How Democracy's Resisters Forge Organizational Change: Insights from the Emergence of Christian Right Broadcasting Companies

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Abstract. *Christian Right broadcasting companies are critical, yet understudied, organizational players in the increasingly anti-democratic US right. Why and how did Christian Right broadcasting companies come into being? My answers to these questions build theory on how right-wing social movements forge organizational change to meet the challenge of democratic transitions. I demonstrate that CRBCs emerged much earlier than previously known: specifically, when grassroots activists created new organizational forms to resist the dismantling of white supremacy in the American South. These findings are puzzling because theory predicts that social movements forge innovation in the political sphere when they lack existing channels of political power and organization. To resolve this puzzle, I use novel data on US radio stations and their programming to show why and how democracy's resisters first created new organizational forms and then adapted these new forms to survive in an increasingly democratic context. My theoretical contribution suggests a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: under certain conditions, democratization can bring into being new and enduring types of political organizations only tenuously committed to democratic norms. Findings furthermore suggest that Christian Right broadcasting companies are important mechanisms linking white backlash to civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s to rightwing anti-democratic authoritarianism in the present-day.*

Introduction[1]

(Stuart Epperson) has done more to help move the radio system into conservatism than any other single person in his generation.

-Newt Gingrich, former Republican Speaker of the US House of Representatives[2]

In July 2023, *Christianity Today* published an obituary memorializing the life of Stuart

Epperson, cofounder of conservative Christian media company Salem Media Group (Silliman

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[2] Remarks at 2017 Value Voters Summit. See "VVS 2017: Honoring Stuart Epperson" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuMQjdAAYBs

2023). The obituary charted Epperson's rise from modest beginnings on a Virginia tobacco farm to helming a major Evangelical Christian radio company, a present-day "empire of influence" that is a leading organizational ally of the Republican Party.

There is broad consensus that the Christian Right is an exceptionally powerful actor in an increasingly anti-democratic Republican Party coalition (Amenta 2022; McAdam and Kloos 2014; Pierson and Schickler 2020; Schlozman 2015; Zoorob and Skocpol 2020). Yet Epperson's obituary captures an underappreciated fact about the *organizational basis* of the Christian Right's power: movement activists developed a novel broadcasting model, bought up much of the radio sector in the US, and for the past generation have used these resources to shape the political process. While scholars agree that tight links between Christian Right elite and grassroots networks underlie the movement's political power (Schlozman 2015; Skocpol 2011; Zoorob and Skocpol 2020), social scientists tend to overlook companies like Salem, focusing instead on "linkages between elites and masses rooted in direct mail" (Schlozman 2015: 199). Meanwhile, scholars of right-wing media tend to focus on the profit-driven "outrage industry" of talk radio and cable news (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018; Berry and Sobieraj 2014). These are both valuable perspectives, but neglect the fact that, with Salem, Christian Right activists pursuing profit and an explicit conservative agenda own one of the biggest radio companies in the US – a company embedded within, and bridging, elite political networks and the associational life of local communities.

Extending a small body of academic scholarship (Diamond 1998; Fetner and Sanders 2012; Ward 2020), recent journalistic exposés have amassed extensive evidence that Salem and other Christian Right broadcasting companies (CRBCs) are major players in an increasingly radical right-wing organizational landscape (Nelson 2019; Piore 2005; Thornton 2022a).

Table 1: Christian Right Broadcasting Companies in US politics, 2000-2023

Role of CRBCs	Companies	Examples
Republican electoral mobilization	Salem Media Group, Bott Radio Network	2004 and 2016 presidential elections
Access to Republican leadership	Salem Media Group, Bott Radio Network, American Family Radio	Meetings with George W. Bush administration officials and Donald Trump before 2016 election
Mobilization in contentious episodes	Salem Media Group	Tea Party and January 6th "Stop the Steal" rally

Note: See Appendix A for supporting evidence

Especially since 2000, CRBCs have been a critical resource for Republican electoral mobilization, CRBC executives have had extensive access to Republican leadership, and CRBCs have mobilized in major contentious episodes such as the rally on January 6,th 2021 to overturn the 2020 election (ibid.). Table 1 summarizes new and existing evidence demonstrating the centrality of CRBCs in the US right from 2000 to 2023, with supplementary data on Salem and other CRBCs provided in Appendix A. While various factors contributed to the growing power of CRBCs, arguably the most important was broadcasting deregulation of the 1980s and 1990s, after which Christian radio became consolidated in the hands of a few companies (Ward 2009). Salem was the "undisputed leader" (Lochte 2006: 79-97), emerging as a major media platform for prominent exponents of Christian Nationalism (like Charlie Kirk and Eric Metaxas) for whom conservative Christianity is the legitimate basis for American identity, social order, and law (Gorski and Perry 2022: 22-23 & 98-99; Whitehead and Perry 2020).

But while existing research documents the final steps of CRBCs' rise to power, we know much less about their origins and early development. Why and how did Christian Right broadcasting companies come into being? Popular investigations suggest that Salem's history of right-wing broadcasting began in the 1970s or 1980s (Nelson 2019; Thornton 2022b) – a claim that resonates with academic accounts, which suggest that institutional breaks in party politics and the media environment during the 1970s and 1980s provided an ideal context for the rise of the Christian Right and partisan media (Benkler et al. 2018; Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Diamond 1995; Pierson and Schickler 2020; Schlozman 2015)

However, my rich qualitative and quantitative data grant us a view into mid-20th century right-wing radio stations that is both wider and deeper than existing scholarship provides, allowing me to develop an alternative, evidence-based account of how, when, and why these organizations emerged. I demonstrate that Salem cofounder Stuart Epperson helped to innovate the CRBC form at least two decades earlier, and in response to a wholly different context, than popular or academic accounts suggest. Specifically, I find that in the late 1950s Epperson and his family were important players in a wave of Fundamentalist Christian entrepreneurs who created CRBCs by using their local radio stations to give voice to national right-wing social movements resisting the dismantling of Jim Crow and the democratization of the American South. New and existing evidence indicates that CRBCs have been anti-democratic since their inception – consistently skirting the democratic norm of "mutual toleration" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018: 59), whereby political actors accept their democratic rivals as legitimate.

By documenting when, how, and why CRBCs came into being, this article makes three important contributions to research on social mobilization and US politics. First, I bring CRBCs squarely into academic analyses on the organizational development of US politics and,

especially, the US right (e.g. Amenta 2022; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Even more than familiar conservative broadcast companies like Fox News Channel, CRBCs operate under the effective control of a political movement. Tied closely to evangelical churches, these companies provide commercial services to right-wing advocacy groups, cooperate with these groups in durable political alliances, and have an important and on-going presence in local communities.

Second, I make an important corrective to the historical record, showing how the organizational form of the CRBC came into existence much earlier, and under much different circumstances, than existing accounts suggest. Social scientists generally trace important developments to the "meso-environment" like the rise of Republican-aligned Christian Right organizations and right-wing broadcasting companies to institutional breaks during or after the 1970s (for an overview see Pierson and Schickler 2020). These breaks include the consummation of elite political realignment on race by the early 1970s, the deregulatory push of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, and the contemporaneous rise of new communications technologies (ibid.). Yet I show that by the late 1950s – decades before the Christian Right struck its alliance with the Republican Party – the movement's activists already had developed a broadcasting infrastructure for linking local church congregations to elite right-wing networks. Thus, while scholars widely recognize that "white backlash" to civil rights was an important factor in the rise to power of the Christian Right in the late 1970s (e.g. Schlozman 2015), my findings suggest that important organizational developments in the Christian Right occurred much earlier than this, when traditional patterns of white supremacy and elite rule in the South were threatened by democratization but still intact.

Third, building on the above two points, I extend research on social movements and organizational innovation. If existing scholarship on US politics cannot explain the emergence of CRBCs, this development is also puzzling from the standpoint of social movement theory. While a large body of scholarship has shown that social movements contribute to organizational change (e.g. Armstrong 2002; Clemens 1997; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000), my finding that right-wing movement activists created novel anti-democratic organizational forms in a moment of democratization poses an empirical puzzle. Scholars have developed theory to explain how progressive movements – and especially movements pushing for democratic participation – have the "means, motive, and opportunity" to create new ways of doing politics (Clemens 1997: 92). But, as I review below, this theory predicts that social movements forge innovation in the political sphere when they lack existing channels of political power and organization — and thus suggests that democracy's resisters, as existing members of the polity, would *not* engage in organizational innovation. Building on recent scholarship that treats the triumph of citizenship rights in the US South as a case of subnational democratization (Mickey 2015), I argue that right-wing activists first forged novel organizational forms to resist democratization, and then partially adapted these to allow their continued operation within a newly democratic context, while still promoting anti-democratic causes. In short, I demonstrate how, under certain conditions, democratization can bring into being new types of political organizations only tenuously committed to democratic norms. I conclude by arguing that CRBCs have made the Christian Right a powerful ally for the Republican Party, but one with institutionalized anti-democratic tendencies that may help to explain the party's radicalization.

WHAT ARE CRBCS AND WHY SHOULD WE STUDY THEM?

My approach differs from scholarship focusing on Christian Right programming or the historical development of religious broadcasting (e.g. Hangan 2002; Hendershot 2011). While valuable, this scholarship misses much of what makes CRBCs worth studying as political organizations. CRBCs function in many ways like advocacy organizations (Andrews and Edwards 2004) by pursuing political goals in coalition with the wider Christian Right and right-wing business interests and, meanwhile, are important institutions in local civic life, especially because of their ties to local churches.

CRBCs have complex identities. These companies own broadcast stations and to survive they must make money (largely by selling airtime), yet even CRBCs that are for-profit entities like Salem are imbued with political and religious purpose. A publicly-traded company, Salem makes this complex mix of goals explicit in its filings with the Securities Exchange Commission: "Our commitment to these (Christian and conservative) values means that we may choose not to switch to other formats or pursue potentially more profitable business opportunities in response to changes in audience preferences."[1] There is robust evidence that achieving the political goals of the broader Christian Right is central to the operations of Salem and other CRBCs and, specifically, that executive-level strategizing and political lobbying by CRBCs is tightly coupled to their use for popular mobilization (see Nelson 2019; Piore 2005, 2020; Thornton 2022a and Appendices A and B for supplementary evidence).

[1] Form 10-K, "Annual Report Pursuant Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017," https://investor.salemmedia.com/sec-filings/annual-reports/content/0001144204-18-015007/0001144204-18-015007.pdf

CRBCs share certain attributes with right-wing media such as Fox News and traditional talk radio captured in existing scholarship. CRBCs amplify right-wing advocacy groups and the Republican Party (Amenta and Caren 2022; Benkler et al. 2018; Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Ward 2020). They are largely unencumbered by the institutional norms of newsgathering such as objectivity that characterized US news media for most of the 20th century (Schudson 1978). Many programs airing on CRBCs (especially Salem) are commercially supported and conform to the norms of right-wing talk radio popularized by Rush Limbaugh in the 1980s and 1990s (Rosenwald 2019).

But I argue that three features distinguish CRBCs from other forms of right-wing media. Each feature evinces institutional norms that *link Christian Right advocacy groups and parachurch organizations to local communities for the purpose of achieving shared political goals*. First, CRBCs provide commercial services to donor-supported Christian Right advocacy organizations, parachurch groups, and ministries, especially by selling these organizations broadcast airtime. Second, CRBCs ally with the broader Christian Right coalition via ongoing coordination by company leadership on shared political goals. And, third, CRBCs promote and support civic and political engagement by local communities and, especially, church congregations. Table 2 provides examples for these institutional norms and Appendix B provides supplementary evidence supporting my conceptualization.

One fact about CRBCs is worth underlining: unlike other forms of right-wing broadcasting, they provide (and typically sell) airtime on their broadcast stations directly to donor-supported organizations. This is a different model for media than is captured by most scholarship on the relationship between media and social movements, which tends to focus on movement dependence on general audience media (e.g. Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). But the

CRBC model is also distinct from the model of cable news and talk radio, which is supported by advertising and *not* the sale of airtime to groups soliciting donations from audiences.

A vivid illustration of how CRBCs operate is Salem's sponsoring of public events in local communities that feature national-level advocacy groups or leaders. As Salem states in its SEC filing: "We regularly partner with organizations that serve the Christian and family-themed audience and sponsor and support events important to this group."[2] These include listener events, pastor appreciation luncheons, and concerts and frequently feature speakers from influential Christian Right groups such as Focus on the Family and the Trump-aligned Capitol Ministries.

WHY AND HOW DID CRBCS COME INTO BEING?

Existing scholarship generally emphasizes how institutional breaks during or after the 1970s set the stage for the rise of the Christian Right and right-wing broadcasting. First, there was a break in party politics following the Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights and an activist state in the 1960s and early 1970s (Pierson and Schickler 2020). In the conventional view, Evangelical Christians were relatively apolitical until the late 1970s (Cf. Dochuk 2010; Williams 2010), but political realignment created the conditions for the Republican Party to strike an alliance with Evangelical leaders opposed to perceived government overreach on racial and gender equality (Blee and Creasap 2010; Diamond 1995; Fetner 2008; McAdam and Kloos 2014; Schlozman 2015). Republican activists wooed supposed political novices like televangelist Jerry Falwell, persuading them to mobilize their congregations (Schlozman 2015). As a result of realignment, there was a relatively homogenous white Republican-voting public by the early 1980s and this

[2] Salem Form 10-K, 2017.

ready-made audience, combined with regulatory breaks of "neoliberalism" and novel communications technologies, transformed the media environment, giving rise to right-wing talk radio, cable news, and (eventually) websites (Benkler et al. 2018; Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Hemmer 2016). Historians have documented that right-wing activism in the 1950s and 1960s played an important part in the emergence of the conservative movement that eventually overtook the Republican Party (Hemmer 2016; Hendershot 2011; Matzko 2020). But even historians argue that these early models of right-wing media were "largely defunct" by the 1970s, killed by regulations requiring balanced programming and the end of the 1960s protest wave (Hemmer 2016: xvi).

Yet responses by (typically elite) actors to institutional breaks in the 1970s do not adequately explain why and how, apparently alone among organized US political interests, Christian Right activists came to develop and control broadcasting companies whose core operations are tightly coupled with the goals of a broader political movement. It is possible that existing religious broadcasting companies like Salem created new organizational repertoires during the Reagan presidency (as suggested by Diamond 1998: 67; Thornton 2022a), but this is an empirical question and my evidence shows that CRBCs emerged much earlier than this – timing that existing scholarship fails to explain. The puzzle of CRBCs' early emergence is illustrated in Table 3, which captures local public events featuring national right-wing leaders and promoted by Salem's organizational forbearers, radio stations owned by Stuart Epperson and his family members, between 1959 and 1970. Clearly, CRBCs did not emerge as a corporate response to the sorting of Evangelical Christians into the Republican Party, nor did they emerge after Republican activists courted leading Evangelical activists. On the contrary, by the time the Christian Right struck an alliance with the Republican Party, its activists – including (as I will

Table 2: Institutional norms of CRBCs with examples.

Institutional Norm	Example
Providing commercial services to donor-supported Christian Right advocacy organizations, parachurch groups, and churches.	Salem sells airtime to *Focus on the Family*.
Ongoing coordination by company leadership with broader Christian Right in formal venues.	Salem's participation in Council for National Policy.
Promoting and supporting civic and political engagement by local church congregations.	Salem hosts "pastor appreciation" luncheons in local communities.

Note: See Appendix B for supporting evidence.

demonstrate) leaders like Jerry Falwell – had already developed and mastered important features of the CRBC "organizational repertoire" (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). My findings indicate that CRBCs originated with social movement actors in the late 1950s *before* the federal government dismantled traditional patterns of white supremacy and elite rule in the South. Given that CRBCs originated with movement actors years before the institutional breaks of the 1970s, can theory on how social movements forge organizational innovation explain their emergence?

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

While institutional theory tends to explain organizational reproduction, stability, and conformity (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Jepperson 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977), scholars have demonstrated how the interests and agency of social movements contribute to organizational change (Armstrong 2002; Clemens 1993, 1997; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Rao et al. 2000).

Scholars now widely agree that movements are an important source of organizational innovation in politics, business, and other domains (see Walker 2012 for a review).

These theories tend to argue that social movement innovation originates with groups marginalized by dominant institutions (e.g. Clemens 1997; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch 2003). As such, scholars explaining the emergence of novel political organizations tend to focus on democratic challengers "battering down the walls of (…) political exclusion" (Skocpol 2011: 46) who must innovate new ways of doing politics—and new organizational forms to support those politics—in order to gain power in a system otherwise closed to them. This view of organizational innovation was first articulated in Clemens' foundational research demonstrating how the late 19th century women's movement drew from apolitical forms of organization such as the women's club to create a novel model of interest group politics (Clemens 1997). Clemens' research has been particularly influential for scholarship explaining how democratic challengers of the 1960s shaped the subsequent organizational development of US politics (e.g. Minkoff 1995; Skocpol 2003, 2011).

The logic of Clemens' theory is that a position of relative marginality provides movements with "means, motive, and opportunity" to engage in organizational innovation (Clemens 1997: 92). Yet this theory's casting of "democratic challengers as innovators" fails to explain why and how democracy's *resisters* – groups acting in defense of an exclusionary polity – developed the organizational form of the CRBC. To begin, democracy's *resisters* are not marginalized, like Clemens' actors, but rather are full members of the polity with full opportunities for public claims-making and political participation. As such, they should have little incentive to create new forms of political organization. Research does suggest that the perceived "threat" of integration and racial competition may spur counter-mobilization or novel

Table 3. Public events in local communities featuring national right-wing leaders promoted by Epperson radio stations, 1959-1970

Date	Leader	Type of Event	Location	Station(s)
October 12, 1959	Billy James Hargis	Anti-Communist Meeting	Petersburg, Virginia	WPVA
October 13, 1959	Billy James Hargis	Anti-Communist Meeting	Lynchburg, Virginia	WBRG
October 14, 1959	Billy James Hargis	Anti-Communist Meeting	Mt. Airy, North Carolina	WPAQ
December 3, 1959	Carl McIntire	Christian Americanism Rally	Lynchburg, Virginia	WBRG
October 14, 1961	Billy James Hargis	Anti-Communist Meeting	Hampton, Virginia	WPVA/ WLES
October 15, 1961	Billy James Hargis	Anti-Communist Meeting	Hampton, Virginia	WPVA/ WLES
October 15, 1961	Billy James Hargis	Appearance at Church	Newport News, Virginia	WPVA/ WLES
March 19, 1964	Carl McIntire	Anti-communist/civil rights meeting	Lynchburg, Virginia	WPAQ
February 9, 1967	Carl McIntire	Rally on "What You Should know About the National Council of Churches"	Winston-Salem, North Carolina	WKBX
March 17, 1970	Carl McIntire	Meeting	Roanoke, Virginia	WKBA
March 21, 1970	Carl McIntire	Meeting sponsored by anti-busing group	Winston-Salem, North Carolina	WKBX

Note: For data see Appendix C.

forms of segregation within the private sphere (e.g. Andrews 2002; Cunningham 2013), but these studies do not answer the question of why resisters would be incentivized to create a novel form of political organization. Why not use existing channels of political power and organization to which these groups already had easy access?

To answer this question, I turn to theories of right-wing mobilization and subnational democratization. McVeigh argues that right-wing movements mobilize when relatively powerful groups experience a loss of power that is sufficient to incentivize mobilization outside of routine institutional channels (McVeigh 2009). Moreover, recent literature on subnational authoritarianism and democratization (Gibson 2010; Mickey 2015) argues that the dismantling of white supremacist rule in the US South between 1944 and 1972 constituted a process of democratization that transformed institutions both *within* states and *between* states and the national polity (Mickey 2015)—a process that, per McVeigh, could spur relatively powerful groups to non-routine collective action. Before democratization, Mickey argues, Southern states were "authoritarian enclaves" within a democratic polity: regimes of one-party rule built atop an alliance between labor-repressive agriculture and the Democratic Party and dedicated to maintaining white supremacy and cheap agricultural labor. To control politics within the South, the region's rulers disenfranchised Black voters and crushed potential challengers in electoral politics and in civil society (ibid.: 53-59). Meanwhile, Southern control over the Democratic Party and the US Congress fended off federal meddling in the region's affairs (ibid.: 49-53). Bringing together McVeigh's and Mickey's scholarship, I argue that as ruling interests began to lose their traditional institutional mechanisms of exercising power over national and regional politics, their allies at the grassroots were incentivized to develop *new models of political*

organization for popular mobilization that they could use to defend or restore their power in an opening political landscape.

While politicians and labor repressive agriculture had the most to lose from the democratization of the South, relatively "grassroots" actors were also materially or culturally invested in maintaining the Southern regime (Bartley 1969; Crespino 2007; McMillen 1994). Local Fundamentalist Christian radio entrepreneurs constituted one such set of grassroots actors. These entrepreneurs were allied with enclave elites and already had created a niche for themselves as stewards of a restrictive Southern public sphere—a sphere that was now threatened by democratization. The national media's spotlight on Southern resistance to integration undermined a key mechanism of authoritarian rule: elite monopolization of information, especially between the South and the nation (Mickey 2015: 182 & 186). As I will show, CRBCs emerged as a grassroots response to the "threat" of democratization that built upon a pre-existing model of popular religious expression: the Fundamentalist Christian radio station. Grassroots actors used these stations to create novel media organizations linking local communities to national groups that tarred democratizing forces (such as civil rights leaders and federal officials) as illegitimate, typically by characterizing them as communists.

These activist-entrepreneurs faced a distinctive opportunity structure. While progressive US social movements faced an opportunity structure in the 1960s that increasingly legitimized organized political activity by marginal groups (Minkoff 1995; Skocpol 2003; Skrentny 2002), the organizational form innovated by the right-wing activists I study here developed in tension with – and was threatened by – the trajectory of the activist state. Right-wing activists such as Stuart Epperson developed a new organizational form during a kind of protracted "total mobilization" by Southern institutions to resist expanded citizenship rights (Mickey 2015: 173-

189). Alliance with the South's elite rulers created a favorable early context for CRBC emergence. But as democratization continued, activists had to adapt these forms to the democratic context or face repression.

The critical question was if and how CRBCs could survive a federal crackdown on right-wing programming that began in the mid-1960s (Matzko 2020). Existing historical scholarship has focused on how the crackdown used government requirements for balanced programming to crush early right-wing broadcasting (Hendershot 2011; Matzko 2020). Yet government requirements for balanced programming aside, the overwhelming thrust of US broadcasting policy has given private stations broad discretion over their operations (Simmons 1978: 189-228; see Starr 2004 on the relative autonomy of US media). I show that this policy framework made it relatively easy for entrepreneurs to convert their radio stations to anti-democratic purposes in the early phase of the democratic transition and, as the transition proceeded, to adapt CRBCs only partially while continuing to promote anti-democratic causes.

To summarize: by analyzing how right-wing movements meet the challenge of democratic transitions, I advance a novel institutionally-centered account of right-wing organizational development. Loss of state power during democratization incentivized right-wing movements to forge a new form of political organization and, further, state institutions structured movement opportunity for engaging in and sustaining that innovation. While the activists under analysis could not stop the democratic transition, they forged new repertoires of popular mobilization that survived the transition and, in time, made them powerful players in party politics. Findings furthermore suggest that Christian Right broadcasting companies are important mechanisms linking white backlash to civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s to rightwing anti-democratic authoritarianism in the present-day. In my conclusion, I discuss how my findings

complement and extend recent literature on how organizational responses by conservative elites determine the success or failure of democratization (Ziblatt 2017) and democratic backsliding (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mickey, Levitsky, and Way 2017).

Case selection, data, and methods

My findings are based on intensive study of local radio broadcast companies between the 1940s and 1970s. I centrally focus on the development of the forbearers of Salem Media Group: the Epperson stations in Virginia and North Carolina. My methodology is to tell a formation story, which provides a "narrative (account) of the emergence of a new social type" (Pacewicz 2022: 937; Hirschman and Reed 2014). Two arguments go into a formation story: one argument defines the "nature of a newly emergent phenomenon" and another narrates or explains its emergence (Pacewicz 2022: 938). I use novel quantitative data on radio stations both to select my case and to perform cross-case analysis to draw conclusions about conditions of necessity and sufficiency for the emergence of the CRBC form (Goertz and Mahoney 2012).

My research began with a general interest in the origins of rightwing media. I focused on the mid-1960s because this was roughly when postwar rightwing broadcasting was at its height (Matzko 2020) and, more practically, for when the most complete data was available. My strategy was to gain a complete picture of the field of rightwing radio to guide in-depth investigation of specific stations using a rich but largely unmined qualitative data source: the vast 669-box collection of far right preacher Carl McIntire housed at Princeton Theological Seminary, which contains correspondence with hundreds of radio stations that aired McIntire's radio program.

To create the 1965 dataset, I used radio data from the Broadcasting Yearbook, an industry reference, and collected data on nine rightwing programs from various archival sources. The result is a dataset consisting of 5,727 stations with variables including the number of minutes of rightwing programming that each station aired per week, station city and state, and station owner. No existing dataset documents the universe of radio stations for any year in the postwar period (nor rightwing programming at the station level). See Appendix D for supplementary information on the construction of this dataset.

The dataset revealed a clear pattern. Of stations with shared or interconnected ownership – so-called "group" stations – none aired more rightwing programming than the "Epperson" group (see Appendix D), the forbearers of Salem Media Group. Then, I turned to the McIntire papers, and discovered hundreds of pages of correspondence between McIntire and the Epperson family (and their respective employees) between 1959 and 1975. The letters revealed a long-lasting, and personal, relationship between the Eppersons and McIntire blending business, religion, and politics. Consulting secondary literature on Salem, I realized that key features of the company's institutional norms emerged not in the Reagan era (as existing accounts suggest) but more than twenty years earlier in the Epperson family radio stations. Together with original and secondary evidence on Salem and similar companies, this historical evidence led me to develop the CRBC concept and to ask how this organizational form emerged.

From the McIntire data and existing evidence, I realized that accounting for the development of the Epperson case required me to account also for the development of an earlier CRBC, a radio station owned by Stuart Epperson's alma mater Bob Jones University (BJU), an interdenominational Fundamentalist Christian institution located in Greenville, South Carolina. Stuart Epperson and Salem's other cofounder Edward Atsinger both studied radio at BJU in the

late 1950s and both worked at the university's radio station WMUU. My qualitative analysis led me to hypothesize that institutions identified with interdenominational Fundamentalist Christianity in the American South played an important role in the emergence of the CRBC form. With the radio station dataset, I was able to analyze a subset of 239 institutionally-owned radio stations that captured variation on this hypothesized explanatory factor and variation on the outcome of interest. (See Appendix E for supplementary information on this data subset). These cross-case analyses enabled me to draw conclusions about the necessity and sufficiency (Goertz and Mahoney 2012) of southern interdenominational Fundamentalism for CRBCs' emergence among institutionally-owned stations.

My units of inquiry are broadcast companies, though I also refer to the specific radio stations that these broadcast companies owned. I centrally focus on the development of organizations linked to Stuart Epperson. My narrative begins with radio companies where he worked before starting his own station in 1961 (these early stations belonged to his two older brothers, his father, and BJU). After 1961, I increasingly focus on those stations that Stuart Epperson owned himself and, beginning in the 1970s, those he co-owned with Salem cofounder Edward Atsinger. I analyze the development of broadcast companies from the 1940s through the 1970s, a long time span allowing me to capture temporal variation before, during, and after the emergence of the CRBC form.[3]

I complement the McIntire radio files and radio station dataset with other sources, including Stuart Epperson's master thesis at BJU, BJU course catalogues, and newspaper

[3] One clarifying note: legally, the Epperson family members' stations were independently owned, but I generally treat the stations as a single case (particularly in their early years) because of consistent evidence of coordination and shared ideology among the family members. Over the course of the 1960s, evidence indicates that these stations became increasingly independent of one another.

articles. I also draw from several other archival collections, especially the Federal Communications Commission broadcast license files, which I consulted for WMUU and all Epperson stations that I was able to obtain between 1948 and 1976. Finally, I use an existing dataset using the McIntire data by historian Paul Matzko (drawn from McIntire's ledgers) that documents the dates for which the preacher contracted with each radio station.

Findings

Organizational precursor to the CRBC

The organizational precursor to the CRBC was the commercial Fundamentalist Christian radio broadcasting company. Few religious radio stations existed before World War II, but these stations emerged in the late 1940s amid an explosion of radio station licensing by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (Ward 2009). The first of the Epperson family's nine stations and BJU's radio station WMUU respectively went on the air in 1948 and 1949.[4] Programming on these stations included news, music, and entertainment, but religious programs were an important feature of their daily schedule.[5]

As rising radio entrepreneurs, the Eppersons saw themselves as stewards of a highly restrictive and conservative Southern public sphere. The Epperson stations were initially low-powered, likely little-known outside their local communities, and located outside the "Black Belt," Southern counties with rich soil and large (often majority) Black populations that were home to the region's planter elites (Key 1949: 5-10). But membership in two social groups tied

[4] For overview of Epperson stations see "Broadcast Bureau's Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusion," November 15, 1962, Box 510, WKBA 7/1/1966-7/1/1971, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA). On WMUU see Turner (2001).

[5] For example, see WMUU Fall Schedule for September 1957, Box 323, WMUU 7/1/1956 - 7/1/1961, NARA or WBRG radio schedule on p. 4 of *The News and Advance*, October 12, 1957.

the Eppersons to the South's authoritarian regimes: first, the hardline movement within Evangelical Christianity known as Fundamentalism and, second, a Southern business class that was accommodated to the terms of white supremacy set by enclave rulers (Mickey 2015; Wright 2013).

Until the late 1940s, the Eppersons lived in Ararat, Virginia as tobacco farmers (Piore 2005). But Fundamentalist universities had opened some of the first programs for radio training in the US, creating an opportunity (along with the US army) for the Eppersons to enter radio.[6] The eldest Epperson son Ralph studied radio at the interdenominational Fundamentalist institution John Brown University from 1939 to 1942. Stuart Epperson later studied radio at BJU from 1954 to 1959.[7] Degrees in radio at BJU required classes in religious and commercial radio production and, "in line with the best educational practice of the time," offered hands-on experience at campus radio station WMUU.[8] Stuart Epperson worked at BJU's station WMUU as a student (as did Salem cofounder Edward Atsinger).[9]

While at first the Eppersons stations did not have an obvious political agenda, radio training at interdenominational Fundamentalist universities embedded the family institutionally within the South's power structures. Fundamentalism had begun as a relatively elite movement in the North rejecting liberalizing tendencies in Christianity, but the founding of these radio companies came at a moment in which the movement had become solidly populist in its anti-elitist popular appeal and increasingly Southern. Fundamentalists created an extensive cultural

[6] See "Directory of College Radio Courses," November 1, 1945, Federal Radio Education Committee, US Office of Education.
[7] "Broadcast Bureau's Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusion"
[8] Bob Jones University Bulletin, Catalog Issue, 1951-1952 and 1952-1953, p. 58. Bob Jones University Archives (BJUA).
[9] "Broadcast Bureau's Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusion," November 15, 1962, Box 510, WKBA 7/1/1966-7/1/1971, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA); "Amendment of Application," December 3, 1965, box 511, WKBQ 2/6/70 to 7/1/71, NARA.

infrastructure that ran parallel to mainstream society, in a network of bible institutes, universities, and radio programs that provided refuge for believers from modernism and secularism (Carpenter 1997). In the 1920s and 1930s the movement also moved South. BJU and other interdenominational institutions – free from resistance to Fundamentalism from entrenched interests in the region's major denominational bodies like the Southern Baptist Convention – became leading outposts for southern Fundamentalism (Dochuk 2010; Glass 2001 81-133; Williams 2010). In the South generally and at these interdenominational institutions specifically, popular models of religious mobilization such as radio evangelicalism conjoined with a political culture of *herrenvolk* democracy (Dochuk 2010; Roediger 1991), oriented around the white male franchise and the self-reliant producer.

South Carolina governor (and later Senator) Strom Thurmond, a leading architect of southern resistance to desegregation, was a trustee of BJU and helped the university navigate state bureaucracies when it moved to his state from Tennessee in 1947 (Crespino 2012). He also specifically backed the university's radio stations. He wrote to the FCC in 1949 to inquire about the university's application for a campus radio station and corresponded with BJU founder Bob Jones about the station's progress.[10]

Fundamentalist radio entrepreneurs were an emergent force in the South's restricted public sphere. Newspapers across much of the region tended to be conservative and to support white supremacy, generally keeping controversial discussions of race off their pages, while enclave rules repressed dissenting sources of information (Mickey 2015; Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). The Eppersons found a niche within this landscape, choosing sites for stations where there

[10] Letter to T.J. Slowie from J. Strom Thurmond, August 9, 1948, FCC Broadcast License Files, Box 219, Folder WMUU 12/15/1949-7/1/1951, NARA; Letter to J. Strom Thurmond from Bob Jones, February 25, 1960, Strom Thurmond Collection, Gubernatorial Series, Box 7, Folder 88, Clemson University.

was available commercial support from local industry but relatively little competition from existing media.[11]

We know relatively little about the Eppersons' ideological outlook prior to the late 1950s, but evidence from their early letters to McIntire shows that they saw themselves as part of a conservative Southern business class. Ralph Epperson admired a prominent advocate for a conservative model of Southern industrial growth based on union-free workforce, low taxes, and (until the early 1960s) white supremacy.[12] Ralph Epperson built the family's first station WPAQ on the land of a conservative textile firm owner with whom he shared political information.[13] Yet at first these private views appear not to have found consistent expression in the stations' public behavior.

From their beginnings, early Fundamentalist radio broadcasting companies were closely tied to local Fundamentalist churches. Programming produced by local ministries was an important part of their daily schedules. As WMUU station manager Ryerson would later say in an oral interview, selling airtime to local preachers was "the best way to make money(…). You just put the tape on and play it."[14] In fact, in 1956, Epperson station WBRG in Lynchburg, Virginia became the first to ever put future Christian Right leader Jerry Falwell on the air (Falwell 1997: 219-223). Falwell credited the station as an important factor in his church's rapid growth (ibid).

[11] Epperson, Stuart Watson, September 1959 "Federal Communications Commission Form 301: Application for Authority to Construct a New AM (Standard) Broadcast Station," Presented to the Faculty of the School of Fine Arts Bobb Jones University, in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Arts, BJUA.
[12] He specifically admired Thurman Sensing, research director of Southern States Industrial Council. See Letter to Arthur Gurley Jr. from Ralph Epperson, June 9, 1959, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15, PTS. On Sensing's vision of a white supremacist model of South's economic modernization, see Ward (2011).
[13] Letter to JC Crossingham from Ralph Epperson, March 31, 1959, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15, PTS.
[14] "Oral History Interviews with Jim Richard Ryerson (1917-2004)," conducted by John Matzko, 2002, BJUA.

In sum: Fundamentalist radio stations did not have an obvious political agenda from the late 1940s through most of the 1950s, yet were an emergent force in a highly restrictive public sphere accommodated to white supremacy. The stations represented an organizational template of popular religious expression and, as I will show, provided the basis for CRBCs' emergence.

Pre-conditions for CRBC emergence

Over the course of the 1950s, democratization challenges by the civil rights movement and the federal government increasingly threatened institutional supports of authoritarian rule in the South. These challenges, and brutal countermobilization by elite and grassroots white southerners, drew growing national media attention that signaled the breakdown of a critical institutional support of enclave rule: the ability of elites to control the national polity and, especially, to control the flow of information between the South and the nation (Mickey 2015). In response, democracy's resisters engaged in an increasingly sophisticated propaganda campaign that, by the end of the 1950s, would enlist Fundamentalist Christian radio stations.

High-profile events marked the intensification of democratization challenges during the 1950s, beginning with the *Brown vs Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 (Mickey 2015). Before *Brown*, the national media had little interest in the South, but the prospect of desegregation drew the media's attention (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). From the murder of Emmitt Till to the Montgomery bus boycott, media interest intensified with each ratcheting challenge to enclave rule, and each wave of reaction by the white countermovement known as "massive resistance" (ibid.) Media interest reached new heights during the Little Rock desegregation crisis in August 1957. "For two months," write Roberts and Klibanoff, "Little

Rock would have a firm grip on page one" and dominated television coverage (Roberts and Klibanoff: 164).

In the wake of the *Brown* decision, massive resistance by Southern elites and grassroots movements like the Citizens Councils used a variety of methods to resist these challenges, including economic coercion, school closures, and (most importantly here) propaganda campaigns (Bartley 1969; Lewis 2006). Resisters believed that they were becoming shut out by the so-called "paper curtain" of national media (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). They engaged in a sustained if loosely coordinated propaganda campaign in print and over the airwaves that framed regional concerns about race within national concerns such as anti-communism (Lewis 2006).

White Southern propaganda campaigns found allies in two actors that had recently emerged at the national level – both of whom would become important for the emergence of CRBCs. First, there was the rise of anti-communist Fundamentalist parachurch organizations, including Carl McIntire's American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) and Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade (Huntington 2021; Ruotsila 2016). These organizations spanned denominations to fight factional disputes within Fundamentalism and, especially with the rise of the Cold War and McCarthyism the 1950s, increasingly tied Fundamentalism to anti-communist politics (Williams 2010). McIntire furthermore pioneered the use of public demonstrations and rallies as techniques for politically mobilizing Fundamentalist Christians (Ruotsila 2016). During the 1950s, McIntire and Hargis (despite not living in the South themselves) allied closely with massive resistance at both elite and grassroots levels (Crespino 2007; Huntington 2021; Matzko 2020; Ruotsila 2016).

Second, there was the rise of the conservative movement. Centered around *National Review* magazine, intellectuals such as William F. Buckley created so-called "fusionist

conservatism" by combining free market ideology, social traditionalism, and militant anti-communism (Nash 2006; Schoenwald 2001). The conservative movement had both mainstream and far right wings, the latter of which included McIntire and Hargis (Schoenwald 2001). Though largely distinguished by style more than substance – the far right tended to be "tacky" compared to more elite mainstream conservatives – the far right was more closely aligned with overt white supremacy and engaged in conspiratorialism (Hendershot 2011: 7). Conservative activism especially focused on challenging and bypassing the "liberal bias" of mainstream media, creating a network of ideological print magazines and radio shows supported by businessmen and audiences (Hemmer 2016). National-level conservative media activism supported the South's propaganda campaign against democratization (Huntington 2021).

These three forces – massive resistance, anticommunist Fundamentalism, and the conservative movement – came together as far right preachers like Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis turned to radio in the late 1950s. Especially after the Little Rock Crisis in September 1957, Fundamentalist preachers such as Carl McIntire began to speak out against desegregation and aligned with massive resistance (Huntington 2021; Matzko 2020). These preachers and other rightwing figures created radio programs and began to search for radio stations willing to sell them airtime. They found willing stations across the country, but especially so in the South where national media attention was an increasingly unwanted presence (Matzko 2020).

Fundamentalist radio and democratization

Evidence shows that both BJU and the Eppersons were allies of massive resistance who sought to use their radio stations to bypass and challenge the mainstream media on the South's democratization. These stations were in no position to restore the South's loss of power in US

governance, nor could they seriously rival the national media's power, but they could – and did – link their communities to an emergent national conservative movement resisting democratization.

Massive resistance reached its height from 1956 to 1960, peaking with the Little Rock crisis in the summer and fall of 1957 (Bartley 1969: 276), and coincided with Salem's cofounders' education at BJU. Though a regional phenomenon, massive resistance was particularly intense in the Deep South, including BJU's home state of South Carolina. "South Carolina's leaders were second to none" in their defense of Jim Crow in the late 1950s (Mickey 2015: 215) and BJU trustee Strom Thurmond was a leading author of the "Southern manifesto" in which Southern politicians pledged to resist compliance with desegregation (Crespino 2012). BJU's location in Greenville, South Carolina placed it outside of the Black Belt, where enclave rule was strongest, but Greenville nevertheless became a site of local resistance to desegregation in the late 1950s (Bagwell 1972).

WMUU (BJU's radio station) was an early beachhead in McIntire's storm through the South. In March 1958, it became the second station in the South and the first institutionally-owned station in the US to air McIntire's program, *The Twentieth Century Reformation Hour*.[15] A Fundamentalist layman and supporter of South Carolina's segregationist governor first contacted McIntire and offered to raise money from his church to air McIntire's program at WMUU. The layman wrote: "the Christian people have their eyes opened as to what is happening in our churches and our schools (…). (Segregationist South Carolina) Governor Timmerman has announced that the schools in South Carolina are being filled with this subtle godless communism. The first college to line with this menace is the colored Methodist School

[15] Dataset provided to author by Paul Matzko, "The Reformation Hour, Station by Station, Revised," no date.

in the southern part of the state."[16] In early correspondence, WMUU's staff sent McIntire approving updates on how the state's segregationist politicians responded to "Communist" threat in schools and in clergy.[17] Staff at WMUU also shared with McIntire letters protesting the supposedly anti-conservative bias of the wire services from which they purchased national news stories.[18]

Stuart Epperson heard McIntire's program on WMUU in 1958, almost certainly for the first time (recall that WMUU was the second station in the South to air the program). Epperson wrote in the family's first letter to McIntire in February 1959: "Having lived in this section most of my life and having heard you on WMUU, I know that it [McIntire's radio show] is a much needed program. I feel with deep conviction that the response will be great, as real Christians always respond to the Truth."[19] Exposure at WMUU was apparently critical to Stuart's contracting with McIntire on behalf of his family's stations. As McIntire put it in a 1959 letter to another station owner, Stuart "just graduated from Bob Jones University and listened to my program for a year there. He persuaded his family to take on our program at amazingly low rates, so we have stepped out."[20]

The Eppersons were also partisans of massive resistance – a fact suggested by the McIntire radio files, but conclusively demonstrated by correspondence with a prominent white supremacist. In 1960, Stuart Epperson wrote to an emeritus Biology professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill who (in the words of a historian of massive resistance) "almost

[16] Letter to Carl McIntire from Andrew J. Sherrard, February 10, 1958, CMMC, Box 522, Folder 32, PTS
[17]Letter to Carl McIntire from George T. Sprout, November 1, 1958, CMMC, Box 522, Folder 32, PTS; Letter to Carl McIntire from Jim Ryerson, November 18, 1958, CMMC, Box 522, Folder 32, PTS.
[18] See e.g. letter to Samuel G. Blackman from Jim Ryerson, June 29, 1961, CMMC, Box 522, Folder 32, PTS.
[19] Letter to Carl McIntire from Stuart Epperson, February 13, 1959, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15, PTS.
[20] Letter to Wade G. McCargo from Carl McIntire, February 14, 1959, CMMC, Box 522, Folder 16, PTS.

single-handedly breathed new life into moribund (segregationist group) Patriots of North Carolina by using the group to popularize his theories of racial science" (Lewis 2006: 107) Stuart Epperson wrote approvingly of the professor's work, writing that "my father, brothers, and I are doing our best to offset the 'liberal' propaganda that has brainwashed so many persons in our country during the past few decades."[21] Indeed, the family's stations aired the radio programs of multiple white supremacists, including an eight-hour "marathon" Billy James Hargis special program featuring a mastermind of massive resistance, Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland.[22]

To sum up: as the institutional supports of Southern enclave rule came under assault, preachers like McIntire and Hargis turned to radio and found Southern Fundamentalist radio companies eager to air their programs, including one station owned by a large institution. And as I show next, WMUU and the Epperson stations began to exhibit novel institutional norms by consistently linking national rightwing advocacy organizations to local church congregations for the purpose of achieving shared political goals.

CRBC Emergence

Here, I summarize evidence that between 1958 and 1960 WMUU and the Epperson stations became some of the first radio stations in the country to exhibit the three institutional norms that define CRBCs.

First, as noted above, the stations began to sell airtime to national rightwing advocacy organizations. Programming guides reveal a change in the stations' operations. Before 1958,

[21] Letter to W.C. George from Stuart Epperson, June 16, 1960, W.C. George Papers, 1904-1971, Box 8, Folder 50, University of North Carolina, Duke Special Collection.
[22] "Marathon Re-Broadcasts in Great Demand," *Christian Crusade*, July 1960, https://archive.org/details/HARGISBillyJamesChristianCrusadeHQ973475181/page/n125/mode/2up?view=theater; "Anti-Communist Marathon is Announced," *The Jackson Independent*, March 24, 1960, p. 5.

these stations may have engaged in rightwing politics at the local level, but only BJU's WMUU aired a single national program of a rightwing figure (that of preacher John Rice).[23] Then from 1958-1959, the stations began to air Carl McIntire's program, *Twentieth Century Reformation Hour,* and the program of another prominent radio preacher: Billy James Hargis's *Christian Crusade*, affiliated with a rightwing group of the same name. Other programs included the *Independent American*, led by the segregationist activist Kent Courtney, and Smoot *Report*, hosted by a rightwing ex-FBI agent. Table 4 lists the rightwing programming that the Epperson stations aired beginning in 1959.[24]

Recall that Carl McIntire was the first Fundamentalist minister to control a national rightwing advocacy organization and also have a nationally-distributed radio program. WMUU was the first-institutionally-owned station in the country to sell airtime to this program. The Epperson stations were the first to do so among so-called "group stations"– an industry term for multiple stations with linked ownership. It is thus safe to conclude that the broadcast companies under analysis not only were among the first to embrace the CRBC form, but also the first *highly-resourced* companies to do so.

Second, the stations consistently coordinated with early leaders of the Christian Right to achieve shared political goals. McIntire and other programs paid the stations for airtime, but management at BJU and the Eppersons made clear in their correspondence with McIntire that theirs was more than a commercial relationship. Spreading McIntire's message was a vital part of their mission. The stations became exponents of conservative "fusionism," albeit a far right strand prone to conspiratorialism and aligned with maintaining white supremacy in the South

[23] Fall Schedule for September 1957, Box 323, WMUU 7/1/1956 - 7/1/1961, NARA.

[24] Matzko dataset and "International Radio Network." "Christian Crusade Radio Network," November 1960, Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Christian Crusade, Group Research Inc. Records.

(Huntington 2021). The stations shared information with McIntire, hosted McIntire and Hargis in local rallies, distributed pamphlets locally, and kept listeners abreast of their organizations' engagements in local communities.[25] As Ralph Epperson telegrammed to McIntire in a typical message from 1961: "PLEASE RUSH ANY AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON (Communist influence over) UNICEF. A CIVIC CLUB IS INTERESTED."[26]

Third, and building on the two previous points, the stations promoted the civic and political engagement of local communities and, especially, church congregations. For example, a listener of one Epperson station in the small city of Petersburg, Virginia wrote to McIntire about having persuaded staff at a local church Sunday school to travel to see an ACCC leader speak in Richmond. "We got three carloads to go," the listener wrote in May 1959, "and they have promised to go the 8th of next month when you (McIntire) come. I sure hope we can go."[27] In many cases, local committees of listeners paid for McIntire's program to air on these local stations (see e.g. Dunn 1964; Matzko 2020)

To illustrate how CRBCs linked national rightwing advocacy groups to local communities, I highlight the important role that the Epperson stations played in promoting local public events (such as rallies) led by McIntire or Hargis. As shown in Table 3, between 1959 and 1970 the Epperson stations promoted at least eleven local public events over six separate trips by these preachers. In some cases, evidence indicates that the stations sponsored these events. In December 1959, Stuart wrote to the preacher that "as owners of Radio Station WBRG, we

[25] These findings summarize findings from CMMC from Box 515, Folders 32, 35, 53; Box 521, Folders 13, 15, 31, 38, and 44; Box 522, Folder 4; Box 527, Folder 5; and Box 522, Folder 4. For examples see: Letter to Arthur Gurley Jr. from Ralph Epperson, June 9, 1959, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15, PTS; Letter to Carl McIntire from Stuart Epperson, September 12, 1961, CMMC, Box 515, Folder 32, PTS; Letter to Stuart Epperson from Carl McIntire, February 13, 1967, CMMC, Box 515, Folder 35, PTS.
[26] Telegram to Carl McIntire from Ralph Epperson, October 20, 1961, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15.
[27] "Audience of 20th Century Reformation Hour Growing in Numbers and Interest," May 7, 1959, Page 6, Christian Beacon.

Table 4. Overview of conservative programming on Epperson stations

Call letters (Epperson Owner)	**Conservative programs on Epperson stations at any time between 1959-1981***	**Minutes of conservative programming/ week in 1965**	**Years airing *20th Century Reformation Hour* (TCRH)**
WKBA (Stuart)	CC; TCRH; LL; IA	375	1961-1981
WLLY (Harry Jr)	CC; TCRH; LL; IA	345	1960-(at least) 1973
WPAQ (Ralph)	CC; MF; TCRH; IA; BTH	300	1959-(at least)1973
WLES (Harry Sr.)	MF; RH: LL; BTH	285	1959-1969
WRAA (Harry Sr.)	TCRH; LL	255	1962-(at least) 1973
WBRG (Harry Sr.)	MF; TCRH; BTH	180	1959-1965
WPNC (Harry Sr.)	TCRH; BTH	165	1959-1964
WKBX (Stuart)	LL; TCRH	105	1964-1965 & 1967-1971

*Key to programs: BTH: Behind the Headlines; CC: Christian Crusade; Independent American; LL: Life Line; IA: MF: Manion Forum; TCRH: Twentieth Century Reformation Hour.
Source: See Appendix D.

feel honored to have been able to sponsor a rally such as that."[28] In other cases, evidence suggests the stations merely advertised the events on their stations.[29]

While many visits appear to have been one-offs, in October 1959 Billy James Hargis effectively embarked on an anti-Communist speaking tour of local cities where stations recently had begun to air his program. This was the first trip that Hargis had made to North Carolina,

[28] Letter to Carl McIntire from Stuart Epperson, December 12, 1959, CMMC, Box 515, Folder 53, PTS. See also "Dr. Hargis to Speak Here Friday Night," *The Daily Press,* October 12, 1961, p. 15.
[29] Letter to Carl McIntire from Ralph Epperson, March 25, 1964, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 15, PTS.

Virginia, or South Carolina that is documented in newspapers indexed in digital newspaper repositories.[30] Hargis stopped first in three small Virginia and North Carolina cities where

Epperson stations played his program and then held a two day "Christian Crusade" conference at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina.[31] For each stop, Hargis ran advertisements in local newspapers announcing his arrival – "HEAR THE DARING, AUTHENTIC FACTS ABOUT RED INFLUENCE!" – and listed the local radio stations where his program could be heard.[32] It is unclear exactly what role the stations played in this tour, but the timing suggests that as local stations started to air his program, Hargis took advantage of his growing name recognition in these Southern communities. A local newspaper noted that the eldest Epperson son, Ralph, attended one rally in North Carolina, quoted him as praising the preacher for drawing a crowd of six hundred people, and listed the times that Hargis' program could be heard on Ralph's station WPAQ (Anon 1959).

In short, between 1958 and 1960 the stations under analysis stations began to embrace the CRBC form: selling airtime to rightwing advocacy groups, coordinating with these groups on shared political goals, and promoting the civic and political engagement of local communities and, especially, church congregations.

Institutionalization of CRBCs

[30] I searched for news articles on Billy James Hargis for these three states in www.newspapers.com and www.newspaperarchive.com on December 22, 2023.
[31] See Billy James Hargis advertisements in *The Hopewell News*, October 9, 1959, p. 2. and *Winston-Salem Journal* October 12, 1959, p. 7'; "Anti-Red Group to hold first SC conference soon," *The State,* October 13, 1959, p. 6a.
[32] Ibid.

The Eppersons' and BJUs' embrace of the CRBC organizational form was never on firm legal ground as the policies of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the federal agency that licensed broadcast stations, required balanced programming on controversial issues (Simmons 1978). Yet between 1958 and 1963 enforcement of these policies was lax. Meanwhile, owner-activists had created a new organizational form during a kind of protracted "total mobilization" by Southern institutions to resist expanded citizenship rights (Mickey 2015)– providing a favorable opportunity context for the form of the CRBC to become quickly institutionalized. By the early 1960s, CRBCs had become institutionalized in two senses.

First, CRBCs were institutionalized in the sense of being supported by actors within the South's authoritarian enclaves. As the Jim Crow order came under threat from civil rights challengers, politicians and pro-segregationist citizens groups welcomed rightwing programming and CRBCs where they emerged. By 1960, South Carolina Senator and arch segregationist Strom Thurmond, a BJU trustee, had his own program on campus station WMUU.[33] A Greenville, South Carolina city council alderman and leader in the local segregationist Citizens' Council paid to air one rightwing program, *The Smoot Report*, on WMUU.[34] The Virginia pro-segregationist group Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual liberties sought to promote McIntire's program on one of the Epperson stations (it is unclear if they actually did so).[35]

By the early 1960s, these stations explicitly framed their stations as a voice for conservatism and an alternative to the "liberal" mainstream media. In March 1963, WMUU solicited advertising support from a local firm with a promise to present a "nationally released

[33] WMUU program schedule, FCC Broadcast License Files, Box 165, Folder WMUU, 7/1/1956-7/1/1961, NARA
[34]"Dr. Jones Jr. Calls Council 'Arrogant and Totalitarian.'" *The Greenville News*, June 14, 1962, pg 2.
[35] Letter to Harry Epperson Jr. from Carl McIntire, July 19, 1961, CMMC, Box 521, Folder 38, PTS.

conservative, patriotic side of the news."[36] Similarly, in 1962 one of Stuart Epperson's own stations ran an ad in a Roanoke, Virginia newspaper in the wake of a magazine's exposé on how McIntire and Hargis had accused church leadership of being communists (largely for support of civil rights) and invited readers to listen to WKBA to "hear the other side of the story."[37]

One public event promoted by the Epperson stations vividly illustrates how CRBCs had become a fixture of local resistance to the South's democratization. In March 1964, just before the US Senate began debate on the Civil Rights Act, a group of local segregationists sponsored an appearance by Carl McIntire in Lynchburg, Virginia. Among the event's sponsors was a rising local preacher airing daily on Epperson station WBRG: future Christian Right leader Jerry Falwell, who was also a featured speaker at the event (Anon 1964; Dunn 1964). By 1964, McIntire and Falwell's programs had appeared in the same morning line-up on WBRG for five years. The group that regularly sponsored McIntire's program on WBRG were local allies of Falwell in the fight against integration and helped bring McIntire to Lynchburg (Williams 1964).

An imperfect, but still useful, indicator shows that by the early 1960s CRBCs had gained a toehold in the South. The indicator consists of stations that aired the two programs most closely tied to the early Christian Right, those of McIntire and Hargis. In 1960, twenty stations aired both Hargis and McIntire's programs, thirteen were in the South, and five belonged to the Eppersons personally. As seen in Map 1, by the mid-1960s, 61 stations aired McIntire and Hargis's programs, 36 of them in the South.

Second, CRBCs were institutionalized at Southern universities affiliated with Fundamentalism, particularly at Bob Jones University. Analysis of the sub-sample of radio stations owned by educational institutions from the 1965 radio dataset yields three main findings.

[36] Letter to Tom Graham from Dave Yearick, March 1, 1963, BJU, BJUA.
[37] WKBA advertisement, *The Roanoke Times*, April 23, 1962, pg 3.

First, the two institutions to own stations that aired McIntire and Hargis' programs – John Brown University and Bob Jones University – were located in the South and current or historically identified with interdenominational Fundamentalism. (Note that John Brown's campus was located in Arkansas, but its station KGER was located in Southern California). Second, *all* stations owned by interdenominational Southern educational institutions belonged to John Brown and Bob Jones Universities and *all* aired at least one program of the early Christian Right (that of McIntire). Third, two groups of radio stations that plausibly might have aired McIntire and Hargis' programs did not do so: (1) stations owned by Northern Fundamentalist institutions and (2) stations owned by comparatively moderate southern Evangelical institutions such as the Southern Baptist Convention (on the relative moderation of Southern Baptism in the 1960s see [Williams 2010: 42]). Appendix E contains supplementary analyses of the institutional dataset.

Map 1. Christian Right Broadcasting Companies (CRBCs) in 1965.
Note: This map uses stations that aired the radio programs of McIntire and Hargis as an approximate indicator of CRBCs. The map shows that Southern Fundamentalist universities owned both university-owned radio stations that functioned as CRBCs. Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina owned radio station WMUU. John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas owned station KGER in Long Beach, California.

Thus, Stuart Epperson's radio training at BJU was almost unique: the university both provided professional broadcast training *and* owned a radio station that functioned as a CRBC. In fact, Epperson effectively learned how to run a CRBC as a student in radio and trainee at station WMUU. Epperson not only heard McIntire's program, but his master's thesis – an annotated broadcast license likely modelled on BJU campus radio station WMUU – describes his intentions to build a commercial radio station that "will propagate the fundamentals of Protestant Christianity."[38] Salem co-founder Edward Atsinger also worked at WMUU shortly after it began to function as a CRBC. In the late 1960s, Atsinger started his own station in North Carolina – and in 1969, it also began airing McIntire's program.[39]

In short, due to a highly favorable opportunity structure during an intense period of mobilization by the South, CRBCs and rightwing programming had been partially institutionalized. But with the rise of the activist state, rightwing programming began to attract federal scrutiny.

Crackdown on CRBCs

The crackdown on rightwing radio in the early 1960s was one part in the broader rise of the "activist state" wherein (among other interventions) the federal government sharply stepped up protections for minority rights (Skrentny 2002). Growing federal power brought great institutional change: under the twin pressures of the activist state and the Civil Rights movement, the Jim Crow regimes that previously had granted CRBCs a degree of legitimacy began to

[38] Epperson, Stuart Watson, September 1959 "Federal Communications Commission Form 301: Application for Authority to Construct a New AM (Standard) Broadcast Station," Presented to the Faculty of the School of Fine Arts Bobb Jones University, in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Arts.
[39] Matzko dataset

crumble (Mickey 2015). Meanwhile, as rightwing radio exploded from the late 1950s to early 1960s, liberal elites inside and outside government attempted to silence rightwing broadcasters (Matzko 2020). A network of liberals in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the executive branch of the federal government, and in civil society (especially unions and liberal churches) wielded a powerful tool to crush rightwing broadcasting: the "fairness doctrine," an FCC rule that since 1949 had required broadcast licensees to air opposing points of view on controversial issues and yet heretofore was unenforced. Censorship fell particularly hard on Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis, leading figures in far right media activism (the FCC even stripped McIntire of his radio station license), and these figures faded in the 1970s (Hendershot 2011; Matzko 2020). But the FCC and liberal opponents also targeted stations airing McIntire's and Hargis' programs, especially by making use of the most specific provision of the fairness doctrine: a requirement that stations grant individuals the right to reply to personal attacks (Simmons 1978). Over the course of the 1960s, liberal advocacy groups increasingly challenged the broadcast licenses of stations that did not honor the personal attack rule (Matzko 2020).

In short, a changing institutional landscape forced rightwing radio companies to respond. Certain companies defiantly challenged the FCC, leading to a landmark Supreme Court ruling upholding the fairness doctrine (Matzko 2020). But rather than resisting, the Epperson stations responded to the democratic transition by partially adapting. The stations complied with the personal attack rule and, in some cases, cut back on their rightwing programming (see Table 4). Yet many Epperson stations – especially those belonging to Stuart – continued to function as CRBCs. How did they get away with it?

The details of US broadcasting policy help to clarify the opportunity context that the Eppersons encountered. These policy details show how it difficult it was for liberals to shut

down ideologically committed activist-owners like the Eppersons. First, while the personal attack rule did make specific requirements of station owners, the FCC's broader requirement for ideological balance was so loose as to effectively allow stations to "favor one spokesman or viewpoint over another" (Simmons 1978: 195). An opposing spokesperson simply had to be given some (unspecified) amount of time to respond, at an hour and in a format of the station's choosing, and the station could continue to air programming with a clear ideological bias (ibid: 194-197). Second, the FCC did not have the resources to monitor violations of even this minimal requirement. The burden of proof lay with private complainants to present "detailed and specific" evidence that a station had presented only one side of an issue (ibid: 209). A 1977 primer on the fairness doctrine captured the burden facing complainants: "what is required is a total monitoring of a licensee's programming (…), which is nearly impossible" (ibid: 209).

In brief, the US broadcasting system gave substantial leeway to CRBCs' activist-entrepreneurs. The Epperson stations did adapt to a changing institutional landscape, but they also took advantage of the opportunity to continue promoting anti-democratic causes.

The Epperson stations adapt…

Evidence indicates that the Eppersons complied with (or avoided) the FCC regulation that individuals be granted a "right to reply" to personal attack. In a 1977 newspaper interview, an employee of Stuart Eppersons' Roanoke, Virginia station WKBA explained how he responded when someone (likely a liberal watchdog) sent letters demanding the right to reply to attacks by a syndicated radio preacher: "I don't know what the other stations did, but we gave him time" (Wright 1977). The employee also noted the station had generally avoided complaints regarding its programming, but to avoid potential problems he had cut out an attack by Jerry Falwell on

Jimmy Carter. This approach was apparently effective. According to a 1981 interview, a WKBA employee stated that the station only had to grant requests twice in his fifteen years at the station (covering almost the entire period of the crackdown on rightwing programming) (Haner 1981).

The Epperson stations adapted their stations in at least one other way. In the rapidly shifting institutional environment of the Upper South, where desegregation was already underway by the early 1960s (Lassiter 2006), two stations began to feature Black programming or coverage of civil rights issues that won praise from the NAACP even before the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[40] Winning the NAACP's endorsement almost certainly reduced the chances of serious fairness doctrine challenges, as the group participated in license challenges elsewhere (Matzko 2020). Yet this programming on just two Epperson stations was dwarfed by the rightwing programming that aired across all the family's stations.

…but still promote anti-democratic causes

Most Epperson stations, and especially those belonging to Stuart, continued to function as CRBCs through the 1960s and 1970s and continued airing McIntire's program through the crackdown.

As seen in Table 3, the stations also continued to promote McIntire in local public events. In 1967, McIntire made a public appearance in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and broadcast locally from Stuart Epperson's station WKBX, writing afterwards: "I cannot tell you, Stuart, how

[40] Letter to WBRG from Robert D Robertson (President of Virginia NAACP) and W Lester Banks (Executive Secretary), October 26, 1961, FCC Broadcast License Files, Box 149, Folder WBRG 7/1/1961 - 7/1/1966, NARA; Letter to Stuart Epperson from Rev R.R. Wilkinson (President of Roanoke Branch of NAACP) and Angeline L Jones (Corresponding Secretary), August 2, 1962, FCC Broadcast License Files, Box 510, Folder WKBA 7/1/1966-7/1/1971, NARA.

much I appreciate the Epperson family and all that your Dad and you have done to help the broadcast along. You have stood by us and helped us in so many ways and in difficult times."[41]

Events in 1970 make particularly clear that the Epperson stations – especially those belonging to Stuart – continued to provide a platform to (now thinly veiled) anti-democratic causes. In March 1970, two of Stuart's stations in Virginia and North Carolina, WKBA and WKBX, helped to promote local public events led by Carl McIntire. These visits were sponsored by local pastors who appeared regularly on Stuart Epperson's stations. A month after McIntire's visits, these pastors chartered buses to a McIntire-led rally in Washington, DC boosting US victory in the Vietnam War.

These events once again linked white reaction against desegregation to anti-communism. The McIntire rally in North Carolina was sponsored by a local anti-busing group that Epperson's station repeatedly provided with airtime. In addition to sponsoring two local rallies featuring Carl McIntire, the group sponsored rallies featuring segregationist Georgia governor Lester Maddox (Anon 1970c, Anon 1970b, Anon 1970d). On McIntire's March 1970 visit to North Carolina – during which he also appeared on WKBX – he gave a speech praising the white supremacist government of Rhodesia and promoted the march in Washington D.C. (Anon 1970a). Then, a few weeks later, the primetime speaker at McIntire's Washington D.C. victory march was again Lester Maddox. The governor framed the federal government as an illegitimate conquering force of the South, declaring that "the only military victories this country has won since World War II were in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama."[42] There is no evidence that the stations' support for these anti-democratic causes provoked complaint or a response by the FCC.

[41] Letter to Stuart Epperson from Carl McIntire, February 13, 1967, CMMC, Box 515, Folder 35, PTS.
[42] "Let's have victory in Vietnam," Christian Beacon, April 16, 1970, Box 229, Folder 14, CMMC.

During the 1970s, the Epperson stations were a local voice for the "old" Christian Right represented by McIntire, the "new" Christian Right represented by an increasingly political Jerry Falwell, and allied conservative figures such as Ronald Reagan.[43] Stuart Epperson's WKBA continued selling airtime to McIntire as late as 1981 (Haner 1981), well after Salem's unofficial founding in 1974.

To sum up: the Epperson stations had adapted to the democratic context, ceding to requirements of a changed institutional landscape. Yet this adaption was only partial, as the stations continued to air programs promoting anti-democratic causes even as the democratic transition drew to a close.

CRBCs at the dawn of the Reagan era

CRBCs faced a mixed picture at the dawn of the Reagan era. In many ways repression had worked, as evidenced by the decline of figures like McIntire during the 1970s. Yet the survival of the adapted CRBC form is clear in the early years of Salem, which was unofficially founded in 1974 as Epperson went into business with his brother-in-law Edward Atsinger.

While Salem at first did not publicly frame itself as aligned with the right (this was likely too risky with the Fairness Doctrine still in place) (Piore 2005), Salem entered into business with a rising generation of Evangelical leaders using similar organizational models to those that owner-activists like the Eppersons had innovated twenty years earlier. Salem's cofounder Atsinger was a fellow BJU alumni who, like Epperson, had worked at WMUU (specifically from

[43] On Reagan, see advertisement in *Broadcasting*, Jun 16, 1975; 88, 24; On Falwell, see "Broadcasting Log" on p. 8 of i "01-26-1979 (The Journal Champion Volume 1, Issue 19)" (1979). 1978 -- 1980. 20. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/paper_78_80/20.

1959-1961, when the station was beginning to function as a CRBC).[44] So was early Salem executive Robert W. Ball, who had also managed a radio station that appears to have functioned as a CRBC in the mid-1960s: KPDQ of Portland, Oregon, which Salem purchased in 1986 (Anon 1965, Anon 2017).[45] Salem also purchased two university-owned stations that functioned as CRBCs in the postwar period, buying John Brown University's KGER in 1986 and Bob Jones University's WMUU in 2012 (Anon 2017).

Beginning in 1977, early Salem stations were among the first in the country to air James Dobson's program *Focus on the Family*, one of the most influential radio programs of the Christian Right. By 1982, seven of Salem's eight stations aired Falwell or Dobson's programs.[46]

One development strikingly illustrates how Salem's early days built upon early CRBCs. In 1976, Stuart Epperson purchased a radio station from an old ally of the Epperson family from the days of massive resistance: anti-communist preacher Billy James Hargis. In 1974, Hargis was accused of sexual misconduct and his college, which opened the radio station just several years earlier, teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. The president of the college informed alumni that Epperson had promised to continue to let its students in radio use the stations' facility for training and that Epperson would even assist in instruction in radio at the college (Macklin 1976). The college soon collapsed, but this station (KCFO) became an early property of the newly incorporated Salem and, in the 1980s, aired the programs of Falwell and Dobson.[47]

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[44] Edward Atsinger, amendment to application for construction permit, December 6, 1965, p. 3, Box 511, Folder WKBQ 2/6/70 to 7/1/71, NARA.

[45]My data show that KPDQ aired conservative programming, including Hargis' program, and also appears to have promoted an appearance by Hargis in August 1962. See advertisement in *The Statesman Journal*, August 14, 1962, p. 5.

[46] "Dr. Dobson's Radio Ministry," *Focus on the Family*, Vol. 6 No. 7, August 1982,

"Old-Time Gospel Hour Television and Radio Logs," FM Record Group 3, Subgroup 1, Series 1, Folder 5, Liberty University Archives and Special Collections.

[47] Ibid

Still, it was not until the mid to late 1980s – particularly with the elimination of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 – that Salem would overtly frame itself as aligned with the Christian Right. Its Los Angeles station KKLA began to sponsor protests and rallies in support of Christian Right causes, particularly those supported by James Dobson and affiliated parachurch groups (Lindlof 2008). In 1986, Epperson wrote an editorial for a religious broadcasting trade magazine with a straightforward headline: "Why a Christian Broadcaster Should be Involved in Politics" (Epperson 1986).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper makes three main contributions. First, it brings CRBCs into scholarship on the organizational development of US politics, demonstrating that CRBCs are a unique, if understudied, form of media organization that bridge elite rightwing networks and the associational life of local communities. CRBCs' translocal orientation is significant because, as Skocpol argues, "US political structures allow unusual leverage to social groups that can, with a degree of discipline and consistency of purpose, associate across many local political districts" (Skocpol 1992: 55). CRBCs have enabled the Christian Right to "associate across" far-flung communities and to do so consistently, even as traditional political organizations come and go. CRBCs not only carry leading Christian Nationalists (Gorski and Perry 2022) and other elite voices over the airwaves, but also have an important physical presence in local communities, vividly illustrated by their promotion of in-person events targeted to pastors and congregants.

Second, I have shown that CRBCs developed over a longer timeframe, in a different process, and within a different context, than existing accounts have claimed. Contrary to accounts tracing the Christian Right and rightwing media to institutional breaks since the 1970s,

my findings show that the Christian Right "brought CRBCs to the party" – in other words, by the time the movement struck an alliance with the Republican Party in the late 1970s (Schlozman 2015), its activists already had developed a broadcasting infrastructure for linking local church congregations to elite rightwing networks. In fact, I have shown that from 1959 to 1970, Salem's organizational forbearers regularly promoted public events led by national preachers aligned with white supremacist reaction, including one event organized by and featuring future Christian Right leader Jerry Falwell. In short, between the late 1950s and early 1970s, Christian Right activists developed the organizational model of the CRBC and a repertoire of associated political skills (Clemens and Minkoff 2004) – timing that existing scholarship fails to explain.

If scholarship on US politics fails to explain CRBCs' emergence, so too does scholarship on social movements and organizational innovation, providing me with an opportunity to extend this latter scholarship beyond its traditional focus on democratic challengers. Building on a growing literature on subnational democratization (Gibson 2010; Mickey 2015), I have developed an institutionally-centered account of rightwing organizational development analyzing how rightwing social movements meet the challenge of democratic transitions. My analysis centers on an overlooked historical conjuncture: the development of the US broadcasting system under the democratization of the American South. Under subnational authoritarianism, state institutions sustain the power of relatively dominant groups, which in the American South included a rising class of Fundamentalist radio entrepreneurs. The threat of democratization spurred these groups to create new forms of political organization to restore or defend their power in an opening political landscape. Specifically, my analysis has demonstrated that CRBCs emerged as Fundamentalist radio entrepreneurs refashioned their radio stations into conduits linking local civic life and national organizations mobilizing around the message that

democratizers were dangerous, un-American, and fundamentally illegitimate. These activist-entrepreneurs could not resist the tide of democratization, but they succeeded in creating durable mobilizing structures that survived the democratic transition and, in time, made these entrepreneurs powerful figures within the Republican Party.

My conclusions are especially supported by process-tracing and cross-case data indicating that resistance to democratization by interdenominational Southern Fundamentalist universities was a critical mechanism in the emergence and rapid institutionalization of CRBCs. My data show that the *only* US educational institutions to own radio stations that embraced the CRBC form were interdenominational Fundamentalist universities in the US South and, further, that all radio stations owned by interdenominational Fundamentalist universities in the US South aired at least some early Christian Right programming. These findings suggest that (1) resisting democratization challenges and (2) affiliation with interdenominational Fundamentalist Christianity were jointly necessary and nearly sufficient conditions for an institution to embrace the CRBC form. My process-tracing also demonstrated that university radio training shaped a rising generation of entrepreneurs including Stuart Epperson, who effectively learned how to run a CRBC as a student. But for democratization challenges, CRBCs may have emerged in the 1950s, but it is unlikely that they would have been sufficiently well-resourced to mold a cadre of entrepreneurs who founded CRBCs of their own and became leaders in the broadcasting industry.

While historians have argued that broadcasting regulation helped to kill rightwing of the post-WW II era (Hemmer 2016; Hendershot 2011; Matzko 2020), I have shown that radio entrepreneurs, and particularly Stuart Epperson, succeeded in converting CRBCs to the democratic context. I have argued that the US broadcasting framework, which granted broad

discretion to station owners, enabled activist-entrepreneurs to sustain their organizational innovation by *partially* adapting to democracy under the eyes of the activist state while still promoting anti-democratic causes.

My theoretical contribution suggests a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: under certain conditions, democratization may bring into being new types of political organizations only tenuously committed to democratic norms. This claim contributes to growing scholarship on the quality of US political institutions, which has theorized the vulnerability of the US to "democratic backsliding" through the "gradual undermining of rules, norms, and pluralistic organizational arrangements that sustain political contestation" (Pierson and Schickler 2020: 53; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Existing scholarship argues that democratization of the US South led to the realignment of voters by race, in turn contributing to party radicalization and polarization that has augmented the risk of democratic backsliding (Mickey et al. 2017). Building from my findings, I propose a complementary perspective on the *organizational* dimension of the dismantling of authoritarian enclaves. Not only did Southern whites sort into the Republican Party as individual voters, but they also appear to have "brought to the party" media organizations with institutionalized anti-democratic norms. These tentative conclusions suggests both specific and general directions for future research.

One specific direction is for scholars to investigate if and how subsequent events strengthened CRBCs and magnified their anti-democratic tendencies. Political parties seek to ally with social movements that can deliver needed resources (Schlozman 2015) – and existing evidence suggests that the capacity of CRBC to bridge elites and local communities helps to explain why the Christian Right is an attractive and durable partner of the Republican Party. Yet Republican dependence on CRBCs for mobilization appears to have come a cost, as companies

like Salem have consistently given voice to figures widely agreed, even by the Christian Right's defenders (Shields 2009) to operate on or beyond the edge of the democratic norm of mutual toleration (see Appendix A for supplementary evidence). Evidence suggests these anti-democratic tendencies have reverberated in national politics, especially after a few big players in religious media emerged with the broadcasting industry's consolidation in the 1990s (Ward 2020). An illustrative example was Salem's support for Donald Trump's election denial after the 2020 election (Thornton 2022a). In fact, an organization led by Salem radio host Charlie Kirk even bused protestors to the January 6th rally that culminated in the Capitol riots (Stanley-Becker and Reinhard 2022) – a striking echo of the pastors airing on Stuart Epperson's stations who, in 1970, bused protestors to a Washington D.C. rally studded with segregationist speakers. This brief sketch suggests a slow-moving process of democratic erosion at least partially caused by the growing political power of media organizations born from the South's democratization.

More generally, my findings suggest that future research be attuned to cases in the US and abroad where democracy's resisters have forged novel organizational forms with anti-democratic tendencies. Here, I extend Ziblatt's recent argument that how conservative elites meet the challenge of democratization – especially whether they develop a robust party infrastructure capable of competing in democratic elections – determines whether a democratic transition succeeds or fails (2017). My findings support a complementary conclusion: even during "successful" democratization, wherein political parties accept the alternation of power, social movements still may introduce new and durable anti-democratic organizational forms. The democratization of the US South is a likely candidate where we may expect to find similar cases. The South's democratization was very slow (lasting from 1944 to 1972 in Mickey's periodization [2015: 61-63]), giving resisters time to adapt, adjust, and experiment with new

organizational forms. By way of example, there is growing evidence that not just CRBCs but important elements of rightwing media in general, especially its tendency to delegitimize democratic rivals, have roots in the South's democratization (see especially Hardin Thrift 2014). My theoretical contribution may also inform other cases of subnational democratization outside of the US such as those in Latin America (Gibson 2010). Alternatively, if this theory has limited purchase outside the US case, it may be a useful comparative tool that captures what makes the US case of subnational democratization exceptional.

My findings contribute to literature on race. Existing scholarship investigates how white social movements responded to the decline of the Jim Crow South, demonstrating that these movements created novel forms of segregation within the private sphere (Andrews 2002), raised the salience of race in electoral politics (McVeigh, Cunningham, and Farrell 2014), and contributed to white Southerners' defection from the Democratic Party (McAdam and Kloos 2014). Yet while existing scholarship has tended to focus on white reaction to the "racial threat" of desegregation (especially from economic competition), this paper makes an analytic shift, centrally focusing on how whites responded to the loss of institutional power with the onset of democratization.

My findings also contribute to scholarship on social movements and media. While social movements scholars have tended to focus on the dependency of social movements on general audience news media (e.g. Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), there is growing interest in how the institutional norms of the wider media environment may shape social movement outcomes (Polletta and Amenta 2022). My findings specifically suggest that the institutional norms of CRBCs, by bridging elite networks with local communities for the purpose of achieving shared

political goals, may contribute to the Christian Right's success in mobilizing against abortion and LGBTQ rights over many decades.

I have shown how democracy's resisters have played an important role in influencing the organizational development of US politics. My conceptual and theoretical contributions provide a foundation for scholars of US politics, organizational innovation, race, and media to investigate further how both CRBCs and resistance to democratization have shaped the US political landscape.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Christian Right Broadcasting Companies (CRBCs) and their role in present-day US politics

I argue that the universe of CRBCs includes three principal companies: Salem Media Group, Bott Radio Network, American Family Radio, and Christian Broadcast Network. Salem Media Group is a for-profit company, while American Family Radio and Bott Radio are non-profit. The

executives for these companies are close political allies with one another, particularly through their membership in the rightwing strategy group the Council for National Policy (CNP)[48].[49]

Two television companies – Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN and Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) – have broadly similar organizational models as these radio companies but are partial cases in my conceptualization. As discussed in the main body of the paper, in my conceptualization CRBCs must consistently coordinate with the broader Christian Right on shared political goals. TBN's involvement in politics is a relatively recent development (Graham 2018). CBN was active in the broader Christian Right from the 1980s to 1990s when its founder Pat Robertson was a leading figure of the movement (Diamond 1998). Yet evidence suggests that the company's leadership has not actively participated in the Christian Right since Robertson's power faded around the year 2000[50] (Schlozman 2015) (though this may have changed with Donald Trump's presidency [Graham 2018]).

Salem Media Group is a publicly traded company and is one of the largest radio station owners in the US. [51] It was unofficially founded in 1974 when two-brothers in law went into business with each other. Salem went public in 1999.[52] As of 2022, Salem owned 103 radio stations, including 63 radio stations in major markets (see Map).[53] It also owns Salem Radio Network, which is distributed to over 3,200 radio stations. Salem benefited from broadcasting

[48]A revealing piece of evidence is the fact that neither Robertson nor other executives from the Christian Broadcasting Network were listed as members of the Council for National Policy in recently leaked directories between 2014 and 2022 (see Footnote 1). Nor was Robertson a central player in accounts of the Christian Right since 2000 such as (Gilgoff 2007) or (Nelson 2019). By contrast, executives from Salem, Bott Radio Network, and American Family Radio have been listed as members of the Council for National Policy since the 1980s and secondary sources indicate that these companies have been central players in the Christian Right.

[51] Data on Salem's business is from Salem's reports to investors available on its website. See https://investor.salemmedia.com/sec-filings/annual-reports?form_type=&year=2023##document-1930-0001193125-23-067859-1

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

deregulation in 1996 that lifted the caps on the number of radio stations a single company could own (Ward 2020). After the cap was lifted, Salem quickly bought up stations across the US and emerged as one of the largest radio station owners (see Figure A1). Salem's revenue in 2022 was $266.97 million.[54]

Evidence indicates that CRBCs first became major players in the Republican Party coalition under the George W. Bush administration. Since the early 2000s, CRBCs have been a major resource for Republican electoral mobilization, CRBC executives have had extensive access to Republican leadership, and CRBCs have mobilized in major contentious episodes. I capture CRBCs' centrality within the Republican Party coalition over four phases from 2000 to today:

2000-2008: CRBCs ally with, and pressure, George W. Bush

- Dobson and CRBC executives repeatedly meet with and pressure Bush administration officials, becoming increasingly vocal about gay marriage ban and nominating conservative Supreme Court justices.[55] See Table 1 for data from the George W. Bush presidential library.
- Christian Radio is central component of Bush's 2004 election strategy. See Table 2 for contemporaneous media reports.

2008-2016: CRBCs are major players in anti-Obama GOP

[54] Ibid.
[55] See Gilgoff (2007) for overview of Dobson's pressure campaign.

- CRBCs play an important role in mobilizing during Tea Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2012: 130 and 217)
- Stuart Epperson is president of Council for National Policy (CNP) 2011-2014.[56]
- Salem Media hosts four debates in 2016 Republican Party primary (Ward 2020).[57]

2016-2020: CRBCs are key ally of Trump in general election and during presidency

- June 2016 meeting between Trump and evangelical leaders convened by leading broadcasters, including a board member for Salem and Bott radio.[58]
- Salem pressures its radio hosts to support Trump's candidacy.[59]
- Salem's talk radio roster includes growing number of "MAGA" voices such as Charlie Kirk and Sebastian Gorka.

Post- 2020 election: CRBCs promote "big lie" and consolidate MAGA

- After 2020 election, Salem radio hosts are a major supporter of the "Big Lie," help to mobilize on January 6th.[60]

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[56] See Edwin Feulner speech for dates of all CNP presidents. https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21091645-edwin-feulner-remarks-at-council-for-national-policys-40th-anniversary-celebration-may-21-2021

[57] As RNC chairman Reince Priebus was battling with CNN and NBC over their coverage of Hillary Clinton, he threatened to not let those networks moderate the party's debates. He said: "You have Fox, you have PBS, you have ABC, you have CBS, you have a lot of other stations on cable. *You can do Salem Communications* (…) The sun doesn't rise with CNN and NBC." See Outfrong on CNN, August 6, 2013.

[58] The board member is J Keet Lewis. On Lewis's role in convening meeting: See https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Heard-Around-the-Hill.html?soid=1103333458754&aid=Sa7-DDBPzcU. On Lewis' board seats, see https://investor.salemmedia.com/sec-filings/all-sec-filings/content/0001144204-16-093338/v436336_def14a.htm

[59] Hadas Gold and Oliver Darcy, "Salem executives pressured radio hosts to cover Trump more positively, emails show," May 9, 2018, https://money.cnn.com/2018/05/09/media/salem-radio-executives-trump/index.html

[60]Thornton, Divided Dial Episode 1, https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/episodes/divided-dial-episode-1-true-believers

- Salem releases *2000 Mules* in 2022, which is major purveyor of misinformation on 2020 election.[61]
- Programs airing on CRBCs are important platform for Republican House speaker Mike Johnson.[62]
- Salem is an important partner of new evangelical groups like Capitol Ministries that are closely allied with Trump.[63]

Evidence also indicates that CRBCs have consistently have skirted the democratic norm of mutual toleration (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) in their programming and in their coordination with the wider rightwing firmament. For evidence on the period from 1958 to 1980, see data presented in the main body of the paper. Below I summarize existing evidence on CRBCs from 1980 to the present day.

- Christian Right leader Jerry Falwell aired on CRBCs throughout the country until his death in 2007. Falwell's anti-democratic commitments included his support for

[61]Danny Hakim and Alexandra Berzon, May 29, 2022, "A Big Lie in a New Package," https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/29/us/politics/2000-mules-trump-conspiracy-theory.html
[62]Calder McHugh, "Mike Johnson is a social conservative's social conservative," October 25, 2023, https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2023/10/25/mike-johnson-is-a-social-conservatives-social-conservative-00123619
[63] For in depth report on Capitol Ministries and Trump administration see https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/magazine/ralph-drollinger-white-house-evangelical.html. On Capitol Ministries and Salem's pastor appreciation luncheons, see https://capmin.org/eager-to-serve-local-political-leaders-pastors-and-church-leaders-in-nyc-embrace-the-capmin-mission/

barring gays from employment and government registration of communists (Schlozman and Rosenfeld 2019; Williams 2010).

- The anti-abortion activist Randall Terry, leader of the group Operation Rescue, had his own radio show on Salem in the 1990s (Piore 2005). Terry led protests blocking access to abortion clinics and voiced support for Christian Theocratic rule (Williams 2010: 226). Salem cofounder Edward Atsinger even appears to have used support for Terry as a litmus test in hiring employees (Trammel 2007).
- Salem radio host Eric Metaxas was a prominent supporter of the movement to overturn the 2020 election (Thornton 2022a). Immediately after the election, he emceed one of the so-called Jericho marches that the January 6th Congressional Committee determined were precursor events to the rallies on January 6th that culminated in the attacks on the Capitol building (Posner 2023).
- Salem radio personality and Turning Point USA leader Charlie Kirk was another prominent supporter of the movement to overturn the election (Thornton 2022a). At Kirk's direction, Turning Point chartered buses that transported protesters to the January 6th rally (Stanley-Becker and Reinhard 2022).
- Many CRBC executives, including executives from Salem, Bott Radio Network, and American Family Radio, are long-standing members of the Council for National Policy (CNP),[64] which researchers have shown to be an elite-clearing house for the false claim that voter fraud threatens election integrity (O'Harrow 2021).

[64] See directories at https://documented.net/investigations/documented-has-obtained-a-recent-council-for-national-policy-membership-list

Map A1: Radio stations owned by Salem Media group, 2017
Source: 2017 Broadcasting Yearbook

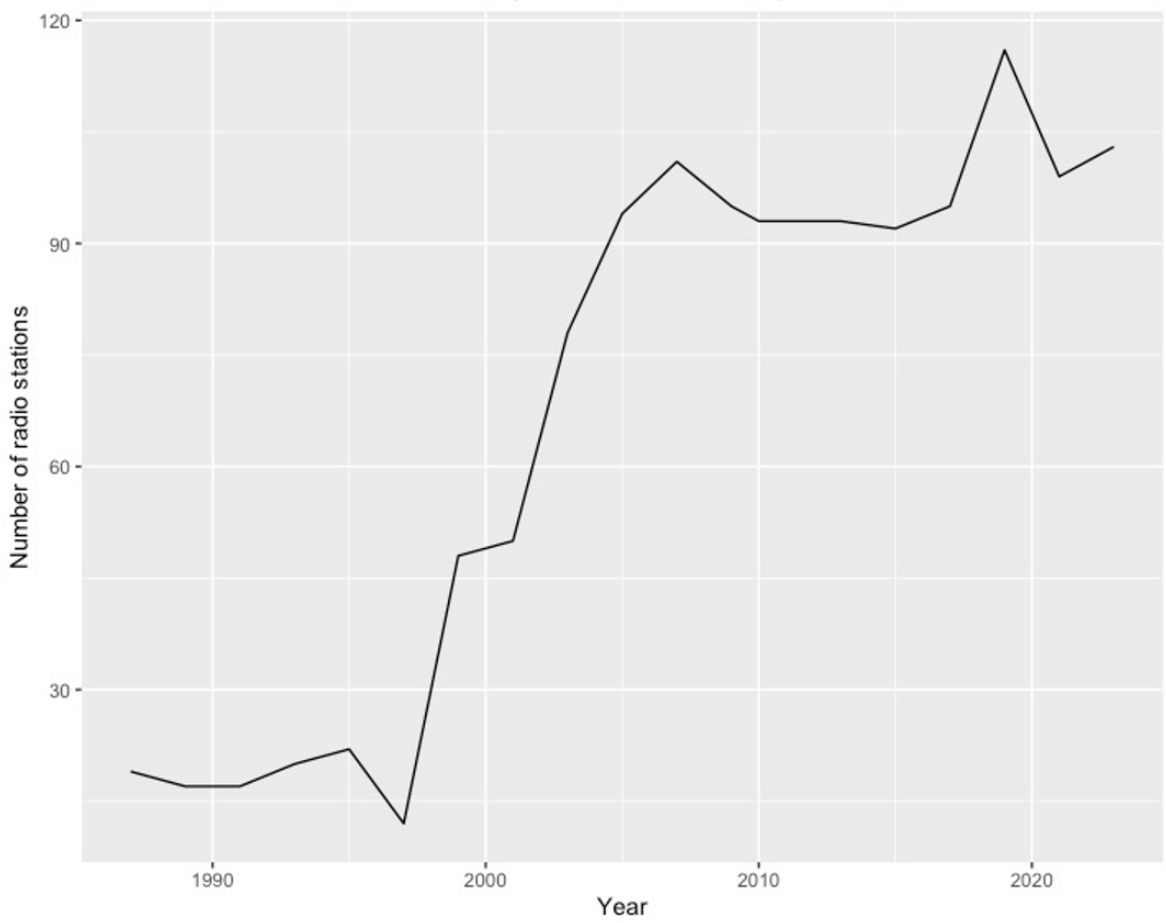

Figure A1: Radio stations owned by Salem Media Group, 1987-2023
Source: Broadcasting yearbooks 1987-2023

Table A1: CRBCs Meet With and Pressure George W. Bush Presidency (data from George W. Bush Library)		
Date	**What Occurred?**	**What CRBC leaders participated?**
4/3/2001	Meeting at White House between President and National Religious Broadcasters	Stuart Epperson, Salem
2/14/2003	Conference call between Karl Rove and "social conservatives on judicial issues" moderated by James Dobson.	Edward Atsinger, Salem Dick Bott, Bott Radio Network Don Hodel, President of CNP and Salem board member Don Wildmon, American Family Association
3/20 - 3/22/2003	White House Briefing (unclear exactly if and when this meeting took place).	"Salem Communications executives and radio hosts"
1/18/2005	Letter to Karl Rove demanding president's support for constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Letter contains veiled threat to pull Christian Right's support for social security privatization.	Stuart Epperson, Salem Dick Bott Sr, Bott Radio Network Rich Bott, Bott Radio Network Donald Wildmon, American Family Association Frank Wright, President of National Religious Broadcasters

Table A2: CRBCs as Organizational Resource for Evangelical Mobilization in 2004 Presidential Election	
Where?	**Evidence**
National	*The Washington Post*, 1/20/2005: "The Bush campaign, in a grass-roots effort generally credited with being a notch above similar efforts on the Democratic side, reached its partisans through a massive e-mail database of 7.5 million names, phone bank operations that placed 27 million calls, unprecedented door-knocking in GOP neighborhoods, and niche advertising in such outlets as farm radio, Christian radio, and television programming seen at fitness centers."
National	*National Journal*, 5/1/2004: "Americans of Faith plans to use Christian radio stations and networks for other publicity, a move that is likely to get a sizeable boost from Atsinger's Salem Communications. "We'll use the internet, church voter-registration drives, concerts, and festivals," to more people to the polls, (Jay) Sekulow said. He believes he'll get substantial in-kind contributions from radio stations to supplement his $800,000 budget."
Kansas And Missouri	*Kansas City Star*, 8/21/2004: "Richard Bott Sr., president of Bott Radio Network, also has noticed that 'it seems as if people in both Kansas and Missouri are energized like never before (by gay marriage and abortion).' (...) But Bott says he doesn't allow his radio stations to endorse candidates. Rather, he says the job of Christian radio is to make sure church members do their civic and political duties."
Missouri	*St. Louis Post*, 11/15/2004: "Another GOP player was Christian radio. Mike McHardy, general manager for two such St. Louis stations -- KSIV (1320 AM and 91.5 FM) -- said, 'I think the impact of Christian radio in Missouri was significant, almost monumental.' The 10 stations in the Bott Network, which include KSIV, reach about 90 percent of Missouri households, McHardy said. The stations made a point of repeatedly detailing the candidates' positions on social issues like abortion, stem cell research and gay marriage. The aim was to get listeners to vote their values, McHardy said. Bush chief of staff Andrew Card was among the campaign figures who called in to KSIV to appeal to those listeners."

Ohio	*Dayton Daily News*, 11/7/2004: “While barred by their tax-exempt status from endorsing Bush or any other candidate, the members of (Lori) Viars' and 12 other Right to Life groups within 40 miles of the Lebanon Zip Code were just one spoke in a wheel of volunteerism that help propel the Bush re- election effort in southwest Ohio. "This was a major coming together," Viars said, adding that hundreds of volunteers involved in the Bush re-election had never been involved in a local campaign before. "Through e-mails and Christian radio broadcasts, every Christian group was doing voter registration reminders."
Iowa	*Des Moines Register*, 11/4/2004, "As much as we hoped to motivate the middle, the plan was very much about motivating our base," senior Bush strategist Sara Taylor said. Taylor said the Bush campaign aired advertisements on western Iowa Christian radio stations that emphasized Bush's opposition to abortion rights and gay marriage.” "We targeted that area with messages about values the president feels strongly about, and it appears to have helped the president's chances of carrying Iowa," Taylor said.

Appendix B: Supporting evidence for conceptualization of CRBCs

This supplement provides supporting evidence for the three features that together comprise my conceptualization of CRBCs. My conceptualization is especially indebted to path-breaking research on Salem and other companies by researcher Anne Nelson (Nelson 2019), journalist Katie Thornton (Thornton 2022a), journalist (Piore 2005, 2020), and professor of Communication Mark Ward (Ward 2009, 2020). I also draw from primary sources including Salem’s filings with the Security Exchange Commission, leaked evidence on the secretive rightwing strategy group Council for the National Policy (CNP), and company websites.

1) *Providing commercial services to the right*

CRBCs provide commercial services to the Christian Right, especially by selling substantial airtime on their broadcast stations directly to advocacy groups, parachurch organizations, national ministries, and local churches. These assorted groups use CRBCs to spread religious and political messages and to generate revenue by soliciting donations from audiences. *Focus on the Family* has been the most successful program to use the "pay to air" model (Williams 2010). Since *Focus* went on the air in 1977, Dobson and his heirs have used this distribution model to reach millions of listeners, to build powerful advocacy groups, and to win substantial influence over church congregations (Bean 2014; Gilgoff 2007).

While insight into the business of most religious radio companies is relatively limited, Salem has been a publicly traded company since 1999, and public filings with the Securities Exchange Commission shed light on decades of its finances. These records show that the sale of airtime to religious programs -- what the industry calls "block programming" – is a core source of Salem's revenue and central to its corporate structure. From 2018-2022, Salem derived between 38% and 42% of its broadcast revenue from block programming ($78.41 million in 2022) – only slightly less than the company generated from advertising.[65] Most of this revenue came from national sales to stations across the country. SEC records also indicate that the sale of airtime to *Focus on the Family* is a particularly important money-maker for Salem. While the company typically has not disclosed revenue generated by specific programs, an exception came in 2004 when a Salem board member was president of Focus on the Family, prompting the company to disclose that it was paid $3.4 million to air the *Focus* program.[66] This amounted to 29.81% of Focus on the Family's media budget.[67] Finally, Salem's SEC statement notes that its

[65] See Salem 10-K for year ending December 31, 2022
[66] See Salem 10-K for year ending December 31, 2004
[67] According to Focus on the Family's Form 990 for 2004, its expenditures for TV, radio, and film was $11,403,865.

sale of national block programming is centralized in its corporate office, which it notes is "necessary because many of our key programming partners purchase time in multiple markets."[68]

Coordination with broader Christian Right

CRBCs ally with the broader Christian Right coalition via ongoing coordination by company leadership on shared political goals. Much of this coordination takes place in durable strategy venues such as the Council for National Policy (CNP), a group that convenes leaders from a wide range of rightwing organizations (Gilgoff 2007; Nelson 2019). Many CRBC executives and board members have been members of CNP since its founding in 1981, with Salem cofounder Stuart Epperson serving as the group's president from 2011 to 2014. Participating leaders from Christian Right advocacy groups include James Dobson and Tony Perkins of the Family Policy Council (Focus on the Family's lobbying arm). Other participants include pastors of local ministries and representatives of conservative business groups.

One CNP member described the group as bringing together "doers and donors," but the CNP does not itself bundle and distribute large donations as do influential rightwing groups like the Koch Seminars (Hertel-Fernandez, Skocpol, and Sclar 2018; O'Harrow 2021). Yet the CNP does share two important features with the Koch Seminars identified by Hertel-Fernandez and co-authors: (1) it operates over a "time horizon beyond individual election cycles" and (2) it has a "major social component" where activists and donors "construct a purposeful community where they come to share political vocabularies, values, and morally grounded perspectives on political challenges" (Hertel-Fernandez, Skocpol, and Sclar 2018: 129). As one CNP member put it: "You could let your hair down and just talk candidly about shared visions" (O'Harrow 2021). Working beyond single election cycles through the CNP and its offshoots, elite activists have

[68] Salem 10-K for 2022

woven a "shared vision" on major issues, operated as a durable if informal consortium of Christian Right and allied organizations, and confronted the political system with a broadly unified voice. Important political issues that CRBCs and CNP or its offshoots have mobilized around include: gay marriage and abortion rights, support for Donald Trump's election in 2016, and the movement to overturn the 2020 election (Nelson 2019; O'Harrow 2021; Thornton 2022b).

Supporting civic and political engagement of local communities

CRBCs support the civic and political engagement of local communities in many ways, but especially by sponsoring events targeted to church audiences or by encouraging congregations to participate in politics or civic life. As with the "pay-to-air" model, much of Salem's promotion of events targeting a church-going audience is corporatized. As Salem reports to shareholders:

> We believe our active involvement and significant relationships in the Christian community provide a competitive advantage in targeting Christian audiences (…). We regularly partner with organizations that serve the Christian and family-themed audience and sponsor and support events important to this group (…) These events connect us with our listeners and enable us to create enhanced awareness and name recognition in our markets. [69]

As this passage suggests, Salem's events frequently feature leaders from national advocacy organizations – including groups Salem leadership coordinates with in CNP or other venues. Focus on the Family has participated in listener events, pastor appreciation luncheons, and was even among the sponsors of a massive Christian music festival in Dallas.[70] In 2023, an Evangelical group closely tied to Donald Trump -- Capitol Ministries, known as Capmin --

[69]"Annual Report Pursuant Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017," https://investor.salemmedia.com/sec-filings/annual-reports/content/0001144204-18-015007/0001144204-18-015007.pdf

[70]https://web.archive.org/web/20110809183759/http://www.klty.com/celebratefreedom/index.htm

sponsored Salem's tour of pastor appreciation luncheons in 19 cities, each of which featured a video presentation by Capmin founder Ralph Drollinger.[71] As discussed in Appendix A, CRBCs have regularly promoted engagement by churches in the political process and, on occasion have encouraged congregations to engage in protests (Lindlof 2008).

Appendix C. Supporting evidence for events promoted by Epperson stations, 1959-1970

This supplement provides evidence for each event appearing in Table 3.

1. *October 12, 1959, Billy James Hargis, Anti-Communist Meeting, Petersburg, Virginia, WPVA*: See Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The Hopewell News*, October 9, 1959, p. 2.
2. *October 13, 1959, Billy James Hargis, Anti-Communist Meeting, Lynchburg, Virginia, WBRG:* See Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The News and Advance*, October 9, 1956, p. 24.
3. *October 14, 1959, Billy James Hargis, Anti-Communist Meeting, Mt. Airy, North Carolina, WPAQ:* See Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The Hopewell News*, October 9, 1959, p. 2. and *Winston-Salem Journal* October 12, 1959, p. 7.
4. *December 3, 1959, Carl McIntire, Rally, Lynchburg, Virginia, WBRG:* Letter to Carl McIntire from Stuart Epperson, December 12, 1959, CMMC, Box 515, Folder 53, PTS. "3 Leading Clergymen Discuss Communism as Paths Cross Here," *The Daily Advance*, December 5, 1959, p. 4.

[71] See "If the Church Doesn't Show Political Leaders What God Wants Them to do in Government, Who Will?" https://capmin.org/if-the-church-doesnt-show-political-leaders-what-god-wants-them-to-do-in-government-who-will/, retrieved on February 23, 2024

5. *October 14, 1961, Billy James Hargis, Anti-Communist Meeting, Hampton, Virginia, WPVA/WLES:* See Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The Daily Press*, October 14, 1961, p. 11 and "Dr. Hargis to Speak Here Friday Night," *The Daily Press,* October 12, 1961, p. 15.
6. *October 15, 1961, Billy James Hargis, Anti-Communist Meeting, Hampton, Virginia, WPVA/ WLES:* see Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The Daily Press*, October 14, 1961, p. 11.
7. *October 15, 1961, Billy James Hargis, Appearance at Church, Newport News, Virginia, WPVA/WLES.* See Billy James Hargis advertisement in *The Daily Press*, October 14, 1961, p. 11
8. *March 19, 1964, Carl McIntire, Meeting, Lynchburg, Virginia, WPAQ:* "McIntire Hurls Widespread Blast," in *The News and Advance*, March 20, 1964, p. 27.
9. *February 9, 1967, Carl McIntire, Rally on "What You Should know About the National Council of Churches", Winston-Salem, North Carolina, WKBX:* "Dissident Ministers Will Meet," *Twin City Sentinel*, February 9, 1967, p. 20.
10. *March 17, 1970 , Carl McIntire, Meeting, Roanoke, Virginia, WKBA:* See Carl McIntire Advertisement, *The World-News*, March 6, 1970, p. 26.
11. *March 21, 1970, Carl McIntire, Meeting sponsored by anti-busing group, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, WKBX*. "McIntire Seeks Moynihan Dismissal," *Winston-Salem Journal*, March 22, 1970, p. 6.

Appendix D. Radio Dataset and Case Selection

Appendix D documents how I constructed the radio dataset and supplementary data guiding my case selection. This supplement notes the sources used for documenting which radio stations aired each program, the frequency and duration of each program, program start date, a brief description of program content and sources used to document program content, program host, and program ties to conservative movement organizations.

I manually transcribed data from primary sources into the station dataset to indicate whether a station broadcast a particular program in 1965. I used data sources as near to January 1965 as I was able to obtain. The earliest data is from March, 1963 and the latest is from December, 1966. In addition to Group Research Inc, I used various sources to document how many minutes per week these programs aired conservative programming.

I coded these programs as "conservative" if they exhibited at least two of three features of modern conservatism (Phillips-Fein 2009): anti-communism, limited government (in the form of laissez-faire economics and/or "states' rights constitutionalism"), and social traditionalism. I used this coding scheme because, even though modern conservativism is typically defined by the "fusion" of these three elements, certain modern conservatives rejected one element or another of the fusionist consensus or emphasized certain elements over others (ibid: 729-730.). Using this scheme, coding confirmed that all nine programs for which I was able to obtain station programming data were "conservative."

Historical scholarship documents six programs' content and history: Carl McIntire *20th Century Reformation Hour* (Hendershot 2011; Matzko 2020; Ruotsila 2016), Billy James Hargis's *Christian Crusade* (Hendershot 2011; Huntington 2021), *Life Line* (Hendershot 2011), Dan Smoot's *The Dan Smoot Report* (Hendershot 2011), Jesse Helms' *Viewpoint* (Hardin Thrift

2014), and Clarence Manion's *Manion Forum* (Hemmer 2016). I primarily relied upon these secondary sources, but where possible I also documented these programs' content by listening to audio recordings or reading transcripts. There are an additional three programs whose content, to my knowledge, historians have not studied: Richard Cotten's *Conservative Viewpoint*, the *Independent American* (though Huntington 2021 has extensively investigated the program's hosts), and RK Scott's *Behind the Headlines.* For the first two programs, I used transcripts and/or preserved recordings at Group Research to verify their conservative content. I could not find a complete recording or transcripts of *Behind the Headlines*. I thus relied upon contemporaneous descriptions of its contents by Group Research Inc., as well as primary sources that document the conservative orientation of the program and the organization that produced it.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Source for radio dataset: "Behind the Headlines," July 31, 1964, Box 43, Broadcasting – Radio and TV Logs: Miscellaneous Programs, Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: once weekly (US Senate Subcommitte on Communications 1968: 393).

Duration: 15 minutes (ibid.)

Start date: approx. 1955 (ibid.)

Content: Previous research has not documented the content of *Behind the Headlines* and I was not able to obtain transcripts or audio recordings of the program. However, the program's promotional materials describe the show as promoting the free enterprise system and its opposition to communism. Further, the Group Research Inc. collection contains materials for the organization that produced the program, America's Future, led by Behind the Headlines host RK Scott. These materials show that America's Future was anti-communist, and promoted defense of

free enterprise and the constitutional system. For program materials see "Behind the Headlines," July 31, 1964, Box 43, Broadcasting – Radio and TV Logs: Miscellaneous Programs, Group Research Inc. Records; for a transcript of a Group Research Inc radio program about Behind the Headlines and America's Future, see "Spotlight #10: America's Future," undated, Box 433, #10 America's Future, Group Research Inc. Records; on America's Future, see materials in Box 27, America's Future, Inc. General, New Rochelle, NY, Group Research Inc. Records.

Host: RK Scott

Ties to conservative organizations: Behind the Headlines was produced by conservative organization America's Future (see above).

CHRISTIAN CRUSADE

Source for radio dataset: "Christian Crusade Radio Network," August 1964, Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Christian Crusade, Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: Varied by station. Monday-Friday on most stations. Saturday and/or Sunday on certain stations (ibid.).

Duration: 15 min (Hendershot 2011: 187)

Start Date: I have not been able to determine when Christian Crusade first aired. However, Hargis founded the "umbrella corporation" for his ministry's activism in 1947 (Huntington 2016: 94).

Content: Christian Crusade promoted anti-communism, social traditionalism, and limited government (primarily in terms of states' rights) (Hendershot 2011: 170-205; Huntington 2016: 84-141; Huntington 2021: 94-97 & 187-189). See audio recordings in "Cotton / Hargis, 1965 February, 1 open reel audiotapes; 7" reel", Box 502, Group Research Inc. Records.

Host: Billy James Hargis

Ties to conservative organizations: Program host Billy James Hargis headed Christian Crusade, a far-right fundamentalist Christian organization (Hendershot 2011; Huntington 2021). The Christian Crusade organization was closely tied to far-right groups such as the John Birch Society (Huntington 2016: 100-101) and the Conservative Society of America, led by fellow broadcaster Kent Courtney (Huntington 2016: 248).

THE DAN SMOOT REPORT

Source for radio dataset: "The Dan Smoot Report," January 11, 1965, Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Dan Smoot, Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: once weekly (Hendershot 2011: 67)

Duration: Fifteen minutes (ibid.)

Start date: 1957 (ibid.)

Program content: The Dan Smoot Report promoted anti-communism and limited government (primarily in terms of defense of states' rights) (Hendershot 2011: 65-101). On both points see audio recordings in "Smoot, Dan, 1965 February 7, 1 open reel audiotapes; 7" reel," Box 510, Group Research Inc. Records.

Host: Dan Smoot

Ties to Movement Organizations: Smoot briefly led conservative organizations in the 1950s, but was mostly independent of movement organizations in the 1960s (though his primary funder also donated heavily to the far-right John Birch Society) (Hendershot 2011: 77 and 98-99).

LIFE LINE

Source for radio dataset: "Life Line National Radio Schedule," April 1965, Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Life Lines, Washington DC., Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: Seven days a week (ibid.)

Duration: 15 minutes (Hendershot 2011: 44).

Start date: 1958 (ibid.)

Content: Life Line primarily emphasized anti-communism and limited government (primarily in terms of laissez-faire economics), though the program also promoted social traditionalism (Hendershot 2011: 26-64). See audio recording in "Life Line, October 28, 1 open reel audiotapes; 7" reel", Box 502, Group Research Inc. Records.

Host: Life Line had various hosts, including Wayne Poucher and Melvin Munn (Hendershot 2011: 44-50).

Ties to conservative organizations: The program was funded by conservative oil billionaire HL Hunt, but was largely isolated from the larger conservative movement (Hendershot 2011: 57).

THE MANION FORUM

Source for radio dataset: "The Manion Forum," March 3, 1963, Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Manion Forum, Washington DC., Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: Weekly (Hemmer 2013: 5)

Duration: 15 minutes (Hemmer 2013: 5)

Start date: October 3, 1954 (Hemmer 2016: 46)

Content: The Manion Forum emphasized social traditionalism, limited government (both in terms of laissez-faire economics and states' rights), and anti-communism (Hemmer 2013: 66-71).

Host: Clarence Manion

Ties to conservative organizations: Manion had close ties to conservative movement organizations, serving in leadership positions in both the John Birch Society and the entity that published *National Review* magazine (Hemmer 2016: 97). He also led the effort to "draft" conservative Republican Senator Barry Goldwater to run for president (Hemmer 2016; Perlstein 2001).

RADIO EDITION OF THE INDEPENDENT AMERICAN

Source for radio dataset: "The Radio Edition of 'The Independent American' Newspaper" May-June 1965, Box 43, Broadcasting – Radio and TV Logs: Independent American, Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: weekly (ibid.)

Duration: 15 minutes (Cook 1964)

Start date: 1958 (Huntington 2016: 264).

Content: Previous research has minimally documented the content of the Radio Edition of *The Independent American*, though Kent Courtney was a well-known right-wing radical who promoted anti-communism, states' rights, and fiscal conservativism (Huntington 2021: 116-117). For an audio recording that reflects these commitments, see "Cotton / Hargis, 1965 February, 1 open reel audiotapes; 7" reel", Box 502, Group Research Inc. Records.

Hosts: Kent and Phoebe Courtney

Ties to conservative organizations: Kent Courtney founded and led the Conservative Society of America, a far-right organization tied to other far-right groups such as the John Birch Society

and Christian Crusade (Huntington 2016: 248 & 271-273), and which supported Alabama governor George Wallace and resistance to desegregation (Huntington 2021: 116-120 & 196).

RICHARD COTTEN'S CONSERVATIVE VIEWPOINT

Source for radio dataset: "Richard Cotten's Conservative Viewpoint," June 15, 1965, Box 43, Broadcasting – Radio and TV Logs: Richard Cotton, Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: Varied by station. Aired Monday to Friday or Monday to Saturday on most stations.

Duration: 15 minutes (author's documentation of audio recordings. See below).

Start Date: Approx 1963. Source: untitled promotional materials for Conservative Viewpoint, 1965, Ernie Lazar Freedom of Information Act request from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (accessed via https://archive.org/details/COTTENRIchardBerkeleyLosAngeles1571132/page/n17/mode/2up?q=birch&view=theater)

Content: Previous research has not documented *Conservative Viewpoint*, but transcripts and audio recordings show that the program emphasized anti-communism, social traditionalism, and states' rights. See program transcript in "Richard Cotten's Conservative Viewpoint, Hon. John Rarick, House of Representatives, Congressional Record," May 15, 1968, Box 98, "Cotton, Richard, General, Bakersfield, CA", Group Research Inc. Records; and audio recordings on "Cotton / Hargis, 1965 February, 1 open reel audiotapes; 7" reel", Box 502, Group Research Inc. Records.

Host: Richard Cotten

Ties to conservative organizations: Cotten was a member of the John Birch Society, but was apparently pushed out in the early 1960s for his antisemitic views. See "The John Birch Society

(Memo to leaders)," February 25, 1965, Ernie Lazar Freedom of Information Act request from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (accessed via https://archive.org/details/COTTENRIchardBerkeleyLosAngeles1571132/page/n17/mode/2up?q=birch&view=theater)

TWENTIETH CENTURY REFORMATION HOUR

Source for radio dataset: "20th Century Reformation Hour Broadcast," 2/15/1964 (handwritten note), Box 43, Broadcasting-Radio and TV Logs: Carl McIntire, Washington DC., Group Research Inc. Records.

Frequency: Daily from Monday to Friday (ibid.)

Duration: Half hour (ibid.).

Start date: 5/13/1953 (Matzko unpublished)

Content: The 20th Century Reformation Hour emphasized social traditionalism, limited government (both in terms of states' rights and laissez-faire economics), and anti-communism (Hendershot 2011 102-169; Matzko 2020: 1-60 ; Ruotsila 2016). On these points, see for example "Twentieth Century Reformation Hour," October 1, 1962, Digital reproduction, Carl McIntire Manuscript Collection, SCM 222, Princeton Theological Seminary. Library. Special Collection.

Host: Carl McIntire

Ties to conservative organizations: McIntire led the Bible Presbyterian Church and interdenominational fundamentalist organization American Council of Christian Churches (Ruotsila 2016: 3). McIntire had ties to many conservative and radical right organizations, including the John Birch Society, organizations opposing desegregation in the Jim Crow South,

and mainstream conservative organizations like the Young Americans for Freedom (Ruotsila 2016).

VIEWPOINT

Source for radio dataset: US Senate Subcommittee on Communications (pg 521). 1968. *Fairness Doctrine Staff Report*. Washington, D.C. (Data on stations airing *Viewpoint* is from the last 13 weeks of 1966.)

Frequency: Five times per week (ibid.)

Duration: 5 minutes (ibid.)

Start date: 1958 (Hardin Thrift 2014: 43)

Program content: *Viewpoint* promoted social traditionalism, anti-communism, and limited government (both in terms of laissez-faire economics and states' rights) (Hardin Thrift 2014: see especially 49-81 & 124-131).

Host: Jesse Helms

Ties to conservative organizations: Helms served on the advisory board of the conservative group Young Americans for Freedom and promoted the group on air (ibid. and Hardin Thrift 2014: 51-54 & 178-179). Helms also defended the John Birch Society on air (Hardin Thrift 2014: 51-54) and was close with fellow broadcaster Clarence Manion (Hardin Thrift 2014: 65).

Supplementary data on Epperson case

Figure B1 shows that radio stations owned by the Epperson family aired more conservative programming than any other "group" stations in the US. The *Broadcasting Yearbook* identifies stations as "group" stations if a single individual owned at least three broadcasting stations. The *Yearbook* also lists stations owned by this individual's immediate family members within the

"group." Since Harry Epperson Sr. (Stuart Epperson's father) owned four stations, the *Yearbook* listed both Harry Sr.'s and his sons' stations as "Epperson" stations.

Note that all Epperson-owned stations were listed in the *Yearbook* as "Epperson stations" except for the two stations owned by Stuart Epperson. This omission may be explained by the fact that one of Stuart's stations (WKBA) was technically licensed to a corporate entity that he owned but that did not explicitly bear the name "Epperson." Figure B1 excludes Stuart Epperson's stations from the Epperson group. Including Stuart Epperson's stations lowers the weekly mean minutes of conservative programming on Epperson stations to 251.25 from 255, which does not substantively affect my conclusions.

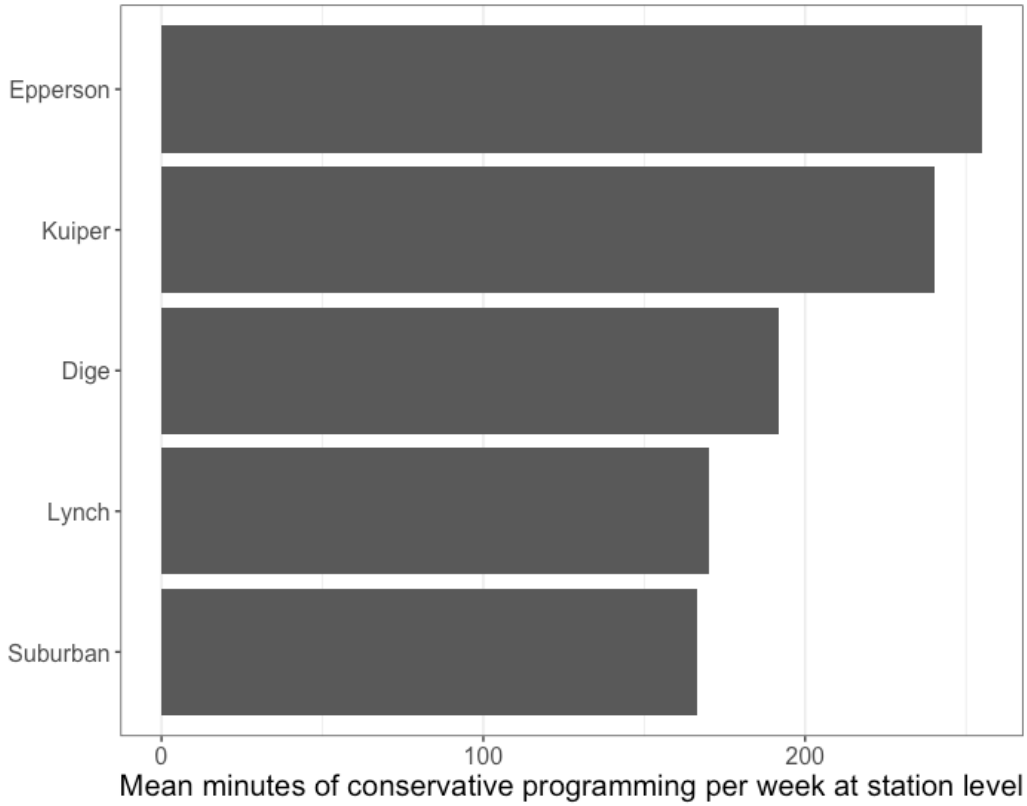

Figure D1: Comparing Conservative Radio Programming by "Group" Stations, 1965.
Note: Figure presents the top five "group" stations (i.e. stations with shared or interconnected ownership) that aired conservative programming in 1965. Figure shows that Epperson stations aired more conservative programming than any other "group" stations in the country.
Source: Radio station data is from 1965 *Broadcasting Yearbooks.* Data on conservative programming is from sources named in Appendix A.

Appendix E: Supplementary Analyses on Educational Institutions

I created the educational institution subset by using the entire radio station dataset and filtering for the following keywords in licensee name: "Institute," "University," "College," "School," and "U." I manually removed false positives by removing licensees not listed in the *US Office of Education Directory* for 1965-1966. To code each institution's denomination, I relied upon the *US Office of Education Directory* for 1965-1966. However, as this source does not indicate whether institutions were currently or historically affiliated with Fundamentalism, I used two additional strategies to code for Fundamentalism. To code for Fundamentalism among institutions with a denominational affiliation, I relied upon the *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. To code for Fundamentalism among private institutions without a denominational affiliation, I looked deeper into stations with institutional owners whose names clearly indicate a Christian identity (e.g. "Boone Biblical College") or whose present-day websites indicate a current or historic "Christian" identity. For schools with a Christian identity, I relied upon secondary sources to determine whether the institutions had contemporaneous or historical ties to Fundamentalism. This coding process resulted in coding five such schools, and thus thirteen radio stations, as having current or historical ties to Fundamentalism.

Table E1 displays the nine radio stations owned by educational institutions that aired any conservative programming in the mid-1960s. As can be seen, the two clear leaders were universities with current or historical ties to Fundamentalism: Bob Jones University and John

Brown University. Each university owned radio stations in two different states airing multiple rightwing programs. Furthermore, each university owned one radio station airing one program associated with the early Christian Right (that of Carl McIntire's *Twentieth Century Reformation Hour*) and each university owned one station airing two programs associated with the early Christian Right (McIntire's program and Billy James Hargis' program *Christian Crusade*). Furthermore, qualitative data from the McIntire radio files and newspaper reports definitively support the conclusion that the two Bob Jones stations functioned as CRBCs. This evidence also generally supports the conclusion that the two radio stations owned by John Brown University functioned as CRBCs, though the McIntire files contain considerably less correspondence with their staff than for other stations under analysis. The only other radio stations owned by educational institutions to air rightwing programming aired one program each and none of these stations aired McIntire and Hargis' program.

Table E2 documents the number of radio stations to air rightwing programs by denomination for all radio stations owned by educational institutions in the mid-1960s. As can be seen, all stations owned by Fundamentalist-affiliated Southern educational institutions – those owned by Bob Jones or John Brown Universities – aired at least some rightwing programming. Furthermore, two groups of radio stations that plausibly might have aired McIntire and Hargis' programs did not do so: (1) stations owned by Northern Fundamentalist institutions such as the Moody Bible Institute and (2) stations owned by more moderate Evangelical institutions such as the Southern Baptist Convention.

Table E1: Educational Facilities Airing Any Rightwing Programming

State	City	Call letters	AM or FM	Name of Licensee	Programs	Total minutes of conservative programming aired	Region	Public or Private	Denomination
California	Long Beach	KGER	AM	John Brown Schools of California Inc	TCRH, CC, LL	330	West	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
South Carolina	Greenville	WMUU	AM	Bob Jones U	TCRH, CC, BTH	270	South	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
South Carolina	Greenville	WMUU-FM	FM	Bob Jones U	TCRH, CC	240	South	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
Georgia	Decatur	WAVO	AM	Bob Jones U.	TCRH, BTH, IA, MF	195	South	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
Arkansas	Siloam Springs	KUOA	AM	KUOA Inc.	TCRH	150	South	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
Louisiana	New Orleans	WWL	AM	Loyola U. of the South	LL	105	South	Private	Catholic
Michigan	Spring Arbor	WSAE-FM	FM	Spring Arbor College	LL	105	Midwest	Private	Free Methodist
Georgia	Atlanta	WAVQ-FM	FM	Bob Jones U	BTS & IA	30	South	Private	Interdenominational Fundamentalist
Texas	Port Arthur	KPAC	AM	Port Arthur College	Scott	15	South	Public	Unaffiliated

Note: The FM stations WAVQ-FM and WMUU-FM were paired to sister AM stations WAVO and WMUU, respectively. These AM/FM sister likely aired the same programming, though this is not reflected in this table.

Table E2: Conservative programming at educational institutions by denomination

Denomination	Stations airing conservative programming	Stations not airing conservative programming	Total stations
Baptist	0	1	1
Catholic	1	11	12
Christian and Missionary alliance	0	1	1
Christian Churches	0	1	1
Evangelical United Brethren Church	0	2	2
Free Methodist	1	1	2
Interdenominational Fundamentalist (Non-South)	0	7	7
Interdenominational Fundamentalist (South)	6	0	6
LDS	0	1	1
Lutheran	0	1	1
Lutheran Church in America	0	3	3
Mennonite	0	2	2
Methodist Church	0	3	3
Reformed Church in America	0	1	1
Seventh Day Adventist	0	5	5
Society of Friends	0	1	1
Southern Baptist	0	3	3
Unaffiliated (private)	0	51	51
Unaffiliated (public)	1	130	131
United Church of Christ	0	1	1
United Methodist	0	2	2
United Presbyterian Church	0	2	2
Total	**9**	**230**	**239**

Source: Institutional subset of radio station data