of the sample are treated as censored cases. Any claims regarding the importance of business or labor organization are thus limited to this crucial period.

2. Because these are grouped data, with multiple repeated observations, it is almost always better to make some attempt to account for temporal dependence and thus to take time into account (see for example Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004:75). But just what form time should take is an empirical and substantive decision for the researcher. One simple approach is to include temporal dummy variables for each year of the sample (minus one), although this becomes awkward to interpret if time is thought to be meaningful in its own right. Alternatively, various transformations (log, quadratic, etc.) may better characterize the baseline hazard of Right-to-Work and provide a better model fit. I experimented with several different transformations, but found that none significantly improved the fit of the baseline model (assuming the hazard rate is flat over time).

3. For ease of interpretation and discussion, I will often convert to log-odds to the odds by taking the exponent of the logit coefficient $e^b$, and also refer to the effect of a variable on the percent change in odds through the following transformation: $(e^b - 1) \times 100$.

4. The union election variable is unfortunately only available at the state-level beginning in 1946. For the models including this variable the risk-set does not start in 1945 but in 1946. There is no evidence that this later starting point biases the results.

5. The presence of a republican governor was not significant. Nebraska and Minnesota did not have partisan legislatures during this period. For these states I substituted the non-South mean for percent republican. To ensure that this approach did not affect the results, I ran separate
models excluding these states, and one model with a control for two and obtained similar results.

6. I also included an interaction term between employer mobilization and the 1947 period, as well as employer mobilization and the South. Neither of these were statistically significant.

7. I computed the expected probability of passage with the Spost suite in Stata (Long and Freese 2001).

8. The importance of national organization on each side of the issue may raise concern as the quantitative analysis does not include any measure for the involvement of specifically nationally oriented groups. For this reason, I experimented with alternative measures of time, and various period dummies to account for the rather late involvement of national labor organizations (who were not active until the mid to late 1950s) in Right-to-Work disputes. None of these measures improved the model fit or altered the results in any meaningful way. What the findings suggest then is that business and labor organization are clearly meaningful for politics across the board. Just how these groups affect policy, and which types of social movement/countermovement organization are best suited to target the state, is more involved and something I turn to in detail in the following chapters.

9. These results persist when accounting for a range of controls, including alternative measures of industrialization or jurisdictional affluence. For example, the percent employed in manufacturing, or the value added per capita by manufacturing do not significantly improve the model or alter the results. Nor does personal income per capita appear to be meaningful. Unfortunately, state-level data on unemployment are confined to census years during this period.
### Table 5.1 Discrete Time Event History Estimates of Business and Labor Organization on the Adoption of Right-to-Work Laws

<table>
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<td>(.625)</td>
<td>(.482)</td>
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<td>(.050)</td>
<td>(.060)</td>
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<td>(.020)</td>
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<td>.004</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(.010)</td>
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<td>(4.291)</td>
<td>(5.349)</td>
<td>(4.85)</td>
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Table 5.2 Discrete Time Event History Estimates of Business and Labor Organization, and Political Opportunities on the Adoption of Right-to-Work Laws

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<td>-.141*</td>
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<td>(.299)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.019</td>
<td>.024*</td>
<td>.019*</td>
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<td>(.534)</td>
<td>(.772)</td>
<td>(.478)</td>
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<td>(.028)</td>
<td>(.028)</td>
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<td>% of Neighboring States w/RTW</td>
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<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<td>(.008)</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
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### Business and Labor Organization

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<td>Employer Mobilization</td>
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<td>(.049)</td>
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### Political Opportunities

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<td>.019*</td>
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<td>(.008)</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
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<td>Anti-Labor Legacy</td>
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<td>(.596)</td>
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### Controls

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<td>% of Neighboring States w/RTW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.265)</td>
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</table>

Note: N=478 State-Years. Standard Errors in Parentheses. *p<.05 (one-tailed tests except for constant)

Table 5.3 Discrete Time Event History Estimates of Factors Influencing the Adoption of Right-to-Work, excluding the South region.
### Table 5.4 Discrete Time Event History Estimates of Factors Influencing the Adoption of Right-to-Work in the South Region

<table>
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<td>(3.670)</td>
<td>(1.494)</td>
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Note: N=45 State-Years. Standard Errors in Parentheses. *p<.05 (one-tailed tests except for constant)
Figure 5.1 Expected Probability of Right-to-Work Passage by Union and Employer Organization
Note: Figure generated from Table 5.2, Model1, all other variables held at their mean.
Viable union organization is the mean for union density, weak organization is one standard deviation below the mean. Baseline probability of passage is .006.
CHAPTER 6

“TO FREE THE WORKERS OF TEXAS”
BUSINESS MOBILIZATION AND LABOR DEFEAT

The preceding analysis demonstrated the influence of business and labor organization and political opportunities on the adoption of Right-to-Work laws across U.S. states, as well as certain regional variations in these processes. Yet, the event history analysis alone can tell us little about the particular mechanisms through which these actors attempt to sway policy. Nor can it tell us much about the public claims and the framing activities of business and labor groups during these years. That is, it says little about the how of social movement influence. In the following two chapters I present case studies of Right-to-Work campaigns in Texas and Ohio in order to disentangle the more proximate strategies of business and labor groups, and their influence across distinct political contexts. These cases in turn extend the quantitative analysis to identify a range of mechanisms of influence for movements and their antagonists.

Recall that the Texas case in particular provides us with important insight into the exchanges between an ascendant social movement challenger and elites in a political system under challenge. Social movement literature on framing suggests that just how these actors present their cause to external audiences and state actors may be crucial for their ability to affect political change. Those actors that advance coherent and articulate frames (Cress and Snow 2000), or “plausible stories” (McVeigh et al. 2003) in the political process should arguably be more successful. These efforts, however, are undoubtedly tied to social movement organization. An important question then is how the relative organization of these contenders shapes political strategy and influence. In what follows I probe how employers mobilized to curtail the growing
union influence in the state, the labor response, and their give and take in the political process. Of particular interest is how each side framed the Right-to-Work issue. By addressing these issues, the historical narrative sheds light not only on an important moment in the Right-to-Work story, but also speaks to the more public battles between social movements and their opponents.

At first glance the response to labor and the New Deal in the state appears exceptional. The state passed some of the most far-reaching and punitive restrictions on unions during this period, with certain measures bordering on the absurd. This activity peaked in 1947 with the passage of several different restrictions on labor unions, highlighted by the Right-to-Work bill “to free the workers of Texas,” as its sponsor Marshall Bell proclaimed. In many ways, however, the Texas case is symptomatic of the varied extremist and corporate responses to the “labor question” that unfolded across the country, and can thus tell us something about the politics of business and labor during these years.

*Texas Politics and the Organization of Business and Labor*

Texas politics during the 1940s combined Southern and Southwestern elements as well as the rising influence of corporate actors. On the one hand, the one-party, conservative democratic rule looked much like the rest of the South, particularly in the northeastern counties and the more agricultural areas of the state. The poll tax, as in neighboring states, disenfranchised African Americans and many poor whites. This diminished wide-scale political participation. African Americans comprised approximately fourteen percent of the population while twelve percent were Mexican American. Along the gulf coast, with the numerous oil refineries came new industrial workers and unions, who began to figure into the political picture. While in the far South of the state, in the predominantly Mexican American counties, a somewhat insular,
patronage-oriented political organization was predominant (Mayhew 1986:139). The western and panhandle areas were sparsely populated and embodied frontier elements.

Despite this diversity of influences and the mythic individualism of the state, a loose-knit coalition of mostly Anglo businessmen, oil executives, and bankers and lawyers – dubbed by historian Green (1979:17) as the “establishment” – proved to be the dominant force in state politics during these years, and they were assisted by a series of conservative governors. At the eve of the 1940s at least, unions did not appear to be much of a countervailing force. Both the AFL and CIO were fairly weak in the state, totaling 110,000 members and just over ten percent of the non-agricultural workforce. The deepening divide between the rival federations, often exploited by employers and the press, further weakened labor’s political efforts (Brewer 1970).

But the industrial and political landscapes were changing. Texas was rapidly industrializing during the 1940s as war industry flocked to the state, and labor organization soon followed. This set of circumstances fostered one of most bitter intra-party struggles along New Deal-anti-New Deal lines. Such factionalism led political scientist V.O. Key (1949) to believe that Texas was the most likely candidate to break out of the one-party democratic rule that characterized the South. Though the one-party politics of Texas did not necessarily bode well for labor unions, observers at the time at least saw potential openings for working-class activism.

The number of manufacturers increased by 40 percent during these years, and the number of production workers employed in manufacturing increased by nearly 130 percent in the decade (Polakoff 1955; U.S. Census of Manufacturers 1947). Population increased by 20 percent during the decade to more than 7 million, with substantial rural-urban migration. These were the years when the percent of workers employed in manufacturing surpassed the percent employed in agriculture, and when the majority of the state’s population would switch over to reside in metropolitan as opposed to rural areas. Unions would also make major organizational gains
during the decade. Unionization increased by more than 225 percent (Troy 1957). Such changes were not lost on employers, who responded to the labor advance with both moderate and extremist approaches.

Business was well organized on the political front in Texas. The major groups involved in labor politics included the Texas Manufacturers Association (TMA), who were affiliated with the NAM through its National Industrial Council. The TMA was formed in San Antonio but moved to Houston, the state’s largest and principal industrial city, immediately following World War II as part of a larger reorganization and political focus. The state and local branches of the Chamber of Commerce, as well as regional organizations like the Southern States Industrial Council and American Farm Bureau Federation were also politically active. For the most part, establishment political actors operated through these associations, and especially the TMA, when dealing with labor issues and legislation. There were also prominent individual employers that took a lead in anti-labor efforts. These included Herman Brown of the Brown and Root Construction Company, as well as executives of the Texas Power Saw Company, and Sheffield Steel.¹

The aforementioned organizations and individual employers, while all virulently anti-union, represented the mainstream segment of the business community. At the far-right, homegrown extremist organizations like the Christian American Association and the Fight for Free Enterprise also publically campaigned against unions (Marshall 1967; Polakoff 1955). Recall that the Christian American Association was the first in the nation to champion the “Right-to-Work” as a full-blown slogan. The group formed in Houston in 1936 to counter New Deal efforts and would eventually become a leading advocate for restrictive labor legislation throughout the South. Vance Muse, the head of Christian American, became intrigued by the use of the Right-to-Work term in a 1941 Labor Day editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* that called for an open
shop amendment to the constitution. After traveling to Dallas and consulting with the editor, Muse was encouraged to use and promote the idea of Right-to-Work. This would indeed become the primary cause for the group, who would then campaign across the country, but especially within Texas, championing “the god-given right to work free from coercion, intimidation, and violence and without paying tribute to union grafters.”

The Fight for Free Enterprise was based in San Antonio. Like the Christian American Association, they advocated for the far-right employers of the 1940s, and had ties to other extremist groups. Among other things, they were noted for attempting to introduce state legislation in the mid-1940s requiring labor organizers to wear identifying head gear (Amberg 2004; Marshall 1967). CIO organizers, not surprisingly, would be required to wear red hats.

All of the employer interests in the state, from moderate to extreme, found a welcome audience in the eccentric governor W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel at the beginning of the 1940s. After two years in office O’Daniel “found” the anti-union movement as a profitable political issue in 1941. While unions had risen to power dramatically in other parts of the country during the 1930s, Texas had yet to experience a major organizational surge or much industrial unrest for that matter. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1941, O’Daniel called for an immediate joint session of the legislature to hear his “anti-violence” bill – a bill to rid the state of “labor leader racketeers,” and in the name of national defense. To that point there had been only minimal workdays lost to strikes in Texas war plants, and while O’Daniel’s previous statements suggested he was an isolationist rather than war supporter, he still used this time to send a message to those that might disrupt defense production:

Some labor agitators have been attracted here from other places for the purpose of fomenting trouble...So let us serve notice to the world that Texas is going to tolerate none of these imported racketeering, fifth column, radical violence-producing element, while this national program is underway. (in Polakoff 1955: 272)
The bill that eventually passed put stiff restrictions on picketing and did “serve notice,” becoming a model for other states considering punitive restrictions on unions during the war years. The bill also helped establish an important alliance between O’Daniel and the far-right Christian American Association, who would champion similar restrictions elsewhere.

Labor, for its part, was deeply divided and had little in the way of coherent political program. Some local unions were active in state and local politics including locals of the Oil Workers, the Communication Workers, and many of the building trades unions. For the most part, however, labor political activity was channeled through the state federations of labor that represented AFL and CIO unions in Texas. It was not until 1943, however, that the Texas State Industrial Union Council of the CIO even had a presence at the state house in Austin. Facing the threat of more anti-labor legislation that year, Clyde Ingram of the state industrial union council called for a meeting of all the labor federations in Houston. Out of this meeting the state Federation of Labor of the AFL, the state CIO, and railroad brotherhoods briefly formed the United Labor Committee to counter business political efforts and to promote positive labor legislation (Mullennix 1955).

These coalition efforts were short lived as the AFL soon withdrew from the committee. The state federation, under advisement from the national office also withdrew from other liberal-labor coalition efforts such as the Texas Social and Legislative Conference. Despite a more sympathetic governor in Coke Stevenson, unions suffered more political setbacks in 1943 as the Manford Act forced unions file annual reports with the state (which were publically available for examination), and limited union political activities. In a last minute attempt to stave off the legislation, labor signed a “no-strike pledge” with Stevenson – a pledge that had been in effect orally for more than a year at that point. The written agreement had little effect as the legislature quickly passed the act, which became law without the Governor’s signature. Parts of this act
were later ruled unconstitutional, but it nonetheless required more defensive action on the part of unions.

While all segments of the business community voiced their displeasure with labor unions during the early part of the decade, the more reactionary wing, championed by organizations like the Christian American Association, proved most vocal. Here the familiar themes of labor unions as atheistic, communistic, corrupt, foreign, un-American, and in need of regulation were deployed in the press and at the statehouse alike (Marshall 1967). Establishment political actors and more mainstream organizations like the TMA, while not working directly with these far-right figures, appeared to accept or, at least were indifferent to their particular brand of anti-labor mobilization. The state labor federations in Texas – not well organized, and deeply divided – were able to offer only a limited response to these political efforts. Both federations ended up challenging early legislative restrictions in court, and with some success. Yet, they were unable to form or sustain any meaningful coalitions to fight such legislative efforts, or to promote any positive legislation of their own. Despite these setbacks for labor unions, however, the political landscape was changing.

Challenge from the Left

In the early 1940s Texas employers and political elites were successful in using the state to limit many of the New Deal gains that unions had experienced elsewhere. Labor nevertheless made some significant strides. With the aid of the wartime state and the National War Labor Board (NWLB), both AFL and CIO unions made substantial membership gains in Texas during the war years (Marshall 1967). The NWLB often forced reluctant employers to obey the results of union elections. The board, moreover, could then turn election results into contracts by prodding employers and even stipulating contract terms in the more difficult cases (Amberg 2004).
Importantly, unions in defense industries were granted a limited “maintenance of membership” form of union security, whereby workers in plants that had organized were automatically enrolled in the union for the length of the collective bargaining contract. The combination of the tight wartime economy and the backing of the federal government thus provided a major boost for Texas unions. The Texas State Federation of Labor, for example, saw its revenues increase by more than five times between 1940 and 1946 (Mullennix 1955; State Labor Proceedings, Texas, Various Years). CIO unions likewise made significant organizational and financial advances during the war years.

These organizing successes briefly spilled over into the political arena in 1944. New Deal forces effectively captured the Texas Democratic party at the fall convention that year. This prompted conservatives to flee and form a third party, the “Texas Regulars,” who, according to their own literature, sought to “fight New Deal radicals to the end because they are the enemies of the South and of Texas” (Texas Regular Party, n.d.). Candidates backed by the new party, however, received only limited support at the polls, while New Dealers and labor were influential in reelecting Roosevelt and a more liberal slate at the state-level. At the same time the Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that the Texas all-white primary was unconstitutional. If this was not enough to alarm employers, the Texas State Industrial Union Council undertook a major poll-tax drive in the home county of notoriously anti-labor Congressman Martin Dies (head of the House Un-American Activities Committee), fielded a formidable opponent and, ultimately, forced Dies into early retirement.

The combination of these events thus posed a serious threat to the existing political order, even challenging the racial hierarchy in the state. The progressive resurgence in 1944 along with the wartime gains of unions no doubt horrified Texas employers. These events would spur reorganization efforts among employers and within the Democratic party. This further intensified
the intra-party split along New Deal lines. In the meantime, however, some of the progressive
election victories paid dividends for labor unions.

With the war almost over and victory all but assured Texas representatives turned their
attention to issues of returning veterans in the 1945 legislative session, and for the first time
Right-to-Work became a major issue in Texas politics. Marshall Bell of San Antonio introduced
a Right-to-Work bill in the name of veterans, stating that since the armed forces were not
“required to join a union in order to defend their country we, as loyal Texans, feel that they
should not be coerced or forced to join labor unions to do an honest days work in support of their
families” (in Polakoff 1955:300).

The bill had the active support of the Christian American Association, the Fight for Free
Enterprise, and the Lieutenant Governor John Lee Smith. Smith, who some suggested was
funded heavily by the Fight for Free Enterprise, took out ads in the state’s major dailies
championing Right-to-Work. The ads invariably played to the plight of veterans and soldiers
abroad, stating “Surely they did not die to make other men pay tribute to labor racketeers before
they can enjoy the God-given right to work” (Green 1979:90; Texas State Industrial Union
Council 1945, 1946). After widespread rumors about the Christian American Association and the
Fight for Free Enterprise funneling huge sums of money toward the Right-to-Work effort, the
house formed a committee to investigate lobbying efforts related to the bill. The committee
found no wrongdoing, although it did scold the Christian American Association for their
propaganda tactics. The more mainstream business organizations like the TMA, while
undoubtedly supportive of Right-to-Work, by all accounts did not take a lead (at least publicly) in
promoting the bill in 1945.1 The framing of the Right-to-Work issue early on was thus shaped in
large part by the more hysterical elements of the business and political community.
The Texas legislature in 1945 was not as resolutely anti-labor as in previous years, and the electoral gains of 1944 appeared to help labor’s cause. The Right-to-Work bill did pass by a slim margin in the House, but was held up in the Senate and the session adjourned before it could be brought up for a vote. Labor supporters in the Senate were able outmaneuver Lieutenant Governor Smith, forcing business groups to wait until 1947 to again push for legislative restrictions on Texas unions.

While there is not much material surviving from the early business campaign in 1945, and we know that the mainstream employer segments such as the TMA were not as vocal as the far-right, the early labor response is worth touching on briefly. Unions were of course divided and their response somewhat muted. Neither state federation had much of a public relations campaign, but representatives from the state federation of labor and the industrial union council testified at public hearings on the bill. W.H. Akin, the legislative representative of the industrial union council (CIO) argued that Right-to-Work was a misnomer as it did not provide any jobs for veterans or anyone else. Somewhat remarkably, he suggested as an aside that the bill might actually benefit CIO unions in the state by opening up some the older “closed shop” industries that the AFL had organized such as printing and the building trades. CIO unions in the state did not have many closed shop contracts, but they had several union shop security agreements, and had benefitted tremendously from the maintenance of membership agreements that the NWLB had enforced during the war years. Right-to-Work would of course outlaw all of these types of union security, making Akin’s side remarks all the more puzzling (Texas State Industrial Union Council 1945).

The Texas Federation of Labor (AFL) also testified against the bill, and executive secretary Harry Acreman lobbied that it was spearheaded by fascist elements (particularly the Christian American Association). He also invoked race as an issue, incredibly arguing that Right-
to-Work would end segregation in Southern workplaces. Perhaps this was a last ditch superficial appeal to the most conservative legislators, but it drew little response from its intended audience (Polakoff 1955). Most union activities in the state were segregated at this point, as the major integration struggles had yet to take off. There was not an African American member of the executive board of the Texas state federation of labor until 1947 (State Labor Proceedings, Texas, 1947). While the AFL had always been more racially conservative than the CIO, and many union members no doubt had deep-seated racial antagonisms, the national federation and even much of the Texas state federation of labor had endorsed basic civil rights issues by this point.

Importantly, employers during this period never campaigned for Right-to-Work on integrationist principles. Indeed, the most vocal proponents of Right-to-Work in the early period included the Christian American Association, who derided labor, but especially the CIO, as communist, integrationist, and un-American.

The early labor response was limited and somewhat puzzling. Neither of the labor federations, moreover, received assistance or expertise from their national counterparts. It appears that the changing political circumstances of the mid-1940s and the gains of the left, combined with the only limited presence and public support of the established Texas employers, were enough to temporarily derail Right-to-Work efforts. The case for business in Texas was most forcefully promoted by the far-right in these early years, although this pattern was about to change. In the meantime, however, Texas labor looked to be on the rise.

AFL and CIO unions in Texas had made major organizing gains during the war years and emerged from World War II, like their national parent organizations, considerably stronger than they had been at the beginning of the decade. Racing to keep up with inflation, and like their counterparts elsewhere, Texas workers walked off the job in record numbers during the end of 1945 and beginning of 1946. The labor militancy in the state, which to that point had been quite
limited, surged for a period of months. For three to four months, national and local strikes provided front page news stories nearly every day in the state’s major daily papers. Workers successfully struck at major industrial plants in Waco including General Tire, and at Consolidated Aircraft in Fort Worth. Some parts of the state, like Houston, were especially active. Public workers even got into the mix. In February of 1946 some 25,000 workers marched on Houston City Hall in support of city workers.

As of spring of 1946 it appeared to many that labor had arrived to stay in Texas and would thus figure more prominently into the political landscape. To add to business worries, the CIO announced the launch of their major Southern labor organizing drive that included Texas. The AFL introduced their own drive to organize Southern workers soon thereafter. By early indications, the organizing efforts looked to be quite successful in Texas.

Employers Regroup

Texas employers were not content to sit by and watch the labor advance in the state. In the spring of 1946 the TMA moved their headquarters to Houston, and reorganized their entire operation to make political mobilization a focus. Their efforts mirrored the wartime changes that national business groups like the NAM underwent to counter labor and liberal political gains.

Prior to the TMA reorganization in Texas, however, individual employers sought to counter union advances in the workplace. As workers walked off the job in record numbers, for example, employers made little effort to negotiate. Rather, employers in basic industries were content to take strikes and instead put their demands on the Office of Price Administration (OPA), using union demands for wage increases as rationale for the government to allow price increases (Lichtenstein 1982). This power-play hastened the demise of the OPA, but it also allowed business groups to take their case to the public. Several large corporations took out full-
page ads in the nation’s daily papers criticizing labor, the strikes, and price controls. In the major Texas papers, for example, ads deriding labor appeared from General Motors, General Electric, U.S. Steel, the NAM, and some local outfits as well, including Sheffield Steel. Labor, by contrast, still had little in the way of a public relations program, particularly in Texas, and thus had virtually no response to the business media campaign.

As the strikes were beginning to wind down and labor unions turned their attention to organizing Texas workplaces, the TMA revamped its organization. Under the direction of Ed Burris the TMA made political mobilization a focus. Prior to this the TMA was mainly a top-down organization that, while participating in state politics, rarely took a public lead on, for example, issues of labor relations. To this end, they formed committees in every house and senate district, and in every county of the state. They also sought to form more direct partnerships with existing trade associations and local organizations such as local branches of the chamber of commerce. As of the early postwar years, the TMA claimed to have 3,200 member employers (Polakoff 1955), and while there are no available figures on funding, state CIO leaders claimed that the TMA along with local chambers of commerce funneled millions of dollars into state politics during these years (Akin 1946).

In addition to expanding their reach, the TMA sought to initiate a “public relations program that will serve to ‘get industry out of the dog house’” (TMA 1946:22). They also formed a labor relations committee, staffed with research assistants, that would provide consulting services and expertise to member employers. In becoming more active in politics and labor relations in particular, they adopted a more sophisticated critique and framing of unions. In the summer of 1946 they outlined a labor relations program wherein they accepted unionism and collective bargaining in principle. Rather than dismissing unionism, they advocated for the right of individuals to join or refrain from joining labor unions, to place management and labor on
equal footing, and to protect the public welfare in labor disputes (TMA 1947). Right-to-Work efforts, which would heat up in the next legislative session, fit well with the TMA’s more vocal, and seemingly moderate campaigning against labor.

In crafting this new message the TMA received assistance from the NAM, who relied on opinion researchers to mount more sophisticated claims against unions – claims that were not as easily dismissed by labor or other left-leaning groups. Recall that the NAM found through extensive polling that their messages came across to the broader public as reactionary, and were too easily subverted by labor (Fones-Wolf 1993; Workman 1998). As a result, the NAM completely revamped its public relations program during the war, doubled its research staff, and produced a more sophisticated campaign that emphasized individual rights and advocated for a labor relations in the public interest. If their labor strategy had not changed in intent, it certainly offered a more carefully crafted message that was likely to capture more of the political center when pushing for restrictions on labor. In their 1946 statement of principles, for example, the NAM first sought to protect the individual’s right not to joint a union, and to make all union security provisions illegal (Gable 1950).

The TMA undoubtedly benefitted from the expertise, ready-made public relations kits, literature, and other strategies promoted by the NAM, that were made available to state and local associations nationwide during the postwar years. The well-researched claims against unions that the TMA would employ, moreover, marked a change in the framing of the Right-to-Work issue in Texas. The most influential segment of the Texas business community, now more vocal and politically organized, sought to curtail labor in the name individual rights and the public welfare rather than to thwart some communist-CIO conspiracy as the far-right had advocated.

In a more direct connection, the TMA sponsored several conferences around the state with representatives from the NAM for the purpose of educating Texas employers on politics,
labor issues, and the virtues of a sophisticated public relations program. Thus as the labor
Southern labor organizing drives spread to Texas workplaces, and with some impressive
successes, Texas employers underwent an organizing drive of their own – this one geared more
directly toward political ends. In doing so, they were aided by a near uniform hostility to labor
among the state’s major daily papers and, by the direct use of NAM newsletters and other
“canned propaganda” in many of the state’s weeklies (Green 1979:103-104).

Employers in Texas, spearheaded by the TMA and with the assistance of national pro-
business groups underwent a profound reorganization in 1946 to counter the what they feared as a
growing labor and liberal influence in the state. As of June 1946, their fears appeared to be
justified. Labor organizing efforts in Texas, unlike the rest of the South, appeared to be quite
successful. CIO unions in particular were on their way toward organizing the major industrial
plants in the state (Green 1982; Texas State Industrial Union Council 1946). Their organizing
successes were concentrated among oil, textiles, steel, auto, and packinghouse industries, but they
even made inroads into east Texas. Between May of 1946 and the beginning of 1947 CIO unions
added nearly 15,000 workers. AFL unions also made substantial gains.

But unlike employers efforts in Texas, the labor organizing drives were surprisingly
disconnected from political operations and exposed some of the deep divisions and antagonisms
between the rival labor federations. As described earlier, the CIO anticipated a political backlash
from its organizing efforts and thus sought to keep its political and organizing operations
completely separate. This was done to avoid being labeled communist when approaching
workers. While the national CIO provided organizers and financial resources for “Operation
Dixie,” however, they did not assist the state Political Action Committee in any meaningful way.
Nor did they assist the state industrial union council, or local unions, in terms of strategy or
finances to counter the redoubled political efforts of business groups.
This disconnect meant that political activists were on their own to counter business mobilization. The political situation of the AFL unions, in their organizing drive to bring real “American unionism” to the state, differed little in this regard. The organizing efforts, what more, exacerbated tensions between AFL and CIO unions. Many competed against each other directly in NLRB elections, and the AFL in particular, campaigned vehemently against CIO efforts throughout the state. Figure 6.1 captures just how acute these divisions were. The flyer distributed by AFL organizers in the state played to plight of Southern workers as caught between unfair employers and communist (CIO) unions.

What did these divisions and the disconnect between politics and the organizing drives entail for political mobilization on the part of labor? The state AFL, for their part, adopted a “go it alone” approach to politics rather than coordinating efforts with the CIO or any other liberal groups for that matter. In the 1946 convention for the state federation of labor, for example, delegates spent more time dealing with the rival CIO than the mounting threat of anti-labor legislation. Indeed, several anti-CIO resolutions were proposed, while a labor-unity resolution was soundly defeated. Several AFL leaders in the state even strategized for the 1946 elections to withhold endorsements from candidates that had CIO support (Mullenix 1955:411).

This of course does not capture the sentiment of all state AFL activists, some of whom sought out cooperative efforts. CIO unions, moreover, had a sophisticated political program within certain areas at least. This despite the lack of national assistance and expertise. The Houston area industrial union council indeed adopted a far-reaching “Peoples Program” for legislative activism. There was even limited cooperation among AFL and CIO locals in the area. On a statewide basis, however, such cooperation or focused political strategy was lacking. And since the state federations were the main vehicle for channeling labor political efforts, the divisions proved crippling.
These deficits were reflected in the 1946 elections, where Texas voters for the first time had the chance to choose clearly along New Deal and anti-New Deal lines, at least in the race for governor. Beufard Jester, a lawyer for the Magnolia Oil Company, and Homer Rainey, the left-leaning former president of the University of Texas indeed provided clear opposites and emerged as the front-runners in the democratic primary. Although performing well up until election day, Raney lost decisively, and would again lose to Jester in the runoff election. The outcome was not helped by Raney’s poor campaigning skills.

Observers credited the success of Jester to remobilization of mainstream business interests, spearheaded by groups like the TMA, and to the poor turnout generated by labor and the left (Green 1979). Progressive candidates indeed lost across the state. While employers trumpeted the 1946 state elections as a mandate driven by public dissatisfaction, estimates suggest that only 9 percent of the electorate actually participated (see Davidson 1990: 55).

With an influential segment of the state federation of labor apparently more concerned with the challenge posed by the CIO than with the reorganization and renewed anti-labor activity of business groups, labor was not able to provide a sizeable voter turnout. The conservative wing of the state democratic party recaptured it for the foreseeable future. This despite the increasing clout of labor in the state as indicated by the organizing successes and wartime growth – union organization approached 15 percent of the workforce at this point and approximately a quarter of a million union members. While labor resources did not approach those of business groups in the state, unions were growing rapidly and many saw their triumph in the state and surrounding region as likely.

Governor-elect Jester, although no friend of unions, campaigned as somewhat of a moderate on labor issues and did not publicly seek “punitive” restrictions on unions. This notwithstanding, and as state CIO representative H.W. Akin warned in 1946 (Akin 1946:4), the
reorganization and increased finances of Texas employers could potentially “buy a lot of anti-
union legislation, it will buy a lot of politicians, it will buy a lot of newspaper ads.” Texas
unions, he continued, “must be prepared to meet the propaganda ...and to bring the truth to the
people of Texas.” Unfortunately for their sake, the combination of the electoral defeats, the
reorganization of business, persistent divisions, and the lack of any sophisticated political or
public relations program did not bode well for Texas unions in 1947.

The Events of 1947 and the Right-to-Work in Texas

1947 proved to be a peak year for anti-labor mobilization nationwide, and a particularly rough
one for the union movement. Employers mobilized in full force and several states considered
Right-to-Work laws. Nine states eventually adopted these restrictions. Later that same year
Congress adopted the Taft-Hartley act, which, among other things, provided federal backing for
states to enforce Right-to-Work laws.

Texas was perhaps the center of state-level anti-labor agitation in 1947. Employers
congregated in Austin at the beginning of the legislative session and were determined to alter the
balance of power in labor relations. Among those present at labor-related committee hearings
were Herman Brown and his lobbyists for the Brown and Root Construction Company. He was
in fact the only individual employer to maintain lobbyists in Austin, as most Texas industrialists,
even the richest oil interests, worked through existing organizations like the TMA (Stilwell
1951). Previously content to work against unfavorable legislation, Brown now pursued an
aggressive legislative agenda of his own, seeking to limit labor influence in the state. In doing so,
he joined the TMA, local branches of the chamber of commerce, and other, mostly mainstream
Texas employers that mobilized to curtail unionism in the name of individual rights and the
public interest.
These of course were not the only employer voices represented. Vance Muse and the Christian American Association were active in 1947, as was the Fight for Free Enterprise to a lesser degree, and these groups promoted the far-right attack on labor and especially the CIO. By this point, however, mainstream employers largely steered clear of the most reactionary groups and Vance Muse in particular, whom some suggest had become a pariah by this point (Meyers 1957).

Unions had representatives on hand from the Texas state federation of labor, the industrial union council, the railroad brotherhoods, and the communication workers. The Texas Social and Legislative Conference, a liberal coalition group, also had some presence in Austin and distributed literature on anti-labor legislation. While all worked against Right-to-Work and other anti-labor initiatives, coordinated political activity among the rival federations was still minimal. Nor did labor have much of response to the mounting business claims regarding the excessive power that unions, and labor leaders in particular, had gained during the war years and the necessity to protect the individual worker and the public from labor abuses.

Employers in Texas regrouped in response to labor advances and the limited political results of the 1945 legislative session. They became more political, and more vocal pertaining to labor relations. Individual employers took out full-page ads in the state’s dailies, like the Sheffield Steel Co., who railed against union security provisions as “a gross injustice to honest employees,” and something that deprives them of their right to work. The TMA, meanwhile, reiterated its message on labor throughout the state at meetings of businessmen and local politicians, stating that they were a “firm believer in the right of workers to bargain collectively...but stoutly opposed to the course that power drunk bureaucrats and labor leaders are steering today” (TMA 1946:25). Figure 6.2 captures the labor message that the TMA, and other mainstream Texas business interests, promoted during this period. Unionism in principle was
now accepted, but the labor movement, and especially union leaders, had grown greedy. The illustration below shows some of these very leaders, arguing that only business should be regulated.

Such was the seemingly moderate and more sophisticated message that an important segment of Texas employers promoted leading up to and during the 1947 legislative session. With business well represented in Austin, several anti-labor bills were introduced early on in the session. As one state AFL activist described, “You might turn any legislator upside down and shake him and an anti-labor bill would fall out of his pocket” (State Labor Proceedings, Texas, 1947).

Representative Marshall Bell introduced a revised version of his 1945 Right-to-Work bill on February 4th. He did so now with the active support of mainstream employers, whose political presence was visibly increased from the previous legislative session. Some allege that the lobbyists for Herman Brown and the Brown and Root construction company directly wrote several of the anti-labor bills that were introduced, including Right-to-Work (Green 1979; Stilwell 1951). Unfortunately for unions, the most notable and highly publicized moment in testimony over Right-to-Work came on February 17th when Ruth Koeing, the self-declared head of the Communist Party in Texas, testified against the bill. While it was unclear if the Communist Party had any presence whatsoever in the state, Koeing’s testimony gave conservative legislators a field day.

The far-right moved quickly on the communist story. The Christian American Association made a flyer alerting Texans to “Communists in the Legislature,” which listed those who did not support Right-to-Work and tied them to Ruth Koeing, stating “Where She Leads Us, We Will Follow.” This did not have the intended effect, however, as some legislators, including the bill’s sponsor, sought to remove Vance Muse and the Christian American Association from
the premises. It appeared that the group first responsible for popularizing the Right-to-Work term would ultimately wield little political influence by the 1947 legislative session. Labor for its part tried to disassociate itself from the communist “kiss of death.” As an exasperated CIO activist noted regarding Koeing’s testimony, “She has sabotaged all of our efforts by putting a Communist label on us for good, and that’s something we’ve been trying to rid ourselves of.”

Mainstream Texas employers did not pursue this attack on labor in their lobbying efforts. Indeed, as one observer noted on the efforts of the TMA and other “established” employers and associations, “Instead of identifying the CIO with communism, these groups talked about the excessive power that, they alleged, trade unions had achieved and were achieving, and about protecting the individual worker from the abuses of this power” (Meyers 1959:3). Texas industrialists like C.J. Denison, for example, in advocating for restrictions on unions, pleaded that “The laboring person is the finest person on God’s earth, but he has been let down.” Employers, in their public claims at least, were not opposed to labor entirely, but rather sought legislation to protect the public and honest, hard working, individual employees. The TMA’s public acceptance of unionism in principle and concerted focus on individual rights apparently played well to the “agrarian individualism” of many rural representatives, who otherwise had little experience with unions (Green 1979:105).

Labor representatives had no answer for the claims promoted by the established Texas employers. In fact, few addressed the TMA’s claims, or even their presence. Instead, nearly all attributed Right-to-Work agitation to the Christian American Association and other like-minded “fascist” elements. This strategy persisted even after prominent supporters of Right-to-Work publicly disassociated themselves from Muse and the far-right groups. The best labor could do was discredit Right-to-Work as “class legislation,” driven by sinister forces, and that would not create a single job. A representative from the railroad brotherhoods argued that Right-to-Work
and other anti-labor efforts would drive working people “to some kind of ‘ism if it doesn’t stop.”
While an AFL representative argued that the bill “would finally destroy collective bargaining and
organized labor.” Labor union appeals to Texas legislators uniformly lumped all legislative
attacks as driven by the far-right, ignoring the more moderate claims against unions that
mainstream employers promoted in the early postwar years.8

The union efforts were of little use. Right-to-Work passed the Texas house on March 4th
by nearly a two to one margin, and would pass the senate easily (State of Texas 1947). While
Governor Jester signed the bill in April, he apparently favored less punitive restrictions on
unions. Indeed, as of the beginning of the session the Governor promoted a more moderate labor
relations bill modeled after a similar act in Minnesota. Organized employers, however, would
have none of it and flooded the governor’s office with telegrams in opposition (Green 1979).
And following the Right-to-Work outcome, the session would just turn worse for labor. The state
would pass nine different restrictions on labor unions, including an anti-dues checkoff law, and
measures outlawing mass-picketing, secondary boycotts, and public employee unionism. In a
period of months the legislature passed more restrictions on labor than it had done in its entire
history to that point. The anti-labor momentum reached absurdity when a labor supporter in the
house introduced an amendment to one of the above bills to “abolish unions, confiscate union
members’ property, line all union members up against a wall and have them shot, and send their
families to concentration camps” (Texas State Industrial Union Council 1947). It was voted it
down 63 to 8.

Labor indeed lost miserably. As the TMA proudly claimed, with their hard work “the big
stick held in the hands of labor unions over the heads of industry” had been whittled down
considerably by the Texas legislature (TMA 1947:18). The labor losses also marked a setback
for New Deal liberalism in the state. Marshall Bell, the sponsor of Right-to-Work, made this
clear in the preamble to the bill, noting that “In the past 15 years new and strange theories of
government have been tried on a long-suffering an patient people. In this unfortunate period
many unwise labor leaders have risen to power and under the protection of federal laws have tried
to gain control over the economic and political welfare over those who are privileged to labor” (in
Dempsey 1961:22). Despite renewed labor activism and political organizing in the following
years, Texas unions and their liberal allies were not able to repeal Right-to-Work or any of the
other anti-labor statutes. Expensive legal challenges also proved fruitless.9

Unions were caught off guard by the reorganization and political mobilization of Texas
employers in the early postwar years. Divisions between rival AFL and CIO federation crippled
political coalition efforts, while neither of the national federations offered their state affiliates any
meaningful assistance in countering the business agitation, or mounting a public relations and
political program of their own. Despite their rapid growth in the state, and the potential openings
in Texas politics, labor unions were not able to translate these gains into political successes.

The Right-to-Work efforts in Texas marked a turning point nationwide. No longer would
far-right, reactionary groups like the Christian American Association take the lead in Right-to-
Work. Rather mainstream employers and their associations, with the assistance of national
groups like the NAM, would instead promote restriction on unions in the name of individual
rights and the public interest. These battles would again take off in the following decade, with
labor still in need of an effective response and counter-strategy.

Summary
While this case presents an important historical moment in the Right-to-Work struggle, how can
it inform explanations of social movements and politics? More specifically, what can it tell us
about the *how* of social movement influence and the various mechanisms through which these actors target the state?

The quantitative results of the previous chapter demonstrate the significant influence of business organization on policy adoption. This chapter, in contrast, elaborates on *how* these groups may be influential. While social movement explanations tend to downplay the role of more elite actors, we see here that employer associations engaged in both traditional interest group lobbying as well as public outreach, framing, and organizing and electoral activism among their own constituents. That is, they acted much like social movement challengers.

Texas employers, however, did not mobilize in isolation. After witnessing the labor advances, and the limited effectiveness of the most reactionary employer voices, mainstream Texas employers regrouped, adopted more sophisticated claims against unions, and made political mobilization a focus. Here the framing and public relations efforts of business groups served as one important mechanism of influence. In advocating for labor restrictions, they were aided by the expertise of nationally-oriented pro-business associations like the NAM. This assistance enhanced both their public claims and more direct lobbying efforts. The framing appeals of employer associations in the early postwar years were indeed carefully crafted to capture more of the political center, and by all accounts appeared more plausible than the early rants of the far-right.

Labor unions were unable to adapt to or counter the redoubled efforts of Texas employers following the war. Deep divisions between the rival federations limited their political capacity. The union response to increasing Right-to-Work agitation was thus muted to begin with. With little in the way of public relations program, Texas labor unions had virtually no reply to the public claims of organized employers. Their lobbying efforts, moreover, were neither coordinated nor particularly coherent, as they lumped all attacks on unions as driven by the far-
right. In fending off employer attacks, moreover, Texas labor unions received little assistance or expertise from their national parent organizations.

Despite their rapid growth during the war years and the promising early results from the postwar organizing drives, Texas labor unions could not convert these gains into political successes at a moment when many observers saw labor triumph as probable. Though unions were still comparatively weak, their tremendous growth forced an influential segment of the Texas business community to reorganize and mobilize politically to curtail labor influence. Unions had no answer for this forceful remobilization.

This chapter begins to shed light on the interaction of these contenders in the political process, and illustrates the complex relations between various dimensions of social movement organization and the more nuanced mechanisms through which these groups attempt to sway policy. Particularly meaningful were the support or lack thereof of professionalized, arguably more bureaucratic organization, and the sometimes crippling divisions among the contenders. In the next chapter I shift to case of the 1958 Ohio Right-to-Work campaign, which similarly proved to be a crucial turning point for Right-to-Work efforts nationwide. I follow this analysis with a more detailed discussion concerning the integration of case insights and the quantitative results, and how they jointly extend existing explanations of social movements and politics.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 6

1. Herman Brown and the Brown and Root Construction company present an interesting case. Brown, whose company would later become a subsidiary of Haliburton, made his fortune on government contracts and was thus not opposed to New Deal public works projects, prompting critics to label him a “socialized millionaire” (Stilwell 1951). Yet his company was resolutely anti-labor and was constantly in dispute with the NLRB. Following labor’s advances in the state, Brown would become the leading individual employer involved in anti-labor political mobilization.

2. Christian American Association appeal is from the State Legislation Files of the American Federation of Labor Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

3. One of Smith’s editorials appeared in the TMA’s publication *Texas Industry*, although they backed away from him as a potential gubernatorial candidate. Smith’s views on labor indeed appeared extreme to many, and while he is linked to groups like the Fight for Free Enterprise there are no financial records indicating the extent of this relationship or his ties to other extremist organizations given the absence of any public disclosure laws during this period (Green 1979).

4. State CIO officers were on their own in countering business political efforts, which showed in their questionable strategy. The national labor federations offered little assistance to their state affiliates in dealing with Right-to-Work in part because they thought it would never hold up under national labor law. This view, however, proved shortsighted following the Taft-Hartley act and its support of state’s rights to pass such laws.

5. Labor-backed candidates lost statewide. Although the elections did not support the most far-right candidates either, as Lieutenant Governor Smith failed to generate much interest or the support of mainstream Texas employers. Jester, while anti-New Deal, campaigned as “middle of the road” candidate in regards to labor. He did not, for example, campaign for punitive
restrictions on unions, and as Governor would advocate for more moderate labor relations legislation. The idea of a conservative, anti-labor mandate is thus somewhat questionable, especially given the shrunken electorate. On the conservative election gains and their bearing on future labor legislation in Texas, political scientist Stephen Amberg (2004:166) also doubts the idea of a mandate. Instead he argues that “It was enough for legislative action to enlist employers, convince newspaper editors, and rally a small section of the electorate...” To that point, Texas employers were indeed now organized and pursuing an aggressive political program of their own.

6. By this point the Christian American Association, while still vocal, did not have the ear of many if any Texas legislators. Mainstream Texas employers and the TMA, with their increased political presence, on the other hand, were received favorably. CIO activist is quoted from the Houston Post, February 20th, P.1.


9. Right-to-Work limited labor organization and diverted their focus to expensive court challenges at a point when unions were on the verge becoming a major force in the state. Union membership would actually increase in the 1950s with the rapid economic growth in the state, but would slide thereafter (Amberg 2004). The increased costs of collective action indeed diminished organizing activity and Right-to-Work proved a useful tool for anti-union employers. Importantly, labor would not play the prominent role that Key (1949) had envisioned.
Figure 6.1 Labor Divisions in the Postwar Years
Source: *Houston Labor Messenger*
Figure 6.2 Business Claims in Texas, “Greedy Labor Leaders”
Source: Texas Industry
Right-to-Work battles intensified during the 1950s. The contests took on greater sophistication on both sides of the debate, and gained national prominence at the end of the decade as several high profile campaigns were waged in the more industrialized states where labor unions had a stable base. The Ohio campaign in 1958 indeed became the key battleground state for labor unions and Right-to-Work advocates. The events that unfolded in Ohio proved to be an important turning point for Right-to-Work activism nationwide.

The Ohio case is thus substantively important for understanding Right-to-Work activism, but also for theoretical purposes. Business groups took their case directly to the public this time through the initiative referendum process. The public vote and campaigning allows us to look more closely at the competing claims of these groups and their efforts to frame the Right-to-Work issue. Because both sides were relatively evenly matched, this case provides a window into political conflict where movement strategy, and the tactical exchanges of movements and their opponents may be all the more influential (McAdam 1983). In addition to the coherence of the particular frames advanced by business and labor, for example, their interaction and the framing battles between the two should be meaningful.

As with the last case, I closely examine the mobilization and countermobilization of these contenders, their public outreach and framing efforts, and the interrelation of these features with
broader dimensions of social movement organization. In the narrative that follows, I extend the insights from the previous case to show how movements may wield influence in a quite different political context.

Business, Labor, and Ohio Politics

Ohio was politically competitive during the 1950s. Partisan influence and strength shifted along a diagonal from solidly republican Cincinnati in the southwest corner to democratic Cleveland in the northeast. The legislature was controlled by republicans for most of the decade while a democratic governor held office until 1957. Despite considerable local variation, neither business groups nor labor unions would dominate state politics during this period (Form 1995; Mayhew 1986).

Employers were well organized in the state, and had their share of associations that were involved in politics and that sought to counter labor influence. The Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the Ohio Manufacturers Association were especially active, as was the Ohio Retail Merchants Association. The Chamber, notably, introduced Right-to-Work legislation several times prior to the 1958 campaign, but never succeeded in getting it to a vote. Certain individual employers proved to be consistent, vocal opponents of labor unions, including the Timken Roller Bearing Company, Armco Steel, and General Electric. Armco Steel was one of the “little steel” companies that had most fiercely resisted the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in the late 1930s, while General Electric was one of the most active and public supporters of Right-to-Work and other anti-labor initiatives among large U.S. corporations. Some major employers in the state, however, were decidedly less public in their opposition to labor, including General Motors. This was done partly in an effort to maintain tranquil labor relations in their own plants (Fenton 1959).
Labor unions in Ohio had risen to prominence in the 1930s and 1940s, but not without stiff and sometimes violent resistance on the part of business and the state itself. Representing more than a third of the workforce by the late 1950s, labor figured prominently into the political landscape. CIO unions, especially the steel and auto workers, had a strong presence in the northeastern part of the state, and the United Mine Workers district six locals were active in the southeastern counties. While labor unions were not organizing many new workers at this point, they were stable, and the sharp divisions between AFL and CIO unions were beginning to subside. The state AFL and CIO federations would actually merge in the spring of 1958, although Right-to-Work agitation no doubt hastened cooperative labor efforts before that. In addition to the advances in organizational cooperation, many union workers made significant strides in their standard of living over the course of the decade. The median family income nearly doubled during these years, with Ohio ranking among the top of all states. Many union workers had thus come to experience some of the benefits associated with collective bargaining by the late 1950s.

Despite this impressive organizational base, however, labor unions did not wield significant influence or control over the state democratic party. Union political efforts were often countered by the Chamber of Commerce and a well-organized republican party, particularly in local strongholds. At a local level, labor, alongside ethnic and racial groups was influential for politics in the urban areas of northeastern part of the state (Mayhew 1986). Yet even in some of the heavy industry centers CIO unions were not able to “capture” the local democratic party as they had in other locales such as Detroit.

Unions, their numerical strength notwithstanding, also had some embarrassing political setbacks. For example, following the Taft-Hartley act of 1947, which unions railed as the “slave labor act,” a major goal for Ohio labor was to defeat Senator Robert Taft in his reelection bid.
AFL and CIO unions even briefly formed a United Labor Committee specifically for the 1950 Taft-Ferguson election. The results proved disastrous. Labor unions were not able to generate a sizeable turnout for the election and many union members even voted for Taft (Lubell 1951). In 1955, the state CIO initiated a public referendum vote on an overhaul of the unemployment insurance system. Despite the support of AFL and CIO unions, the initiative failed and the vote was not even close. Some attribute this setback to the aggressive campaigning of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce (Miller and Ware 1963).

If business had no success in getting Right-to-Work through the state legislature during the 1950s, labor unions failed to advance a political program of their own. Unions also suffered some major public defeats when their prestige was at stake. Events of the late 1950s, moreover, gave Ohio business leaders optimism for Right-to-Work success, and perhaps none more so than the passage of Right-to-Work in neighboring and also heavily unionized Indiana in 1957. In that case, the newly formed National Right-to-Work Committee worked closely with state employer associations, hired public relations specialists, published pamphlets, took out newspaper and radio ads, and ran a speakers bureau to generate interest in the issue. All of this was done well in advance of the legislative session. The campaign caught a still deeply divided Indiana union movement off guard (Fones-Wolf 1994).

The Indiana victory was part of a larger concerted business effort to advance Right-to-Work campaigns in several of the heavily unionized states. Figure 7.1 shows the key battleground states in the late 1950s, where there were public votes held on Right-to-Work or where activists initiated public campaigns. In 1958 alone, public votes on Right-to-Work were held in California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Ohio and Washington.

Conservative activists were emboldened by the Indiana victory and the spread of campaigns to the very center of union strength. Right-to-Work committees formed in Illinois and
Michigan and initiated public relations campaigns to generate support for the issue. A strong showing in Ohio would indeed put a firm business stamp on labor relations in the industrial heartland.

If these prospects were not bad enough for labor unions, the national McClellan committee hearings on union corruption provided a consistent source of negative publicity in the press. To give the reader a sense of the political climate for labor unions, these were the years when Jimmy Hoffa became a household name for Americans (Fones-Wolf 1994). It was thus under these relatively auspicious circumstances that Ohio business groups decided to take their case to the public.

The 1958 Referendum

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce launched a campaign for a public referendum vote on Right-to-Work in the late fall of 1957. The proposal for the campaign was adopted at their annual meeting and soon gained the backing the main business associations in the state. By late November the Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Manufacturers Association, and the Ohio Retail Merchants Association formed Ohioans for Right-to-Work and the Labor Committee for Right-to-Work (Ohio Chamber of Commerce 1957). The latter organization sought to voice the concerns of union members that supported Right-to-Work, although it was rumored to exist only on paper and remained in the far background throughout the campaign (Miller and Ware 1963). Business groups instead channeled their activity through Ohioans for Right-to-Work, and this organization was primarily under the direction of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

Representatives from Ohio labor unions wasted no time in countering Right-to-Work. They began meeting in late 1957 to deal with the Right-to-Work threat and eventually formed United Organized Labor of Ohio (UOLO). This organization was devoted solely to defeating
Right-to-Work and was led by representatives from the state federation of labor, the Ohio industrial union council, the mine workers, and the railroad brotherhoods. UOLO was to coordinate and stimulate local anti-Right-to-Work activism and to serve as a clearinghouse for information and materials on the issue. The Teamsters union, recently expelled from the AFL-CIO, worked separately against the issue. Later in the campaign labor would also initiate a Citizens Committee Against Issue 2, as the ballot proposition was labeled.

National organizations on each side of the debate also pledged assistance as Ohio emerged as the key battleground state for Right-to-Work. For the first time since Right-to-Work activism took hold in the U.S., the newly merged AFL-CIO had a formal organizational structure devoted to the problem that offered research, funding, and campaign assistance to state affiliates. On the business side, the National Right-to-Work Committee supported state campaigns. The NAM, while not publically campaigning in states during this period, nonetheless provided assistance to their state affiliates and member employers on the issue. The National Council for Industrial Peace was active on behalf of labor unions. The council was an anti-Right-to-Work citizens group led by prominent liberal figures, and provided campaign material and assistance for local activists during the late 1950s (Gall 1988).

Notably, the resources expended by business and labor groups throughout the campaign appear to be relatively equal. Reports to the secretary of state place labor-side expenditures at over a million dollars and business at just under a million (Zavacky 1968). These figures likely underestimate the totals on both sides. Business groups, moreover, had the free editorial support of the major newspapers in the state.

Labor unions, with approximately one million members in the state, had more grass roots activists to draw on. This was labor’s one clear edge. Yet they had experienced difficulty in turning out union members in large numbers during previous high profile political campaigns.
Indeed, despite their impressive numbers, Ohio labor unions had not been able to turn out the vote prior to the 1958 campaign. While business groups may have actually outspent labor in the long run, this marks an important case in which subordinates and elites are somewhat evenly matched – a scenario where the strategies and interaction of these contenders may be all the more influential (McAdam 1983).

Initially business groups were confident in their prospects. A polling of state Chamber of Commerce members in 1957 showed unanimous support for Right-to-Work, and that more than three quarters believed that the issue would pass in Ohio if put up to a public vote (Miller and Ware 1963). Labor leaders too feared that it would succeed. A recent national poll, as well as private ones conducted by business and labor groups, suggested that a majority of citizens favored Right-to-Work on a simplistic level even if they did not know what the law entailed (Gall 1988). To this end, labor unions in Ohio would expend considerable resources and energy into political outreach and education on the issue, not the least of which meant generating a compelling response to Right-to-Work.

A New Labor Response

Recall that labor unions were slow to counter the powerful individual rights theme promoted by Right-to-Work advocates. Unions typically fought Right-to-Work on a purely defensive basis and treated it as a narrow trade union issue. Yet such a limited focus made it difficult to appeal to numerically important voting blocs outside of immediate labor constituencies. Early on, moreover, neither of the national labor federations offered any meaningful assistance to their state affiliates on the issue. This was due in part to the short-sighted, yet understandable focus on national politics and the belief that such state initiatives would not hold up in court. This approach, however, soon backfired for labor organizations.
Unfortunately for labor, and as described in the last chapter, the lack of national assistance or expertise left local union activists in a precarious position to counter the mounting business-led Right-to-Work efforts. This often resulted in last-ditch, defensive campaigns where the best labor could do was to invert the Right-to-Work slogan to “Right-to-Scab” or “Right-to-Starve.” Not surprisingly, informal polling by both business and labor groups suggested that these claims were not especially effective (NAM 1955).

By the mid-1950s it became clear to many in the labor movement that unions needed a comprehensive Right-to-Work strategy. The AFL-CIO thus began publishing a series of pamphlets, talking points, and fact sheets on the issue to aid state affiliates. In 1957 they devoted a formal organizational structure to the problem. Unlike in the late 1940s, labor unions across states now had a sizeable body of material and research to draw on in forging their claims regarding Right-to-Work. Perhaps more importantly for this case, however, were two steps taken by the Ohio and national labor movements in early 1958. First, UOLO retained a labor friendly public relations firm for the campaign. Secondly, the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, and Walter Reuther in particular, worked to develop a substantially different public approach to the Right-to-Work issue.

Ohio unions drew on the public relations expertise of Charles Baker and the Burr Agency out of Toledo. In forming a Right-to-Work counter-strategy for Ohio, Baker conveyed the uphill battle that unions faced. The business message was indeed consistent with American values, and it received strong support in the limited polling available on the issue. Unions, he argued, needed to get out in front of the opposition with their arguments. Otherwise they were left to wage a defensive campaign, which to date had yielded few positive results.

Ohio labor and UOLO thus needed to promote a positive campaign that made Right-to-Work into a public issue. They also needed to mobilize union members in mass, and to garner the
support of popular fraternal and civic organizations. The potential number of grass roots activists was the only clear edge for the Ohio labor movement in the campaign. The support of popular civic organizations, meanwhile, would arguably force Right-to-Work activists to take a stand and publicly discredit these respected groups.

Ohio labor appeared to be ahead of the game by retaining public relations specialists, taking their message seriously, and coordinating strategy through a centralized apparatus (UOLO) well prior to the active campaigning phase. This in itself marked a significant advance from previous labor efforts on the issue. The stakes were no doubt higher in the Ohio case. But the UOLO also benefitted from the increased focus of the national labor movement.

An AFL-CIO conference chaired by Walter Reuther in the spring of 1958 focused on the upcoming Right-to-Work votes, and labor’s public claims on the issue in particular. Reuther was head of the UAW, and the leader of the CIO prior to the national merger in 1955. At the end of the 1950s he was one of the few remaining “social unionists” among labor’s top leadership, as he envisioned the labor movement as broad-based social movement rather than a narrow interest group (Lichtenstein 1995). Correspondingly, he urged unions to adopt a similar, broad-based public approach to counter the growing Right-to-Work agitation.

The basic idea was for labor groups was to articulate the broader social and economic roles of labor unions. Reuther argued that Right-to-Work advocates were the same figures that sought to limit social welfare provisions, fair employment practices, and many of the basic gains of the New Deal era. Only by tying Right-to-Work backers to reactionary politics, and linking the cause of labor to the public welfare, could unions expand the issue beyond a narrow trade union concern. That is, labor needed to make Right-to-Work a concern for all workers, not just those belonging to unions. In Reuther’s words, “The answer to the Right-to-Work problem is a practical job of political education” (in Gall 1998:202).
This new approach suggested by Reuther fit well with the strategy envisioned by Baker and UOLO, and undoubtedly influenced the claims about Right-to-Work that Ohio unions brought to the public in 1958. This was the most far reaching adaptation by labor groups to the powerful individual rights theme promoted by Right-to-Work advocates since the activism took hold in the mid-1940s. While it had taken some time, labor unions, and especially activists in the Ohio campaign, now devoted considerable energy to the framing of the issue.

The case that UOLO took to the public linked the status of labor to the greater public welfare, generous social welfare provisions, and a vibrant civil society, and it associated Right-to-Work advocates with reactionary politics that sought to roll back the gains that Ohio residents had made since the New Deal years. Figure 7.2 captures this new message by labor unions. The flyer, which was distributed heavily in the 1958 campaign, explicitly links labor with the public welfare.

Labor also sought to make Right-to-Work a family issue. They specifically targeted women, arguing that the business-funded initiative would ultimately diminish prosperity for Ohio families. Such a focus was reflected in the considerable organizing activity among women’s union auxiliaries as well as the campaign material produced and distributed by UOLO (UOLO 1958a). This too was a marked change for labor in Right-to-Work campaigns. Previously there was only a limited focus and outreach beyond immediate union constituencies. Unions now made Right-to-Work a public issue, and tied it to bread and butter concerns such as wages and the prosperity of Ohio’s families.

For the business side, Ohioans for Right-to-Work adopted a far reaching public relations campaign as well. Business groups had long relied on the well-researched and tested claims on the issue produced by outfits like the NAM and later by the National Right-to-Work Committee. Ohio Right-to-Work advocates relied on the in-house public relations staff of the Ohio chamber
of Commerce to run the public campaign, headed by Herschel Atkinson (Zavacky 1968). Initially at least, business claims did not stray too far from the traditional individual rights message promoted by Right-to-Work advocates.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce initially attempted to head off labor claims that the slogan itself was deceitful. In a release to members, they agreed with labor that the Right-to-Work term “incorrectly describes the current controversial issue.” They instead advocated for the use of the “Freedom of Choice” slogan that “expresses best the central ideas of voluntarism vs. compulsion in union membership” (Ohio Chamber of Commerce n.d.). And the campaign articulated their cause as one to “protect a fundamental freedom...the right of free choice in union membership.” Although it does not appear that the change in terms was carried out systematically. Campaign materials drew on both slogans, and the primary organization behind the issue, and that was under the Chamber’s direction, Ohioans for Right-to-Work, retained its name and focus.

Importantly, the expanded focus of labor unions forced Right-to-Work advocates to seek the support of multiple constituencies as well. Ohioans for Right-to-Work, for example, also targeted women and families. Yet unlike labor unions, they were not able to appeal to this group on the basis of Right-to-Work increasing the prosperity of Ohio families. Instead they focused their appeals on safety, and pointed to violence in labor disputes as a rationale for Right-to-Work. They urged women to vote for Right-to-Work as a means of protecting Ohio families. This focus is illustrated in figure 7.3, as Ohio women are encouraged to participate in a battle against fear. Right-to-Work appeals targeted to general audiences, however, remained focused on their core issue of freedom of choice in union membership.

Both business and labor groups thus entered the Ohio campaign well-equipped and with the assistance and expertise of various national organizations tied to the issue. Unions, moreover,
appeared to have adopted a more sophisticated message and approach to the Right-to-Work problem – one that tied labor’s welfare to that of the broader public.

Snags in the Business Campaign

The first step for Right-to-Work advocates was to collect the more than 350,000 signatures needed to put the initiative on the November ballot. The petitioning phase lasted until the August 5th deadline, after which point Ohioans for Right-to-Work accelerated their education, outreach, and get out the vote activities. The opposition, meanwhile, first sought to register all union members and their families to vote, and to stimulate activism among their base. While Right-to-Work supporters would secure the required number of signatures to put the measure on the ballot, they ran into some unexpected bumps along the way. Ohio unionists, meanwhile, appeared to be gaining momentum heading into the fall elections.

Labor activists were well prepared from the beginning. Recall that unions began strategizing in late 1957 and had built a centralized campaign apparatus, in UOLO, by the winter. As Right-to-Work advocates distributed and collected petitions, for example, many were contacted by unionists who urged them not to do so. UOLO claimed that many who were given petitions to distribute were unaware of the purpose of Right-to-Work, and should thus be informed. The Chamber of Commerce, however, decried what they saw as “insidious methods” of coercion and union intimidation (Ohio Chamber of Commerce 1958). Still, labor claimed that several employers coerced their employees to sign and circulate Right-to-Work petitions.

After attempting to persuade petitioners, labor activists also published lists of those who had signed in various union publications. This activity surrounding the petitioning phase of the campaign carried on through the winter and spring of 1958. In some locales the labor strategy appeared to be effective. In the small industrial town of Steubenville on the West Virginia
border, for example, unionists boycotted stores and other establishments of petition signers. This prompted some to withdraw their support for the issue.

The countermobilization by UOLO and the labor campaign no doubt dissuaded some from circulating petitions. The end result was that the Chamber of Commerce and Ohioans for Right-to-Work were forced to pay people to collect petition signatures, often college students. Labor eventually toned down this activity after it received criticism in the press (Miller and Ware 1963). The effects of these actions were nevertheless important. They forced Right-to-Work advocates to expend considerable resources on petitioning alone, and discouraged some small business owners from actively supporting the campaign.

Ohioans for Right-to-Work also had difficulty relying on the active support of what should have been some of their staunchest allies. Heading into the summer, many republican politicians in the state seemed leery of publicly campaigning for Right-to-Work. Because several republicans were up for reelection in statewide races, both national and state party strategists feared that Right-to-Work could generate a large turnout and ultimately prove harmful. As a result, many politicians offered only limited support for the issue or tried to sidestep it entirely. The state republican party, for example, made no official endorsement of the measure, nor did the Taft forces within the party. Attorney General William Saxbe too remained conspicuously neutral on Right-to-Work.

Republican senator John Bricker, while no friend of labor, found a particularly difficult balance around the issue. He publicly supported Right-to-Work, yet behind the scenes he lobbied hard to postpone it for another year when he was not up for reelection. Shortly before the petitions were due to the secretary of state, for example, Bricker tried to convince business leaders and Right-to-Work advocates to delay the campaign until 1959. Bricker’s pleas were met with sharp criticism. Some business leaders accused him of being “gutless” (Fenton 1959).
Among the prominent Right-to-Work supporters in attendance were representatives from General Electric, the American Rolling Mills Company, and Timken Roller Bearing. They argued that 1958 was “the year” for Right-to-Work, and that the allegations of union corruption brought up through the McClellan committee hearings could not have provided a better climate for the issue. Some also thought that the sputtering economy (Ohio was just starting to come out of the recession) provided a good backdrop for the campaign. Business beliefs in this regard appear to be off the mark, as claims for Right-to-Work may have been even harder to promote with many still seeking employment (see Miller and Ware 1963).

The tentativeness of some republicans on the issue left incumbent Governor William O’Neil as the most forceful political advocate of Right-to-Work. He indeed pinned his reelection hopes on the issue. O’Neil, sometimes to the dismay of party strategists, consistently spoke out in favor of the issue right up until election day, making it one of his central campaign themes.

Democrats were solidly against Right-to-Work, although the democratic gubernatorial candidate Mike DiSalle gave the labor side only lukewarm support. He consistently avoided the issue, saying it was best left to “the people.” Several national figures toured the state campaigning for Ohio democrats, and offered more forceful support for labor. These included Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy, and former president Harry Truman, who had the memorable campaign-trail quote on the issue: “Some people will tell you that they are against the union shop but for unions. This is like saying they are for motherhood but against children.”

While politicians of both parties seemed leery of campaigning too actively for or against the issue, the somewhat limited backing of republicans was certainly a blow for Right-to-Work advocates.

Perhaps most surprisingly for the business community, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation refused to take a public stand on the issue. This neutrality was a victory in itself for labor. The
Farm Bureau had been a consistent conservative voice in Ohio politics, and its national parent organization publicly advocated for Right-to-Work laws. Yet this is an area where Ohio labor had tried to make inroads. Labor’s campaign efforts specifically targeted rural areas of the state as well. UOLO, for example, developed materials for the “county fair circuit” for this very purpose.

Heading into the fall it appeared that labor had succeeded garnering considerable support among religious and civic organizations. In the spring the Ohio Catholic Welfare Conference came out against the issue. The major Protestant and Jewish representatives in the state soon followed with their opposition. There was certainly local variation in labor support amongst the religious community. At a parish level, many actually supported Right-to-Work. Top church leadership, however, nearly uniformly sided against Right-to-Work, and the Catholic church was the most vocal opponent (Fones-Wolf 1994). The backing of the religious community behind labor worried the strategists for Ohioans for Right-to-Work and many in the business community.

Throughout the summer several civic organizations also adopted resolutions against Right-to-Work. These included the likes of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the Ohio Disabled Veterans, and the Ohio NAACP. Some city councils passed resolutions against the issue. These were primarily the larger industrial areas with a strong union and democratic presence such as Cleveland, Akron, and Youngstown, but included some smaller locales as well (UOLO 1958b).

The support of the NAACP was particularly important for labor unions. Black trade unionists were influential in carrying out voter registration drives, and the black press proved to be forceful opponent of Right-to-Work. This budding labor-minority alliance took some doing as several of the building trades unions in the state had long been racially exclusive. But with the backing of the national organization, the Ohio NAACP’s Committee on Political Action provided active support for the labor side (Gall 1998).
The successful coalition work by labor and the only limited support of Right-to-Work by key republican figures was not a promising sign for advocates of the measure. To make matters worse, divisions began to appear within the business community on the issue. The Ohio Information Committee, a pro-business organization, for example, backed off of the Right-to-Work campaign. Previously it had worked closely with the Chamber of Commerce to defeat the labor-sponsored unemployment insurance overhaul. By the summer of 1958 there were rumblings from the Committee that the Chamber was dominated by large industrial interests and was not responsive to the concerns of small businesses in the state. And as a result, the group did not publicly campaign alongside the Chamber for Right-to-Work (Zavacky 1968).

Right-to-Work advocates first thought that the organization of the Chamber of Commerce itself would provide a useful structure to coordinate activism. With 280 local chapters, and 60,000 member employers, the Right-to-Work message could be carried to every corner of the state. This did not go smoothly either. Some local Chambers of Commerce were less than enthusiastic about the campaign. The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, for example, strayed from the state initiative and did not even publicly endorse the measure. As for the independent base of Ohioans for Right-to-Work, only a few counties had active chapters outside of their headquarters in Columbus.

Some small business owners also defected from the campaign. This occurred both because many did not want to lose union customers and due to general dismay with the Chamber. It was an ill-kept secret that the Chamber of Commerce was running the campaign, and Ohioans for Right-to-Work and the Chamber often appeared indistinguishable. While there were some rumblings about the Chamber’s attentiveness to the concerns of smaller companies, it appears that some of the larger corporations did not actively campaign for the issue. This in an attempt to maintain calm labor relations in their own plants. While some undoubtedly worked behind the
scenes, their conspicuous absence from the public eye was damaging for the Right-to-Work effort (Fenton 1959). The divisions that began to appear in the business community were not likely as crippling as those within the labor movement in earlier years. No major business figures actively conspired against the campaign or lobbied publicly against Right-to-Work. Rather, they limited the active, public support of some figures.

Ohio labor unions, meanwhile, appeared to be relatively free of strife and to be gaining momentum in the campaign. The state AFL and CIO merged in the spring. UOLO had been somewhat successful in stimulating local anti-Right-to-Work activism. There were literature distribution centers in every county, and several areas had set up local speakers bureaus on the issue. Voter registration, particularly among union ranks, was one of the major labor goals for the early phase of the campaign. Labor appeared to be quite successful in this regard. Ohio unions and their allies had not only registered the vast majority of union members, but also had added additional thousands of mostly working class voters to the rolls (Miller and Ware 1963; Gall 1988).

Despite the strides made by Ohio labor unions, and some of the difficulties that surfaced with the business campaign, Ohioans for Right-to-Work were still able to retain well above the required number of signatures needed to put the measure on the ballot. Strategists for Right-to-Work indeed remained confident in their prospects for the fall election. And the same prominent employers remained vocal proponents of the issue, including like Timken Roller Bearing, Cincinnati Milling Machine, General Electric, and Armco Steel. With Right-to-Work now certain to be on the ballot as Issue 2, both sides stepped up outreach and educational efforts to make their respective cases to the citizens of Ohio.

*The Stretch Run: Right-to-Work and Its Unraveling*
In the last few months of the campaign, each side considerably increased their advertising efforts. Right-to-Work ads appeared in the major newspapers and were aired on radio, and now television slots as well. Ohio labor again tied its welfare to that of the larger public, and to the prosperity of Ohio families. They attempted to tie the Right-to-Work advocates to the same reactionary politicians and business interests that sought to roll back many of the gains that Ohio workers had made since the New Deal years. As one popular UOLO flyer put it, “The Same Big Business Interests Which are For ‘Right-to-Work’ are Against Child Labor Legislation, Civil Rights Legislation, Minimum Wage Laws, Social Security, Aid to the Aged....”5 UOLO consistently tied the fate of labor unions to the wages and prosperity of Ohio families.

Ohioans for Right-to-Work continued their focus on individual rights, freedom of choice, and argued that Right-to-Work was actually *pro-union*. Given the recent publicity from the McClellan committee hearings, however, they also turned to union corruption as a selling point for Right-to-Work. The major individual employers behind the issue certainly saw the corruption angle as profitable, as did Governor O’Neil, who campaigned actively on the issue. Yet as each side increased their outreach efforts, and attempted to counter the other’s claims, Right-to-Work advocates appeared to lose their focus and moved toward a more strident attack on unionism in principle.

In August UOLO contracted with academic researchers to conduct a public opinion poll on the issue. The results were somewhat encouraging to labor. Approximately one third of the electorate was for Right-to-Work, another third against it, and a third undecided. These figures can provide a useful window into the campaigning efforts of business and labor.6 Just prior to the accelerated media and educational phase of the campaign, after which point the state would literally be bombarded with ads from both sides, the poll shows the campaign to be relatively
even, and with a large group of undecided voters. In the eyes of labor strategists at least, the campaign was up for grabs, and the last phase was thus all the more crucial.

Labor leaders, while cautiously optimistic, worked feverishly to encourage voter turnout, draw interest to the issue, and get their new and refined message to the public. UOLO kicked off the final phase of the campaign at the beginning of September with an organizational meeting and rally at Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Columbus. Nearly 4,000 union activists and officials attended. According to labor reports, activists took more than a million pieces anti-Right-to-Work literature and campaign material back to their home districts to carry out leafleting and outreach activities (UOLO 1958b).

Meanwhile, some of labor’s coalition work appeared to be paying off. For example, Ohioans for Right-to-Work published a pamphlet targeting the African American community, arguing that the Indiana Right-to-Work law had opened up opportunities for black workers. The black press immediately refuted these claims. Labor and the Ohio NAACP then distributed flyers in black neighborhoods noting that Right-to-Work backers were the same forces that opposed Fair Employment Practices legislation (Gall 1998). Such nascent coalition efforts looked promising for many labor activists, showing the potential to generate interest in the issue among the non-union black community.7

Some observers suggest that the business campaign may have tailed off in the final two months. After the issue was placed on the ballot, it is argued that at least some segments of the Right-to-Work movement were overconfident and believed that the issue would pass easily. Yet if there was any decline in business mobilization, it was not reflected in the media campaign. By all accounts, the amount of informational and campaign materials aired by opponents and supporters appears to be relatively equal during this last phase (Zavacky 1968).
What we do know, however, is that the Right-to-Work campaign largely steered away from the repeated claims by labor unions that the law would diminish prosperity, and ultimately harm the public. This was consistent with the initial strategy of Ohioans for Right-to-Work to run a positive campaign that focused on their core issues of “freedom of choice” versus “compulsory unionism,” while not responding to oppositional claims. Yet because labor was well-prepared from the beginning and able to get their message out to the public early on – even in front of the opposition at times – the relative silence of Right-to-Work advocates on these core themes proved puzzling. Some observers (Miller and Ware 1963:66) questioned this strategy, especially as such labor arguments, “among them the loss of social security protection, lowered wages...seem to have been reasonably effective.”

The Right-to-Work campaign thus had little response for union claims that tied labor to Ohio’s prosperity and to the public welfare. Right-to-Work advocates also appeared to lose focus and to stray from their core “freedom of choice” theme. In the final month of the campaign they stepped up their attacks on union corruption. Their key political advocate at this point, Governor William O’Neil, made this a focus of several speeches leading up to the election. Just days before the vote he made a television address to the state, focusing on union corruption. Here he pointed to the exploits of Jimmy Hoffa in urging citizens to vote for the Right-to-Work initiative:

I am for the Right-to-Work amendment because I want to protect the union member from the corrupt labor bosses and give the union member some weapon with which to fight corruption and oppression in his union...This man – James Hoffa – is the national dictator of the Teamsters Unions, with final and absolute control over all members of the teamster unions in Ohio. They must belong and pay dues or they lose their jobs...8

While O’Neil trumpeted union corruption, the Right-to-Work campaign took to the airwaves with near hysterical charges of labor violence. In the last few weeks of the campaign
Right-to-Work supporters appeared to lose focus from their core freedom of choice theme and moved to an all-out attack on unionism. They aired television ads, for example, featuring clips of a Cecil DeMille film showing labor mob violence during earlier organizing struggles. The clips showed cars being overturned, rioting, and beatings. There were also pro-Right-to-Work ads placed featuring a threatening figure, the stereotypical “union boss,” warning viewers not to vote for the amendment (Gall 1988; UOLO 1958c). The Right-to-Work campaign thus appeared to be unraveling in the final days before the vote.

Labor activists continued their media campaign and outreach through election day and stayed consistent with their message. Their coalition efforts again appeared to be paying dividends. Several church leaders condemned the Right-to-Work ads featuring violence as inflammatory, and some stations stopped airing them as a result. Importantly, unions and their allies appeared to be quite successful with voter turnout. A record number turned out to the polls on election day. The voter turnout set a non-presidential year record and even surpassed the 1956 presidential turnout.

Much to the surprise and dismay of the business community, the Right-to-Work amendment lost by a landslide. The margin was nearly two-to-one in favor of labor. The issue was soundly defeated even in some of the most rural counties. In the end, 74 of 88 Ohio counties voted against Right-to-Work (Fenton 1959).

No political observers expected such widespread support for labor. The heavy voting, moreover, did not bode well for conservative candidates. As some republican strategists had feared, several statewide candidates lost in reelection bids. Most notably was incumbent republican Governor William O’Neil, who made the support of Right-to-Work one of his key campaign issues. U.S. Senator John Bricker, a looming figure in Ohio politics, also lost in his reelection bid. Recall that Bricker supported the issue but sought to have Right-to-Work
postponed by a year for this very reason. Democrats also made substantial gains in state legislative races.

Up until election day, many observers, even those among labor’s ranks, expected Right-to-Work to pass (Miller and Ware 1963). Such skepticism, after all, was well-founded. In previous campaigns, Ohio labor unions were never able to translate their numerical strength into a political force. Indeed, prior to the Right-to-Work campaign Ohio unions had consistently failed at delivering a large labor turnout or advancing a political program of their own. What more, the recent Right-to-Work efforts in neighboring and also heavily unionized Indiana weighed heavily on the minds of labor strategists.

This campaign was different on a number of fronts. The labor movement was spared the sharp divisions that had proved crippling for political efforts in the past. Ohio’s labor federations merged in the spring of 1958, but the UOLO served as a centralized campaign apparatus that represented most segments of the state’s labor movement prior to the merger. For the first time since Right-to-Work activism took hold, the national labor movement also had a vested interest in the problem. The AFL-CIO aided Ohio labor with campaign materials and funding, but also in generating a new response to the Right-to-Work problem. To get this new message out, moreover, Ohio labor retained its own public relations firm well in advance of the active campaigning phase.

Such organizational backing and expertise helped to get the union message out early. At times it appeared to throw off Ohioans for Right-to-Work, who failed to counter the outreach and framing efforts of UOLO and its allies. This was perhaps most acute the end of the campaign, as Right-to-Work advocates descended into an all out attack on unionism. Historian Elizabeth Fones-Wolf (1994:274) sees this particular exchange as influential not only for the Ohio outcome, but for the shape of things to come, arguing that business leaders learned that “future
efforts to limit the power of labor needed to differentiate between unions as institutions and the abuses of labor leaders.”

It appeared that Ohio labor unions had begun to forge an effective counter-strategy to, and framing of, the Right-to-Work issue. Each side now had a stable campaign repertoire to draw on. The embarrassing political setback for Ohio business leaders also stemmed the advance of Right-to-Work activism in the industrial heartland. Following this loss, business groups would indeed be much more selective in their campaigning efforts, with some preferring less public union avoidance and resistance strategies.

Summary
The Ohio Right-to-Work campaign was important for halting the momentum of business activists in the industrial midwest, and thus marks a crucial turning point in mobilization over the issue. It also provides a useful case to examine how social movements and their opponents attempt to sway policy. Unlike the Texas case, business leaders in Ohio took their cause directly to the public. Here framing and public outreach efforts took on greater importance and were conducted on a much larger scale. This particular case, moreover, provides an important window into the dynamics of political struggle where elites and subordinate groups are both well-equipped if not evenly matched.

The organizational base of labor unions was no doubt influential for the Ohio campaign. Yet Ohio unions had never been able to translate their numerical strength into a potent political force prior to 1958, and labor activists nationwide were unable to counter the powerful individual rights message promoted by Right-to-Work advocates. This time they drew on noted public relations experts and the strategizing of the national labor movement to generate a new, arguably
more compelling response to Right-to-Work. Ohio unions in this case tied their welfare to that of the public, and the fate of unions to the prosperity of Ohio families.

Union activists also had the benefit of a united labor movement for the first time in more than two decades. With little organizational strife, they established a centralized campaign apparatus early on to coordinate activities. And Ohio unions had the organizational wherewithal to carry their more sophisticated approach to Right-to-Work to all reaches of the state.

Right-to-Work advocates too were well organized. Yet employer divisions that surfaced at times throughout the campaign diminished the active support of at least some segments of the business community. While perhaps not politically crippling, such divisions slowed the campaign efforts of Right-to-Work advocates. The business campaign, moreover, had difficulty lining up what should have been its most reliable allies – most notably, republican politicians. Labor on the other hand was quite successful in garnering the support of key allies.

Importantly, Ohio labor got out in front of the campaign with their message early on. They also countered business activity at each step of the way. When we examine the interaction of these groups, Ohioans for Right-to-Work tended not to counter the public outreach and framing efforts of unions. This silence proved damaging as labor unions, at least to many observers, appeared to get their arguments out in front of the opposition. With the issue still up for grabs, the Right-to-Work campaign began to unravel. Not only did Right-to-Work advocates fail to counter the stepped up political education efforts of labor, they lost focus and descended into a last-ditch attack on unionism in principle.

The framing efforts of these groups, and the plausibility or coherence of their particular messages were consequential, and I will turn to this in more detail in the concluding chapter. Equally important, however, was the interaction of business and labor throughout the campaign, and their ability to counter the other’s actions and claims throughout. The united, strong
organizational base of labor unions, and the expertise and focus offered by national labor organizations enabled the anti-Right-to-Work campaign to adapt to business appeals and to advance a new, likely more compelling case to the public.

In the following chapter I return to the central question of how social movement organizations and their opponents influence political change. I synthesize the insights of these two quite different anti-labor campaigns with the quantitative results to extend organizational, political, and cultural framing approaches to social movements, and to shed light on business political mobilization and the quite unexpected setbacks for U.S. labor unions.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER 7

1. Armco Steel continued its staunch anti-labor stance from the infamous little steel strike of 1937 into the Right-to-Work years, and it apparently persisted for decades thereafter. The company later merged with AK Steel and made headlines at the end of the twentieth century with another extremely bitter and violent labor dispute that ensued from locking out a united steel workers local in Mansfield for more than three years.

2. Materials pertaining to Baker’s role in the campaign are from the Charles Baker papers, boxes 1-3, at the Walter P. Reuther Archives, at Wayne State University.

3. UOLO distributed a flyer with statements in support of union shop contracts from prominent Taft family members, including, surprisingly, the late senator Robert Taft and author of the Taft-Hartley act. It appears the Taft forces within the state republican party were hesitant to publicly endorse the measure in an election year, much to the dismay of Right-to-Work advocates.

4. The Truman quote is from a democratic rally in Youngstown and appears in Zavacky (1968:84).

5. UOLO flyer “Big Business Found to be Financing Tricky ‘Right-to-Work’ Law,” from Ohio AFL-CIO Collections, Box 48, Ohio Historical Society.

6. Unfortunately the actual poll results and recommendations are not available. From Zavacky (1968), however, we know that the pollsters noted the effectiveness major labor themes of prosperity and unions and the public welfare.

7. Anti-Right-to-Work flyers targeted to the black community are from the Elmer Cope papers, Ohio Historical Society. By the late 1950s African Americans comprised approximately eight percent of the state’s population. The black community figured into local politics in some of the northeastern cities, although to this point there was little coalition work between labor and non-union blacks. The efforts of the 1958 campaign inspired a concerted AFL-CIO, COPE strategy to
form labor-minority coalitions to counteract Right-to-Work agitation. And not without some success. Yet, the creation and maintenance of such coalitions proved difficult. The uneasy alliance between labor and civil rights movements illustrates some of these difficulties (but see Isaac and Christiansen 2002).

8. A script of the O’Neil address in its entirety is from the Samuel Pollock papers, box 3, Walter P. Reuther Archives, Wayne State University.
Figure 7.1 Right-to-Work Battleground States (shaded) in the Late 1950s
Source: Gall 1988; Annual Digest of State and Federal Labor Legislation (Various Years).
Figure 7.2 The New Labor Response.
Source: Ohio AFL-CIO Collection, Ohio Historical Society.
Figure 7.3 Right-to-Work Advocates Target Women and Families
Source: Ohio AFL-CIO Collection, Ohio Historical Society.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this project I set out to explain how business groups mobilized politically to deal with the “labor question” following the union upsurge of the 1930s, and how a seemingly ascendant union movement suffered such a series of political setbacks during a period of tremendous growth. Labor research and the literature on employment relations have been surprisingly slow to address these union defeats. These literatures also steer away from the political process to begin with. The research presented here begins to shed light on an important pocket of neglect in the scholarship on U.S. labor relations.

Equally, if not more important, this project tackles the enduring question for political sociologists and social movement scholars of how movements and their opponents affect political and social change. More specifically, I question how social movements and their opponents, and business and labor organizations in this case, may matter for policy adoption. Organizational, political, and cultural framing approaches to social movements each provide useful insights to address this important historical case. Yet these traditions too are limited by a narrow focus on mostly successful social movement challengers, and by neglecting the role of elites for a range of movement processes. Literature on social movements has also struggled to identify just how movements may matter, beyond demonstrating an association between social movement presence and an array of relevant outcomes.

I synthesize insights from the aforementioned perspectives with historical insights on the experience business groups and labor unions in the U.S. states, and adopt a multi-method
approach to extend research on both labor and social movements. The quantitative event history analysis assesses the importance of aggregate patterns of social movement/countermovement organization and political opportunity across states during the 1940s and 1950s for the adoption of an important labor policy in Right-to-Work laws. The key questions are how business and labor organization, and political opportunities affect policy adoption. I also probe how the more specific alignments of business organization and political opportunities, as suggested by political mediation arguments, may matter for the passage of Right-to-Work.

The historical case studies of anti-labor campaigns in Texas and Ohio, in contrast, speak to the how of social movement influence and elaborate on the many ways in which these actors may shape political struggle. Specifically, I probe the cultural work of social movements and their framing activities in the political process. These particular campaigns capture the two main phases of Right-to-Work activity, the range of mobilization, and successes and defeats on the issue. Importantly, the cases reveal how processes of contention and the more proximate strategies of business and labor to sway policy unfold across distinct political contexts.

**Social Movement Organization, Political Opportunities, and Right-to-Work Struggles**

In chapter 5, I used discrete time event history analysis to assess factors influencing the likelihood of states adopting Right-to-Work laws, and how organizational and political approaches to social movements can help us understand these processes. The event history results provide strong support for, and advance resource mobilization perspectives on social movements. The findings also reveal the complexities of these political struggles and suggest that there are multiple routes to policy change – something that becomes clearer upon closer inspection of distinct regional patterns of Right-to-Work activism.
Recall that early resource mobilization arguments suggested that social movements were potentially effective political actors. While research in this area has become more sophisticated by honing in on the ways in which social movements may matter in this regard, the underlying assumption remains the same. The presence of supportive social movements should be influential for politics. Considering the adoption of Right-to-Work laws between 1945 and 1960, the presence of employer organizations involved in labor politics significantly increases the likelihood of a state adopting this restrictive measure. Employer organizations are influential for good reason. These were the organizations that made Right-to-Work a public issue in the first place, and that went to great lengths to educate their employer colleagues, political decision-makers, and citizens to the dangers of unionism and the need for legislative restrictions. Independent of a host of controls, the presence of employer organizations increases the likelihood of Right-to-Work by more than three times.

Unions organization is also influential. Labor union strength exhibits a consistent, negative and significant impact on the likelihood of Right-to-Work. Importantly, the impact of both business and labor organization on the adoption of Right-to-Work remains significant after accounting for political opportunities, and after the inclusion of several relevant controls. The persistence of these results across several models suggests that social movements are meaningful in their own right for policy adoption.

Movements and countermovements may be politically effective through the pressure they bring to bear directly on elected officials, where social movements begin to look much like interest groups. Social movement organization may be important for other reasons as well. Organization is crucial for the coordination of protest, political education and framing, and for energizing important third parties. As Andrews (2001) suggests, those movements with a strong movement infrastructure, and that possess both formal and informal leadership and expertise, are
able to pursue multiple mechanisms of influence and are thus more successful in the political process.

Anecdotal evidence from this case supports such a movement infrastructure perspective, and suggests a number of ways in which employer and union organization are influential for Right-to-Work outcomes. The historical record of Right-to-Work struggles also points to the importance of professionalized, national backing and organization on each side of the debate. Both sides engaged in direct lobbying efforts, as well as more public outreach and framing. Yet, they entered these struggles with different levels of expertise and support from national parent organizations. For much of the period, neither of the national labor federations offered any meaningful assistance to their state affiliates to counter mounting Right-to-Work efforts.

These anecdotal insights give us a glimpse into the ways in which organization on each side of the issue shaped Right-to-Work struggles and outcomes. And while the quantitative findings do not speak directly to the more nuanced mechanisms through which local actors attempt to sway policy, they nonetheless extend recent insights on the political efficacy of social movements (e.g., Andrews 2001) and countermovements (Soule and Olzak 2004). Social movement and countermovement organizations are indeed meaningful for politics. Considering the political relations of business groups and labor unions in the 1940s and 1950s, the presence and extent of such organization proved crucial for policy change.

How might political opportunities matter for policy adoption? Political opportunity theorists such as Meyer and Minkoff (2004) argue that the presence of sympathetic state officials is likely the crucial factor shaping the political success of social movements and their opponents. The political mediation variant, moreover, suggests that movements will only be successful when their presence coincides with favorable political circumstances. The event history findings do
provide some support for the political opportunity perspective, albeit narrowly applied to these specific movements.

I find that partisanship, and republican strength more specifically, positively and significantly affects the adoption of Right-to-Work laws. Republicans, recall, were the party of Right-to-Work. Correspondingly, republican predominance in state legislatures is influential for the adoption of Right-to-Work laws, independent of the presence and extent of supportive social movement organizations, and other pertinent controls. The political legacy of a state on labor relations is likewise important. States with a history of restricting unions are shown to be more likely to adopt Right-to-Work laws. Specifically, those states with anti-syndicalist laws on the books were significantly more likely to adopt Right-to-Work in the 1940s and 1950s. Many states invoked anti-syndicalist laws to curb labor insurgency in prior decades, but then called on these provisions to quell labor uprisings in subsequent years. This particular stance of states toward labor appears to be somewhat enduring, indeed, carrying over to their approaches to the Right-to-Work problem.

The significant effects of republican strength and state-labor legacy persist whether controlling for the potentially idiosyncratic Southern region or eliminating it from the analysis altogether. This analysis provides a broad testing ground for political opportunity explanations by considering political relations of business groups and labor unions across states and over time. While these explanations have been criticized for focusing on a limited range of mostly successful social movement challengers, or single legislative episodes, political opportunities, at least narrowly applied, are influential for policy adoption and tell an important part of the Right-to-Work story.

The findings presented here are consistent with the work of McCammon et al. (2001) and Meyer and Minkoff (2004) – work that points to the importance of constituent-specific
opportunities. The political circumstances shown to be influential in this study, for example, may not be meaningful for a broad range of social movement challengers, or many for that matter. Supplemental analyses showed no support for arguably more universal political opportunities such as electoral competition, or election year politics. What this research suggests is that analysts of policy adoption should consider “opportunities for whom” when devising political opportunity measures, and that it may prove difficult to identify specific opportunity variables that shape the political success of all or most challenging groups. In this way, the political opportunities crucial for social movement success do not necessarily overlap with those patterning movement emergence.

Interestingly, the results show no support for the conditional relationships between organization and political system characteristics as suggested by political mediation theorists. The political mediation argument was developed to explain liberal social spending outcomes in the 1930s and 1940s, but it does not help explain the rollback on labor law following the New Deal. Instead, the independent and significant effects of business and labor organization are consistently borne out in the event history results.

These political processes were undoubtedly complex, and varied considerably across region. Because the South was so different than the rest of the country on numerous political and social dimensions during this period, I assessed the factors influencing the timing of Right-to-Work just within the ex-confederate states. Many have suggested that the South as a whole was inhospitable for labor. At first glance, the uniform, conservative democratic rule across the region provided few openings for unions. Labor organization, moreover, was fairly weak, although growing, across the region. Yet labor politics and the struggles over Right-to-Work in the region were decidedly more complex.
What we find is that the timing of Right-to-Work laws in the region was shaped in part by the focus of the major Southern labor organizing drives of the postwar era. The percentage of workers in a state involved in union elections significantly increases the likelihood of a state adopting Right-to-Work. Those Southern states targeted by the organizing drives were indeed quicker to adopt labor restrictions. As both the AFL and CIO funneled considerable resources into highly publicized organizing efforts in the region, neither of the labor federations was adequately equipped, or willing, to aid their state affiliates in countering the political backlash that ensued. Political and organizing efforts were completely separated, and union activists in these states were left in a precarious position to counter employer mobilization and the ire of conservative politicians.

Rather than Right-to-Work being adopted solely where union organization was weak, these laws were passed where unions were actively organizing and trying to solidify their movement as a truly national force. Here the relations between national and local labor organization, and their resultant ability to engage in political battles were certainly complex.

The implication to be taken from the quantitative findings is that social movement organization is undoubtedly meaningful for policy adoption, as are favorable political arrangements. These patterns of organization and opportunity are useful for explaining political outcomes, and Right-to-Work in particular, across most times and most places. But there are multiple routes to policy change. This underscores the importance of a historically grounded approach to social movements and politics that acknowledges, and accounts for, such complexity. In the South, a region of continuing importance for the fortunes of labor, these processes were more involved. The struggles and political outcomes were tied to the large scale organizing drives of the postwar era, its effects on the organizational and political capacities of labor unions in the region, and the political backlash that ensued.
The event history analysis advances our understanding of the quite unexpected series of political setbacks for labor unions during the 1940s and 1950s, and the effects of concerted business group mobilization during these years. The results show that business groups were indeed quite successful in their efforts to roll back labor’s New Deal gains at the state-level. This approach, however, necessarily tells us less about the particulars of how business and labor groups attempted to influence policy, and the multiple mechanisms through which these actors target the state. The historical case studies, in contrast, expand on these very issues.

*Cultural Framing and the Political Battles Within States*

The historical case studies of Texas and Ohio presented in chapters 6 and 7 respectively, illustrate how business and labor actors attempted to sway policy across two quite different contexts. The narratives speak to the cultural work of social movements and their opponents, and framing in particular. Moreover, they suggest a number of ways in which framing and the tactical exchanges between business and labor are shaped and constrained by social movement organization, and by sometimes crippling movement divisions.

The literature on framing has advanced contemporary debate on social movements and contentious politics by bringing focus to the cultural work of these actors, and by demonstrating how framing is an important mechanism of persuasion for social movements and their opponents alike. Just how movements present their cause to external audiences and state actors, and whether their appeals are resonant with mainstream societal values, it is argued, may be crucial for success. More concretely, and pertinent for the political battles considered here, those social movement actors that carry out core diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks, by clearly identifying the problem, a likely culprit, and a plausible policy solution, are more likely to be successful in advancing political change.
Whether conceptualized as coherent and articulate framing (Cress and Snow 2000) or credible narratives (McVeigh et al. 2003), these insights provide a useful guidepost with which to evaluate the claims advanced by business and labor groups in the political process. Yet this literature tends to neglect the interactive and temporal components of framing and, indeed, the concept of framing battles between movements and their opponents. The historical narratives offer an important window into these dynamics.

In the Texas case, labor had made major strides during the 1940s. While still comparatively weak, the tremendous growth of Texas unions and the early successes of the postwar organizing drives in the state convinced many employers that labor was a formidable opponent and political actor. Dismayed by union advances, employers regrouped, made political mobilization a focus, and formulated a more sophisticated critique and framing of the labor problem. Seeing the limited effectiveness of the early campaigning by far-right groups, with their near hysterical claims on the dangers of unionism, Texas employers in the postwar years instead sought to curb labor organization in the name of the public welfare and the rights of honest, hard-working employees. They pointed to the excessive power that labor organizations, and especially labor leaders had allegedly gained during the war years, and the need to protect individual workers from these abuses. In doing so they relied on the well-researched and tested claims developed by national pro-business organizations like the NAM.

The scope of conflict in this case was limited to rallying a small portion of the electorate, Texas employers, and political representatives. Texas employers thus engaged in organizing efforts among their own constituents, lobbying, as well as more public political education and framing of the labor problem. While many saw labor triumph as probable in the state, unions were not able to counter the redoubled political efforts of Texas employers. The lack of any sophisticated public relations program, or the expertise and focus of the national labor federations
certainly hurt their cause. The deep divisions between AFL and CIO unions, and the complete
disconnect between the organizing drives (and the resources associated with them) and political
mobilization diminished the public claims put forth by unions to begin with.

These limitations meant that the labor federations in Texas did not respond to the claims
advanced in the media by individual employers and their associations. Labor also found
difficulty in mobilizing their base or forming more wide-ranging coalitions to counter business
efforts. Instead, their political efforts were limited to lobbying and public testimony against
Right-to-Work. Their claims, moreover, were not especially sophisticated. What we can take
from the historical narrative is that, at least to many observers, the new business message – the
formulation of which drew on considerable expertise, research, and opinion polling – was more
plausible than the previous far-right claims, set well with political representatives, and that labor
was not able to answer this. Indeed, labor was left to wage a last-ditch, defensive campaign that
lumped all legislative attacks on unions as stemming from the far-right.

The Ohio case offers us insight into conflict where subordinate groups and elites are more
evenly matched, and where framing battles may be more likely to take hold and weigh heavily on
the outcome of political struggle. The public referendum campaign increased the scope of
mobilization and brought greater focus to the framing of the issue, as both sides attempted to
sway the electorate and to garner the support of influential allies. Much to the surprise of both
business and labor leaders in the state, the initiative lost in a landslide. The defeat, moreover,
halted the momentum of Right-to-Work activists in the industrial Midwest. The organizational
base of Ohio unions was no doubt important in this regard. While not growing rapidly at this
point, unions had stabilized, representing more than a third of the workforce. The Ohio labor
movement was also unified for the first time in two decades.
In addition to the organization and cohesion on the ground, Ohio unions also had the assistance of the national labor movement when it came to the formulation of a more sophisticated response to, and framing of, the Right-to-Work problem. This was the first major adaption in the framing of the issue since the activism first took hold in the mid-1940s. There was a considerable lag for labor to catch up in this regard. This time Ohio unions tied the welfare of labor to that of the public, and to the prosperity of Ohio families. They argued that Right-to-Work advocates were the same forces that sought to roll back many of the gains that average Ohio citizens had made since the New Deal years.

Ohio unions were prepared early on and at times managed to get their claims out in front of the opposition. Business groups indeed found their actions and claims countered at every step of the way, from the collection of petition signatures, to campaigning, and advancing Right-to-Work claims in the media. The pro-Right-to-Work campaign also encountered difficulty in energizing what should have been its normal allies. As labor began to target new audiences such as women and families, the business campaign was forced to do the same. Business activists, however, experienced difficulty in establishing an effective message for such groups, and in countering the persistent labor claims that Right-to-Work would diminish prosperity for Ohio families.

The give and take in the framing of the issue was most acute at the tail end of the campaign. Just prior to the acceleration of the public media campaigns on both sides of the issue, the Ohio electorate was reportedly evenly split on Right-to-Work, and with a large share of undecided voters. As both sides stepped up their public outreach, labor continued to tie its fate to the prosperity of Ohio citizens and the public at large. At this point the business campaign appeared to lose focus and descend into an all-out attack on unionism in principle, airing to Ohio citizens that unions were not only corrupt, but violent, and in need of regulation. I argue that this
interaction between business and labor, particularly in regards to framing, was especially crucial. This was most visible in the inability of business to answer the more developed claims put forth by labor unions and in their descent to an extremist critique of labor.

These important historical cases reveal the multiple ways in which movements and their opponents may affect the political process, and point to framing as a crucial mechanism of influence. We saw that business and labor groups engaged in direct lobbying efforts as well as more public outreach, and framing of the Right-to-Work problem. These efforts were shaped and constrained in important ways by organization. Certain types of social movement/countermovement organization were better equipped for these tasks. Like the work of Andrews (2001), the research presented here suggests that viable organization enables groups to pursue multiple mechanisms of influence. In addition, I argue that is the combination of professionalized movement organizations, with paid staff, and sophisticated public relations programs – much like the organizations that early resource mobilization theorists pointed to – and more grassroots organization on the ground that fosters such political mobilization.

This sometimes uneasy combination proved important for both business and labor across two distinct political contexts. While professionalized organizations are associated with the institutionalization of social movement activity, they are crucial for political ends. This is certainly the case for subordinate groups who find their rights or newfound gains under political attack. The case studies, moreover, illustrate the debilitating effects of factionalism for political efforts. This was most acute in the Texas case, where deep divisions limited any coordinated political mobilization to begin with.

This research presented here lends support to recent work that links framing to political mobilization and outcomes, but also extends this work in important ways. As described in the preceding chapters, both business and labor groups eventually devoted considerable energy, and
often extensive research and polling into the framing of the Right-to-Work issue. The framing literature points to the importance of the coherence or plausibility of particular frames, and whether social movement actors advance claims that clearly articulate the problem, a likely culprit, and a policy solution, versus more sweeping claims and less articulate attacks. The unfolding of the Texas and Ohio cases are consistent with these insights.

Yet the historical narratives speak more directly to the dynamic, temporal components of framing. This focus marks an important extension for social movement research. In political conflicts where contenders are somewhat evenly matched, for example, framing battles may be more likely to take hold and shape political struggle. This was most vividly demonstrated in the Ohio case, where labor was able to get its claims out in front of the opposition, and business not only failed to counter them, but ultimately lost focus and reverted to more extremist claims against unions. By drawing on McAdam’s (1983) framework, we are able to bring the analytic focus to the interaction of these challengers, and the framing and counter-framing of key policy issues. Such interaction was certainly crucial during the peak Right-to-Work years, and has only increased in importance since then with the expansion of media technology. Like other tactics then, framing and the cultural work of social movements are played out in relation to the actions of opponents, authorities, and boarder publics. This dynamic should inform theorizing on framing, and the research designs employed by social movement scholars.

**Implications**

Taking the quantitative and qualitative insights together, we gain a complex view of social movements and politics in which there are multiple routes to policy change. Organization is clearly important. This research suggests that social movements/countermovements are potentially effective political actors. The presence and extent of organization, along with the
stance of the state or political representatives toward a movement’s cause provide us with important insight into where and when movements may be successful in securing favorable legislation. This is certainly an important part of the Right-to-Work story and business group political mobilization across U.S. states.

Given these clues for where movements may be more or less successful, just how they influence the political process is more complex. What this research suggests is that framing is an important part of the social movement tactical repertoire to be drawn on in political struggles, and often serves as a crucial mechanism of influence for movements and opponents alike. The framing appeals of social movements, moreover, are rooted in objective circumstances and may be profoundly shaped by the resources and expertise these actors have to draw on, the political climate in which they are working and, importantly, by the interaction between movements and opponents in the political process.

This research extends recent attempts to synthesize perspectives on social movements and politics, and especially organizational and cultural approaches. When considering the more proximate strategies of business and labor actors, and as illustrated in the historical case studies, it was the interaction of organization and the cultural work of movement actors that was critical for their ability to influence politics. These processes, moreover, are shaped and constrained by historical and social context, as illustrated by the distinct regional variation in Right-to-Work activism. By gaining a deep understanding of the cases, we are better able to grasp this complexity and thus speak to the enduring question for social movement scholars of just how these actors may matter.

The approach I have taken here certainly has its limits. Considering the how of social movement influence, the historical case studies shed light on the strategies of movements and their opponents in more public political battles, and therefore neglect the entire range of political
conflict. The cases necessary have less to offer on situations where, for example, policy is enacted with little public opposition or protracted struggle. This study, moreover, does not offer a formal test of the influence of framing, or the content of particular frames, across cases. Instead, we gain insight into the research and polling that actors often drew on to formulate their Right-to-Work claims and, from observers of the period, how these claims resonated with their intended targets.

Yet it is important to remember that the goal here was not to isolate the effects of framing on policy adoption, but rather to illustrate how framing and the tactical exchanges between business and labor may matter for politics in relation to varying degrees of social movement organization and opportunity. Taken together with the systematic quantitative evidence on the importance of organization for policy outcomes, the historical narratives – with the explicit focus on the processes of contention, and the interaction of political contenders – provide important insight into the politics of social movements.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study advances contemporary debate on social movements in other ways by bringing focus to the purposive role of more elite actors. Financial and political elites have long been theorized to be important for social movements either as sponsors or influential allies, yet rarely are they considered meaningful in their own right. This limited focus is unfortunate. Business groups and corporations are the target or adversary of many contemporary social movements in the U.S. and abroad. As the preceding chapters illustrate, such actors have a bearing on a range of movement processes and sometimes attempt to spur their own brands of grassroots activism. That is, they are often more than interest group political actors. In this case business actors went to considerable lengths to attend to the cultural work that we most often associate with social movement challengers, and framing in particular.
Social movement scholars have begun to expand their lens beyond subordinate group challengers on the left, especially as conservative and religious protest efforts and organizations have been emboldened of late. This expanded focus is a necessary and important development for the social movement literature. Bringing scholarly attention to the role of elite actors, such as the business groups described here, however, presents an important challenge for future research. Scholarship should probe the role of these actors for a range of movement processes that expand beyond sponsorship and their presence as influential allies. One potential avenue in this regard is the integration of the elite literature in political sociology with core social movement perspectives. Such an integration and focus could advance theory on the topic and inform the analytic strategies that researchers employ.

Conclusion

At its core, this is a project about stratification and political power. Social movements, but especially labor mobilization, capture the intersection of these core sociological phenomena. Right-to-Work battles, more specifically, are ultimately distributive struggles surrounding the appropriate strength of labor organization. The setbacks for unions following their dramatic upsurge during the 1930s and WWII period, the success of business group political efforts, and the eventual containment of labor to a narrow geographic and industrial space continue to weigh heavily on contemporary patterns of stratification and the relative leverage of average workers in the employment relationship. The political processes analyzed here ensured that any “accord” between labor and management would be short-lived and limited in scope.

Theorizing and empirical research on these events has been quite limited. Labor mobilization in the South, for example, had been almost completely written off until late. Right-to-Work agitation, what more, is often assumed to be confined to areas where labor is weak.
Such a view misses the experience of employers, workers, and labor organizations during the 1940s and 1950s, and perhaps incorrectly shapes our understanding of balance of power between business and labor during the postwar years. This study instead shows a wide range of political struggle over the Right-to-Work issue. It points to the possibilities for unions in the South during these years and, importantly, the encroachment of business group mobilization into the industrial Midwest and the very heart of industrial union strength. The campaigns waged by unions in the industrialized states in the latter Right-to-Work years showed their potential as a formidable political and social movement actor, yet these budding efforts were difficult to sustain and labor ultimately failed to capitalize on them.

The limited scholarship on labor’s political setbacks and Right-to-Work in particular is symptomatic of a more general tendency by social movement researchers and political sociologists to focus on the insurgency of less powerful groups and the episodes of progressive legislation that flourished during 1930s and 1960s. These events are admittedly crucial to our understanding of social movements and American politics. As a consequence of this rather one-sided approach, however, we have devoted far less time and energy to the setbacks, and perhaps the more enduring challenges that movements face.

One implication is that the work of social movement scholars and political sociologists could be of greater use to those engaged in distributive struggles, and better inform core sociological questions pertaining to stratification and inequality, if it had more to offer on the failures of challengers on the left, and on the political and cultural work of more elite actors involved in these struggles. It is my hope that as the labor movement struggles to reinvent itself and, indeed, struggles for relevance in the twenty-first century, this study can provide a useful window into the struggles underlying its political successes and defeats.
## APPENDIX A

**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES USED IN THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Vote Held on Right-to-Work</td>
<td>1=Yes</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>% of State’s residents residing in urban areas</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>16.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighboring States w/RTW</td>
<td>% of neighboring states that have adopted Right-to-Work (lagged)</td>
<td>21.28</td>
<td>24.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Presence</td>
<td>% of a State’s Population that is African American</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>10.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Region</td>
<td>1 if Ex-confederate state</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1 if Year=1947</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
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Table A.1 Descriptive Statistics for Control Variables
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Employer Mobilization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Enterprise Size</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Union Org.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.354</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Union Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.238</td>
<td></td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.262</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) % Repub</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Restrictive Labor Legacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Public RTW Vote</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) % Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td>.274</td>
<td>-.364</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.261</td>
<td>-.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) % Neighbor States w/RTW</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>-.200</td>
<td>-.429</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.047</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10) % Minority</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>-.315</td>
<td>-.382</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>-.652</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>-.069</td>
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<tr>
<td>(11) South</td>
<td></td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>-.139</td>
<td>-.440</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>-.622</td>
<td>-.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) 1947</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>-.165</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.049</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
<th>(11)</th>
<th>(12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(8) % Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) % Neighbor States w/RTW</td>
<td>-.276</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) % Minority</td>
<td>-.266</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) South</td>
<td>-.387</td>
<td>.356</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) 1947</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>-.150</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table A.2 Correlation Matrix of Variables Used in the Event History Analysis
APPENDIX B

ARCHIVAL AND QUANTITATIVE DATA SOURCES

Archival Sources Consulted

Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin
   Texas Newspaper Collection
George Meany Archives, Silver Spring Maryland
   AFL-CIO Legislative Reference Files
Hagley Archives, Wilmington Delaware
   National Association of Manufacturers Records
   U.S Chamber of Commerce Records
Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University
   California State Federation of Labor Records
   ILWU Records
Ohio Historical Society
   Ohio AFL-CIO Collection
   Elmer Cope Papers
   John Ramsay Papers
Ohio University Special Collections
   United Mine Workers, District 6 Records
Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University
   AFL-CIO Region 8 Records
   Pamphlet Collection
State Labor Proceedings Microfilm Collection, Center for Research Libraries
Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington
   Don Ellinger Papers
   Margaret Carter Papers
   Texas AFL-CIO Collection
   Texas State Industrial Union Council Records
Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University
   CIO Executive Board Minutes
   Charles Baker Papers
   Samuel Pollack Papers
Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison Wisconsin
   American Federation of Labor Collection
Periodicals Consulted

AFL-CIO News
American Federationist
Austin American
Business Week
CIO News
CIO Notes (Texas State Industrial Union Council)
Columbus Dispatch
Dallas Craftsman
Dallas Morning News
Economic Outlook
Free Enterprise
Fort Worth Star Telegram
Home Front
Houston Labor Messenger
Houston Post
Journal of Labor (GA)
Labor and Nation
Labor News
Nation’s Business
Texas Industry
U.S. News & World Report

Government Publications and Quantitative Data Sources

Council of State Governments. The Book of the States, various years. Lexington, KY.
National Labor Relations Board. Annual Report, various years. Washington D.C.

______________________ . Census of the United States, various years. Washington, D.C.
______________________ . County Business Patterns, various years. Washington, D.C.


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