EXPLAINING DIFFERENTIAL PROTEST PARTICIPATION: NOVICES, RETURNERS, REPEATERS AND STALWARTS

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Abstract

Protest participation scholarship tends to focus on the special characteristics of novices and the highly committed, underplaying the significance of those in between. In this article, we fill a lacuna in the literature by refocusing attention on four different types of protesters – novices, returners, repeaters and stalwarts. Employing data from protest surveys of demonstrations that took place in seven European countries (2009-2010) we test whether these types of protesters are differentiated by biographical/structural availability and/or psychological/attitudinal engagement. Our results suggest that biographic availability distinguishes our four groups, but not as a matter of degree. Few indicators of structural availability distinguish between the groups of protesters, and emotional factors do not distinguish between them at all. Some political engagement factors suggest similarity between novices and returners. This confirms the need to avoid treating protesters as a homogenous group and reinforces importance of assessing the contributions of diverse factors to sustaining ‘protest politics’

Key words: Protest, climate change, May Day, biographic availability, structural availability, political engagement.

Introduction

Patterns of political participation among Western publics have significantly changed in recent decades. One frequently cited change is the rise of participation in public demonstrations. While the number of people engaged in protest is not necessarily growing year on year (Stoker et al 2011: 54-6), since the mid-1970s there has been a dramatic rise in the number of people claiming to have engaged in protest (Dalton et al. 2010; Dalton 2008: 51; Inglehart and Catterberg, 2002). This has led many scholars to proclaim what has been variously called
a “demonstration democracy” (Etzioni 1970), “social movement society” (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Soule and Earl 2005) or “protest politics” (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002).

Whilst protest is now quite justifiably understood as a relatively routine form of political participation in democratic states (Cf. Barnes, Kaase et al. 1979), the questions asked in large-scale cross-national surveys of political participation – which are extensively invoked to sustain claims about “protest politics” – have resulted in relatively little attention being devoted to understanding the differences among those who protest more and less intensely and/or persistently. The European Social Survey (ESS), for example, asks people only whether they have participated in a demonstration in the last 12 months, and the World Values Survey (WVS) only asks people whether they have ever participated in a demonstration. Thus these surveys allow us only to compare those who have demonstrated (either in their lifetimes or within the past 12 months) with those who have never demonstrated. We are consequently unable to learn anything from these surveys about what distinguishes people who have protested once in their lives from those who protest repeatedly.

Fortunately, social movement scholars have started addressing this question with surveys of protesters. Verhulst and Walgrave (2009) surveyed participants in a number of protests across Europe to discover what distinguishes novices (“first-timers”) from other protesters, and Verhulst and Van Laer (2009) have used similar data to understand what is special about persistent protesters, whom they call “die-hards” (and whom we term “stalwarts”). But both these studies failed to look at those who protest relatively frequently but are not “die-hards”.

There is a need to look more closely at those protesters who lie between the extremes of novices and stalwarts for two important reasons. Firstly, those intermediate between the extremes may play a crucial role in sustaining protest. Cress et al.’s (1997) “competition thesis” posits that intense involvement in protest leads to fatigue and ‘burnout’ among activists, and consequently to declining activism over time; we might, therefore, suppose that the converse applies: that those who attend protests repeatedly but less frequently are more likely to persist in protest over time. Thus, the protest participation of those who are intermediate between novices and stalwarts might substantiate claims about the persistence of “protest politics”. Secondly, protesters who are neither novices nor stalwarts are the implicit but unspecified reference group in studies that suggest that committed or persistent activists
are more remarkable (structurally and/or in terms of engagement) than others. Thus, we address a missing link in understanding dynamics of differential protest participation. Are protesters who are neither novices nor stalwarts really less remarkable than other protesters in terms of their biographical and structural availability and psychological and political engagement? This is the key question that underpins our investigation.

The extant literature presents us with a puzzle insofar as very similar explanations are given for what is remarkable about novices and for the persistence of the committed. Verhulst and Walgrave (2009), for example, found in their analysis of a number of demonstrations across Europe that novices are more biographically available, and are emotionally different from other protesters. Novices need to be remarkable in these respects, they argue, because they face considerably higher barriers in their passage from non-protester to protester than an experienced protester does in attending yet another protest. But, as we shall explore in more detail later, biographical availability and emotional engagement are also used to explain persistence in activism (Corrigall Brown 2011, Kanter 1968).

We suspect that it is for contextual and conceptual reasons that similar explanations for the participation of novices and the persistence of the committed prevail. Contextually, research on novices and committed activists has been undertaken in a variety of research settings. Novices are studied almost exclusively in the context of their participation in demonstrations (Verhulst and Walgrave 2009). By contrast, the persistence of the committed has been researched in various contexts: in intentional communities (Kanter 1968), college anti-apartheid mobilizations (Hirsch 1990), anti-hunger organizations (Barkan et al. 1993, 1995) and membership of voluntary organizations (Cress et al. 1997), to name a few. Conceptually, commitment is frequently understood to be a mechanism that ties people to a social movement or a social movement organization (Moscovici 1985, Becker 1960) rather than as an outcome. According to Snow and Soule’s (2010: 143) summary of the literature on commitment and social movements:

… the stronger and more unwavering the commitment, the less relevant those costs and risks [of protest participation]; the weaker the commitment, the weightier the costs and risks.
If we take Snow and Soule’s formulation seriously, novices might be viewed as committed because they have proved willing to overcome the relatively high costs and risks involved in making the difficult transition into activism (Verhulst and Walgrave 2009). The mechanism of commitment might therefore be at work regardless of the intensity and persistence of protest participation.

We develop the literature by identifying four groups defined by their different frequencies of participation in protest, and by avoiding the contextual and conceptual problems outlined above. Contextual problems are addressed by analysing impacts of both structural and agential variables on the same dataset. Our data, on participants in ten demonstrations (six May Day demonstrations and four climate change demonstrations) that took place in seven Western European countries during 2009-2010, is derived from the Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualising Contestation collaborative European research project (Klandermans et al. 2009). To avoid conceptual confusion, we have distinguished four types of activists not in terms of their commitment, but on the basis of the intensity and persistence of their protest participation. Our survey asks respondents about their participation in protest in the past 12 months and across their lifetimes. We measure intensity on the basis of their protest participation in the past year, and persistence by their protest engagement over their lifetimes. Stalwarts exhibit high levels of intensity and persistence. Novices have never participated in protest (before the one at which they were surveyed). Returners exhibit moderate intensity and commitment, and repeaters protest with moderate intensity but greater persistence. We test three models: 1) a structural model, which includes indicators of biographic and structural availability; 2) an agential model, which includes political and psychological engagement; and 3) a combined model, which combines structural and agential factors.

To explore whether there is anything remarkable about those protesters who are neither novices nor stalwarts, we proceed as follows. Firstly we discuss structural and agential variables on the basis of extant evidence. After elaborating hypotheses, we discuss the data and operationalization of the dependent and explanatory variables. In our analysis, we present descriptive statistics and multinomial logistic models. We use multinomial logistic regression models to assess differences between our four categories in terms of structural and agential factors. We close with a discussion of the research findings and their implications.
Two sets of explanans for protest participation

Whilst there is a wealth of literature exploring trajectories of social movement participation, much of it has done so through the lens of one or another of recruitment, persistence or commitment. Moreover, many studies of the persistence and commitment of activists have looked at these processes in relation to a particular movement and/or organization. Although its focus differs from ours, extant literature nevertheless provides a useful set of variables we might employ to understand intensity and persistence of protest participation, and allows us to assess whether studies of recruitment to protest and commitment to organizations can be generalized to research on differential participation in protest. To simplify this complex body of literature, we separate it into two broad types of explanans: the structural and the agential. The structural explanans pertain to the position of individuals in relation to others, in other words, to external factors; central to these are the concepts of biographical and structural availability. The agential explanans consider internal characteristics of individuals: their emotional standpoint; adherence to movement issues; or degree of political engagement.

External / structural factors: Availability

Biographical availability is the “absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage and family responsibilities” (McAdam 1986: 70). McAdam (1986, 1989) found that individuals who were employed were less likely than the unemployed to participate in high-risk activism because they had less time and feared it might jeopardise their employment. Similarly, Corrigall-Brown (2011:80) found that marrying, having children and moving house worked against sustained commitment to protest organizations. By and large, however, when we move away from a focus on high-risk activism, empirical findings on protest participation or commitment to activism provide mixed support for the biographical availability hypothesis. Some studies have shown that employment is positively rather than, as the thesis proposes, negatively correlated with participation in protest (McAdam 1986; Nepstad and Smith 1999), possibly because monetary resources are important for participation (Verba et al. 1995; McCarthy and Zald 1973), but also because employment is highly correlated with personal self-efficacy and self-esteem and social involvement, and contributes to structural availability by embedding individuals in networks. However, Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) found that
biographical availability influenced professed willingness to protest, but not actual participation. Consequently, in their comprehensive review of the literature, Snow and Soule (2010) conclude that the evidence in support of the biographic availability hypothesis is weak. Nevertheless, we do not rule out the potential importance of biographical availability for determining differential participation in protest. Varying degrees of support for the biographic availability thesis are – at least partly – artefacts of the different research contexts studied: McAdam focused on high-risk activism; Corrigan Brown looked at participation in particular voluntary organizations; Nepstad and Smith studied involvement in the Nicaragua Exchange peace movement campaign; and Verba et al. considered a range of civic, political, social and material voluntary activities. We would not expect the thesis to work equally well across all forms of political engagement. Most importantly, no-one has yet tested whether biographic availability can explain differential participation in street demonstrations.

*Structural availability* refers to the ‘presence of interpersonal networks which facilitate recruitment to activism’ (Schussman and Soule 2005: 1086). Given the importance of interpersonal networks, it is unsurprising that being directly asked to attend a protest has been found to be a good predictor of protest participation (Schussman and Soule 2005; Klandermans 1997; Verba et al. 1995). Organizational memberships foster development of interpersonal ties (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Klandermans 1997; McAdam 1982; Snow et al. 1980, Verhulst and Van Laer 2009). Furthermore, once someone is an organization member, s/he is more likely to receive information about protests through channels closed to non-members, such as activist newsletters (Verhulst and Walgrave 2009). Mobilizing potential is even more pronounced if people are members of more than one organization (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; McAdam 1986; Oberschall 1973; Gould 1991; Snow and Soule 2010:122). Having friends or being married to people involved in social movement organizations or protest causes identities to become more embedded. Thus “salient identities” (Stryker 1968; 2000) emerge as individuals’ networks inside and outside movements increasingly overlap (see also Kornhauser 1962; McAdam and Paulsen 1993). However, ties that pull new members into an organization can push current members out (McPherson et al. 1992; Gould 1990) due to conflicting demands on individuals’ time (Cress et al. 1997: 66). But do multiple memberships work in the same way for protesters, making them unavailable for frequent protest participation? As with biographic availability, the current literature provides no straightforward answer. This is because previous studies have been conducted on a range
of different types of social movement participation, and never on the four categories of protesters upon which we focus.

Internal / agentic factors: Engagement

Psychological / political engagement explanations have developed substantially since early studies of political participation. Some borrow ideas from social psychology, others from political science. All, however, share the idea that it is something internal (or intrinsic) to individuals that leads them to protest participation. Early scholars of social movements such as Gurr (1970) explained protest participation as the product of frustration, anger and alienation from the political system or, at the very least, from government and conventional politics. Although the frustration-aggression and disaffection from democracy theses have been heavily criticised (Norris et al. 2005; Thomassen 1990), grievances and emotions are still considered crucial for motivating individuals to protest. As Klandermans (1997) has pointed out, people protest “not only to enforce political change, but to gain dignity in their lives through struggle and moral expression” (Klandermans 2004: 365). There is considerable evidence that anger, contempt, fear and sorrow influence people’s intention to participate in political action on issues underpinned by moral concerns (Leach et al. 2006; Reed 2004).

Social-psychological approaches to the study of social movements have sought to determine the effects of “approach” and “avoidance” emotions on protest participation. Anger and frustration are classified as approach emotions, and worry and fear as avoidance emotions (Klandermans et al. 2008). It has been found that protesters who identify with a group they consider powerful are more likely to experience approach emotions, and, consequently, are more likely to participate in protest. In contrast, those who consider their group weak are more likely to experience avoidance emotions and therefore will not take action (Devos et al., 2003; Klandermans et al., 2008). In the case of street demonstrations, anger seems to make people more decisive in their recourse to protest and/ or in reinforcing existing motives (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007). Thus, we have some inkling that the presence of approach emotions allows us to distinguish between protesters and non-protesters. But how do they distinguish among people who protest with different degrees of intensity and persistence?
Of course, motivations to protest are not solely emotional. The social-psychological approach to motivations considers that they may be instrumental, ideological or identity-based (Klandermans 2004). Instrumental motives are based on the rational cost-benefits calculation of both collective incentives and selective incentives gained by participation (Klandermans 1997, 2004; Olson 1971; Verba et al. 1995). Collective incentives refer to the overall collective goal of a protest, whilst selective incentives refer to material benefits accruing to individuals. According to Klandermans (2004: 365), ideology involves “wanting to express one’s views” and the emotions associated with it, for example, moral indignation. In this sense, it relates to the literature on emotions. Strong identification with a group appears to make participation in collective political action on behalf of that group more likely (Kelly and Breinlinger 1996; Simon et al. 1998; Klandermans et al. 2002; de Weerd and Klandermans 1999). This, in turn, is similar to Kanter’s (1968) idea of “cohesion commitment” which ties together the members of a group; only when cohesion commitment is high do affective ties among members of a group create solidarity and potential for action (Hirsch 1990). But it has not yet been established whether novice, returner, repeater and stalwart protesters experience different degrees of identification with other protesters, or a sense of cohesion commitment.

The political science literature discusses the role of political engagement in facilitating participation. This literature covers political interest, political knowledge and the presence or absence of liberal attitudes, arguing that, without some level of political interest and political information, individuals will not engage in political acts (Schussman and Soule 2005; Verba et al. 1995; Putman 2000). By and large, those with liberal or progressive political views tend to make disproportionate use of protest (Dalton, 2008), and protesters often have a left-wing orientation (Corrigall-Brown 2011).

Finally, it has generally been argued that without some level of perceived political efficacy – the belief that one’s actions can make a difference (McAdam and Paulsen 1993) – individuals will not attend protests. But do those who attend protests frequently have more faith in the efficacy of protest than those who rarely participate? Or is it more the case that their participation becomes habitual by virtue of their structural availability? We extend the debate in the literature by considering how agential variables – including perceived efficacy of protest – interplay with structural variables amongst our four types of protesters.
Hypotheses

The two types of explanations for persistence and commitment – structural and agential – could be understood to conflict. Agentic explanations suggest that individuals who often participate in protest differ in psychological and attitudinal characteristics from those who participate less. The former might, for example, be more frustrated or angry with the political system, more strongly left-wing, or more highly interested in politics, their strong internal characteristics could enable them to overcome structural barriers to participation. On the other hand, structural explanations imply that individuals who protest often do not differ in their internal characteristics from individuals who protest less frequently, but are better positioned biographically and/or structurally by, for example, being younger and so having fewer commitments or, being retired from employment and having more discretionary time, by having friendship networks that include other protesters, or being members of political organizations that afford them opportunities for protest participation. The presence of such structural factors may obviate the need for agential factors. Thus, we test which set of explanations – the structural or the agentic (or both combined) – best explains whether there is anything remarkable about those activists who are neither stalwarts nor novices.

1. Availability: Stalwarts and novices are more structurally and biographically available than returners and repeaters; they protest despite lacking psychological and political engagement.

2. Engagement: Stalwarts and novices are more psychologically and politically engaged than returners and repeaters; they protest despite lacking structural availability.

Data and methods

Our focus is upon factors that distinguish among those who protest with different degrees of intensity and persistence. This entails limitations to the generalizability of our findings. Firstly, our results cannot be generalized to commitment and/or persistence in movement organizations or within a particular movement. An ‘activist’ might be an enduring member of
an organization without intensely or persistently protesting, and a frequent demonstrator might not be a member of any organization.

Secondly, our findings cannot be generalized to protest participation *per se*. Our focus is restricted to relatively large May Day and climate change street demonstrations in Europe in 2009-10. Observation and survey evidence suggest that these were not typical of the large number of protests that occurred even during that short time period. Moreover, these May Day and climate protests differed in respect of our dependent variable: novices, rare in May Day demonstrations, were present in greater numbers in climate demonstrations (more on this, below).

Finally, our data provide only a snapshot. We use survey responses taken in the present to understand decisions respondents made in the past. Because novices have never participated in a demonstration before the protest at which they were surveyed, we can be confident that the information they provide about their availability and engagement is still valid, but the situations of people who participated in protests years ago might have changed. It is, therefore, problematic to use current biographical information to explain patterns of participation in past protests. This limitation does not apply equally to all independent variables: some, such as political values, might be fairly stable over the life course. A panel study design might have been preferable, but because few of our respondents provided contact details and few protesters could be followed over time, it was impracticable. We are nevertheless able to draw out differences between various categories of protesters and to consider contributions of different factors to sustaining protest participation.

**The data**

We analyse survey results from ten demonstrations in seven countries (see Table 1). Respondents are split almost evenly between May Day demonstrations in May 2010 and climate change demonstrations in December 2009.

<Table 1 here>

Response rates varied between 18% (London May Day) and 41.7% (climate event, Utrecht, see Table 1). To establish the representativity of our data, we compare two samples those
who completed the mailback survey and those who gave face-to-face interviews (see Klandermans et al., this volume). We found no significant differences for gender, the timing of respondents’ decision to participate, degree of interest in politics and highest educational qualification. There were, however, small but significant differences in responses to three questions: ‘Are you a member of any of the organization(s) that organized this demonstration?’ (Phi .08, significance .034); ‘In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in your country?’ (Phi .05, significance .048); and year of birth (T-test significance .000; the mean age of those who did respond was 45.9, and of non-respondents 40.8 years). Overall, our sample modestly under-represents those ‘not sure’ whether they were a member of an organization that organized the demonstration, and those least satisfied with democracy. The survey sample was also slightly biased towards older respondents. With these caveats, we have reasonable confidence that our survey data is broadly representative of participants in the demonstrations surveyed (see Walgrave and Verhulst 2011).

Operationalization of the dependent variable: intensity and frequency of protest

We operationalized four types of protesters in terms of intensity (last 12 months) and persistence (lifetime) of protest participation. This was derived from the survey question: ‘How many times have you taken part in a demonstration?’ – ‘Ever’ and in the ‘Past twelve months’. The answer options for each were: “Never”, “1-5”, “6-10”, “11-20” and “21+”. We used the two different time periods to distinguish between four patterns of protest participation over time:

1) ‘Novices’ answered ‘never’ when asked whether they had ever (previously) participated in demonstrations;
2) ‘Returners’ are those who claim to have participated in 1-5 protests in the past 12 months and 1-5 times ‘ever’;
3) ‘Repeaters’ claim to have participated in 1-5 protests in the past 12 months but in 6 or more protests ‘ever’;
4) ‘Stalwarts’ claim to have participated in 6 or more demonstrations in both the past 12 months and ‘ever’.
Table 2 shows the distribution of novices, returners, repeaters and stalwarts by issue of protest. Returners and repeaters together constitute over 80% of our sample, which demonstrates why it is important to study protesters intermediate between novices and stalwarts.

There are notable differences between May Day and climate change protesters’ responses across our dependent variable (Table 2). May Day demonstrations are, in western European countries, long-instituted and routine annual parades, often family outings, facilitated by a public holiday. Because they are so traditional, they tend to attract relatively few novices (Table 3). Climate change marches, however, are more novel. In the UK, for example, annual climate change marches have occurred only since 2001; the 2009 march was by far the largest to date. Thus it is unsurprising that climate change protests, and the London 2009 march in particular, attracted a higher proportion of novices than May Day marches. This is even more the case for the Utrecht climate event, ‘Beat the Heat’, which, in addition to being a protest event included an exhibition costing five Euros admission, with entertainment provided by Dutch celebrities; its cabaret style may explain the high proportion of novices.

Unlike other climate change demonstrations, the Copenhagen protest attracted many stalwarts. This may be a consequence of the nature of the protest, which centered around the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 15th Meeting of the Parties (COP15). Almost half the participants came from outside Denmark, and they were, on average, significantly more left-wing than other climate demonstrators (Wahlström, Wennerhag and Rootes 2012). Stalwarts might be more likely than others to manifest the levels of commitment necessary to sustain travel abroad to protest at such an international summit. In all, the statistically significant difference in the distribution of the dependent variable between climate and May Day demonstrations (Chi 364.97*** ) justifies our decision to control for type of movement issue in our multinomial logistic regression models.

Our study does not test macro-level hypotheses for cross-national comparisons, but we are mindful of differences in the distribution of our dependent variable across demonstrations in
different countries. All but one (Barcelona) of the surveyed demonstrations took place in northern Europe (London, Brussels, Copenhagen, Utrecht, Antwerp, Stockholm and Zurich), but the protest culture is generally considered more intense in southern Europe, with protests more frequent and confrontational than in northern Europe (Kousis et al. 2008). This may explain the relatively high proportion of repeaters and stalwarts in the Barcelona May Day demonstration. Yet even Barcelona has a lower proportion of stalwarts than the London May Day demonstration. To accommodate differences across countries and demonstration type we tried controlling for both, separately, in our models by setting up a series of dummy variables. However, there were so many redundancies in the data as well as singularities in the Hessian matrix that proceeding with the multinomial regression would produce results too difficult to interpret.

Using responses to the ‘ever’ question about protest participation to construct our dependent variable is problematic, because older people have had more opportunities to protest than younger people. To mitigate this, we excluded everyone under 18, and crosstabulated age by our dependent variable (Table 4) to check that there was an acceptable number of young people in the stalwart category. We found that 15 per cent of young people (aged 18-25) could be classified as stalwarts, which is a higher percentage than other age groups. Since 18.2 per cent of the stalwarts in the sample are young (despite the relatively smaller numbers of young people in the sample), our operationalization does not unduly discriminate against young people.

<Table 4 here>

**Operationalization of the explanatory variables**

The independent variables were derived from previous research on commitment, recruitment and participation in protest. Our measures of biographical availability are age, employment situation and gender (assuming that those who are young or retired, out of employment and male are more ‘available’ for protest). For structural availability, we include variables that measure whether respondents went with others to the demonstration at which they were surveyed, whether they were asked by others to attend, if they had heard about the demonstration through closed channels, and whether they claimed to be members of social and political organizations. For emotional engagement, we examine perceived efficacy of the demonstration, whether protesters perceived that their personal participation would make a
difference, their sense of identification with other protesters, what motivated them to participate\textsuperscript{iii} and the presence of avoid and approach emotions\textsuperscript{iv}. To measure political engagement, we considered respondents’ previous political engagement, degree of interest in politics, self-placement on the left-right continuum, subscription to left-libertarian values, extent of distrust of government and dissatisfaction with democracy. We recoded each variable on a scale of 0-1, where zero indicates a variable’s lowest bound and 1 its upper bound; thus, on a ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ scale, strongly disagree would be represented by a zero and strongly agree by 1. (See Appendix for details).

Results

Multinomial regression models allowed comparison of the effects of our independent variables on returners and repeaters relative to novices and stalwarts. We compare results from three different models: Model 1 includes variables that measure biographical and structural availability; Model 2 measures psychological and political engagement; and Model 3 combines Models 1 and 2. Combining Models 1 and 2 into a full model also allows us to understand how important variables in Model 1 are when controlling for the variables in Model 2 and vice versa. This strategy allows us to understand whether there is anything remarkable about returners and repeaters compared to novices and stalwarts. It also allows us to understand how the structural and agential variables interplay.

Table 5 presents the results of multinomial logistic regression on our dependent variable (novices, returners, repeaters and stalwarts). The first thing to note is that the Pseudo-R2 for the biographical/structural availability model (1) is smaller (30\%) than that for the psychological/political engagement model (44\%) – this means that Model 2 does better than Model 1 in explaining differences between our four types of protesters. Across all models, participants in climate change demonstrations are more likely to be novices and returners than repeaters and stalwarts, which is consistent with the relative novelty and less institutionalized character of climate protests.

The results for Model 1 show that in terms of biographical availability, all three of our variables – being male, being out of employment and being of biographically available age – have significant effects. However, only being male operates in a linear fashion as a matter of degree – stalwarts are more likely to be male than repeaters, returners and novices in turn.
Novices are no less likely to be out of employment than repeaters, but returners and stalwarts are somewhat less likely to be out of employment. All other groups are significantly more likely than repeaters to be of biographically available age.

In terms of structural availability, also from Model 1, we find that all four variables have significant effects. However, novices and returners were significantly less likely than repeaters to have attended the demonstration with two or more other people/groups, and returners were somewhat less likely than repeaters to have been asked to attend by others. Overall, as we might expect, novices were less embedded in protest networks than others, and thus were less structurally available. Moreover, novices were also less likely to have accessed closed (organizational) communication channels than returners, repeaters and stalwarts and thus would have had fewer opportunities to find out about protests not publicized in the mainstream press. Similarly, novices and returners were less likely than repeaters to have multiple organizational memberships.

The results of Model 2 (psychological/political engagement) show that three of our variables – the extent to which respondents believed in the capacity of groups to bring about political change, identification with fellow protesters and strength of motivation – distinguish between our four types of protester. Returners were significantly less likely than repeaters to believe that organized groups have power to bring about political change, and all (novices and, surprisingly, stalwarts, especially so) were significantly less likely than repeaters to identify with other protesters.

<Table 5 here>

The political engagement variables in Model 2 explain much variation, with strongly significant effects suggesting that many of the variables in this model distinguish between the four categories as a matter of degree; that is, they increase in relevance as protest frequency and intensity increases. Novices are the least likely to have a wealth of previous experience in political action and to be highly politically interested, followed by returners, repeaters and stalwarts, respectively. But novices and returners place themselves further to the right on the left-right continuum, with repeaters being most likely to hold left-libertarian views. Stalwarts are least satisfied with democracy, whilst only returners are significantly less likely to be
distrustful of government than repeaters. In summary, only political interest has a clearly linear effect, with stalwarts reporting most interest and novices least.

The Pseudo-R2 (47%) for Model 3 suggests that the full model does even better than Model 2 at explaining differences between types of protesters. The results mostly cohere with Model 2, but there are some interesting differences. Once we control for the psychological/political engagement variables, stalwarts were no longer more likely to be male and novices no longer more likely to be female than repeaters, but returners remained more likely to be female than repeaters. In Model 1, novices and repeaters were less likely to have attended the demonstration with others than repeaters, but these differences are not significant in Model 3. Model 1 suggested that novices were less likely than stalwarts to have heard about protest through closed communication channels, but the differences were weaker in Model 3, distinguishing only stalwarts. Novices, as might be expected, lack political experience. Overall, structural and biographical availability work together as predictors of our outcome variable, but political engagement works best of all. To some extent, structural and biographical availability variables appear to work as proxies for political engagement, which is hardly surprising given that agential and structural variables are intertwined and can iteratively bolster one another.

**Discussion and conclusions**

What support do we have for our hypotheses? If hypothesis 1, “Stalwarts and novices are more structurally and biographically available than returners and repeaters; they protest despite lacking psychological and political engagement”, were fully confirmed, we should expect the variables ‘not in employment’, being of biographically available age and being male to positively and significantly discriminate novices and stalwarts from each of returners and repeaters. Whilst we find significant differences between returners and repeaters on all three of these variables, only age distinguishes novices from repeaters, and none of them distinguishes between stalwarts and repeaters. Structural availability works less well than biographical availability at distinguishing between novices and repeaters, and only by comparison with stalwarts, who were more likely than others to hear about the demonstration at which they participated through closed communication channels. Consequently, hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed.
But what about hypothesis 2? This suggested that “Stalwarts and novices are more psychologically and politically engaged than returners and repeaters; they protest despite lacking structural availability.” This holds more water, but only for stalwarts, who were positively different from both returners and repeaters on a number of indicators of political engagement. Contrary to the arguments of Verhulst and Walgrave (2009), novices do not appear remarkable in (most) structural and agential terms. Instead, our combined model suggests that stalwarts protest more than any other group, despite not being more biographically available, because they are more politically engaged.

In sum, we find that agential and structural factors are required to explain differential protest participation. Our findings contradict our hypotheses that stalwarts and novices are straightforwardly more agentially and structurally remarkable than those in the intermediate groups. We find that the factors distinguishing novices from returners and repeaters are either not like the factors that distinguish stalwarts from the intermediate groups or, where they are similar, that they work as a matter of degree, making novices and stalwarts very distinct from one another.

Although our key question asked whether protesters who lie between the extremes of novices and stalwarts were remarkable, we also uncovered significant differences between the two sub-categories of intermediates, i.e. between returners and repeaters. The differences are complex. In terms of biographical / structural availability, returners are more likely than repeaters to be female and in employment, and in these respects returners are more distinct from repeaters than are novices and stalwarts. When we consider biographically available age, only novices are more distinct from repeaters than are returners. Of the psychological engagement variables, returners are the only protesters significantly different from repeaters in their estimations of group efficacy, but this is the only such variable where returners differ from repeaters. On most of the political engagement variables, returners are closer to novices than to repeaters, and only on political interest and satisfaction with democracy, where the differences between novices, returners and repeaters are not significant, are repeaters significantly different from stalwarts.

There are a few clues to what may be systematic differences between returners and repeaters. The fact that all other groups are significantly more likely than repeaters to be of biographically available age suggests that repeaters are more likely to be habitual protesters.
able to maintain a moderate level of protest participation over the longer term without the facilitators provided by biographical availability. Returners were significantly less likely than repeaters to have attended the demonstration with two or more other people/groups, were somewhat less likely to have been asked to attend by others, and were less likely to have multiple organizational memberships. All this suggests that repeaters are more likely than returners to inhabit a relatively intense protest milieu in which the circles of friendship and political commitment overlap. This may help to explain why returners were significantly less likely than repeaters to believe that organized groups have power to bring about political change, or to identify with other protesters, placed themselves further to the right politically, and were significantly less distrustful of government.

Our work builds upon McAdam’s work on recruitment to high-risk activism. He found that structural and agential factors make individuals available for protest. Whilst agential variables work best in our models, it is clear that the agential variables and structural variables are strongly inter-correlated. Certainly, if we had treated our protesters as a homogenous group, we would have discovered that protesters display many of the structural and agential traits McAdam would lead us to expect. However, contrary to McAdam’s thesis, we find that stalwarts – who, like those engaged in high risk activism, give up more time for protest – appear no more biographically available than others in our sample.

We also find evidence to challenge previous scholarship on structural availability and identity. Some, for example, might be surprised to discover that structural availability – aside from closed communication channels – does little to distinguish between our four categories of protesters in our combined model. In particular, whereas Schussman and Soule (2005) found that being asked to protest is the strongest predictor of participating in protest, we found that the variable ‘being asked to participate’ was insignificant when we controlled for psychological and political engagement. This juxtaposition encourages us to reiterate our warning against generalizing across studies of recruitment and participation, and of the weaknesses of relying on general studies of political participation. It is important to note that Schussman and Soule compared only protesters with non-protesters based on the American Participation Survey (Verba et al 2005). Our apparently contrary finding serves to reinforce one of our key arguments: that it is a mistake to assume that what distinguishes protesters from non-protesters will also distinguish between novices, returners, repeaters and stalwarts as a matter of degree, i.e., as points on a continuum. The inclusion of questions about
frequency and intensity of protest in large-scale surveys of political participation would be a real boon to this field of study.

As the concept of identity is given central prominence in much of the literature about social movements (Diani 1992), it may seem strange that both novices and stalwarts identify less with fellow protesters than do repeaters. However, most accounts of collective identity refer to identification with a particular social movement or social movement organization (Saunders 2008), but not identification with others attending a demonstration. Whilst previous research has shown that strongly identifying with a particular group might make action on behalf of that group more likely, and whilst those who persist in social movement organizations are thought to develop a sense of “cohesion commitment” that short-term participants lack (Kanter 1968), our findings suggest that strongly identifying with other protesters on a march seems not to be straightforwardly correlated with increased intensity and frequency of protest participation. This, again, reminds us that concepts that apply to movements or organizations do not always work so well when we shift the focus to participation in protest demonstrations.

In addition to raising important theoretical and contextual challenges in the study of differential recruitment, our findings also carry a useful message for protest organizers. If we are right that those intermediate between novices and stalwarts sustain protest, then protest organizers would do well to know what it is that characterizes them. They are generally more satisfied with democracy than their more engaged counterparts, and have participated in fewer political acts. They also tend to hear about demonstrations only through open communication channels. This suggests that protest organisers might work harder to make calls to action more widely available through open channels. Protest organizers are not, however, faced with the task of having to alter less tractable factors like political attitudes in order to boost the numbers of people who return to protests. This is fortunate because one of the best-supported generalizations in political sociology is that political attitudes and behavioural habits acquired during the “formative years” (Mannheim 1928) of socialization remain relatively stable through the life-course (e.g., Andersen and Fetner, 2008, Heath and Park, 1997, Mattei et al., 1990, Abramson and Inglehart, 1992, Putnam 2000). Thus, it is easier to see how social movement organizers might spread their calls to action more widely through open channels than it is to visualise them bringing about large-scale structural changes sufficient to alter political behaviours and attitudes. Whilst social movements
continue the struggle to bring about large-scale structural changes, “protest politics” can in the meantime be sustained by less ambitious short-term actions designed to encourage novices to return to protest.

References


Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University Department of Sociology.


## Appendix – Variable coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices, returners, repeaters, stalwarts</td>
<td>How many times have you taken part in a demonstration?</td>
<td>Novices (0 ever, 0 last 12 months) \nReturners (&lt;6 ever, &lt;6 last 12 months) \nRepeaters (6+ever, &lt;6 past 12 months) \nStalwarts (6+ ever, 6+ last 12 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Day or climate change demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 if May Day demo; 0 if climate change demo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biographical availability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Are you … ?</td>
<td>1 male; 0 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>What is your employment situation?</td>
<td>1 if student, unemployed/between jobs, retired, housewife/househusband; 0 other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>In which year were you born?</td>
<td>1 if 18-30 or 60+ and female or 65+ and male; 0 other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural availability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company (count)</td>
<td>Were you at this demonstration with …</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the individual was accompanied by no-one and 1 means the individual was accompanied by all 6 possible categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked by (count)</td>
<td>Which of the following people specifically asked you to take part in the demonstration?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the individual was asked by no-one and 1 means the individual was asked by all 6 possible categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed communication channels (reliable access)</td>
<td>How did you find out about the demonstration?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 if mentioned no closed channel and 1 if mentioned both closed channels: fellow members of organization or association and an organization – magazine, meeting, mailing list, or website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational membership (count)</td>
<td>If you have been involved in any of the following types of organisations in the past 12 months, please indicate whether you are a passive member or an active member.</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means passive or active member of 0 organisations and 1 means active or passive member of all 12 organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological/political engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstration efficacy</strong> (perceived)</td>
<td>How effective do you think this demonstration will be in achieving these goals?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the respondent thought the demonstration would be not at all effective on both goals and where 1 means the respondent thought the demonstration would be very effective on both goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual efficacy</strong></td>
<td>My participation can have an impact on public policy in this country.</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means strongly disagree and 1 means strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group efficacy</strong></td>
<td>Organized groups of citizens can have a lot of impact on public policies in this country.</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means strongly disagree and 1 means strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protester identity</strong></td>
<td>To what extent do you identify with other people present at the demonstration?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means not at all and 1 means very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivational strength</strong> (*see fn iv)</td>
<td>I participated in this demonstration in order to …</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means strongly agreed with 0 motivations and 1 means the respondent strongly agreed with all six possible motivations for protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach emotions</strong> (*see fn v)</td>
<td>Thinking about &lt;the issue of this&gt; demonstration makes me feel …</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the respondent said not at all about both approach emotions (anger and frustration) and 1 means the respondent said very much about both approach emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance emotions</strong> (*see fn v)</td>
<td>Thinking about &lt;the issue of this&gt; demonstration makes me feel …</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the respondent said not at all about both avoidance emotions (fear and worry) and 1 means the respondent said very much about both avoidance emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous political engagement</strong></td>
<td>There are many things people can do to prevent or promote change. Have you, in the past 12 months …?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means the respondent engaged in no other type of political action in last 12 months and 1 means the respondent engaged in all 10 other types of political action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political interest</strong></td>
<td>How interested are you in politics?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means not at all and 1 means very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Left-right scale</strong></td>
<td>In politics, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the Left and 10 means the Right?</td>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means left and 1 means right (originally 0 to10 scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Left-libertarianism</strong></td>
<td>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</td>
<td>Derived from four political values questions on redistribution, public/private ownership of companies, authority, and free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movement of peoples: 1 for left-libertarianism; 0 other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distrust in government</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please indicate, in general, how much you trust national government.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 means very much trust government and 1 means not at all trust government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in your country?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A scale from 0 to 1 where 0 very dissatisfied and 1 very satisfied with democracy (originally 0 to 10 scale)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**End notes**

1 The span 1-5 means that those who had previously attended only one demonstration are in the same category as those who had previously attended 4, but this is an artefact of the questionnaire design.

2 Only 2% of the original sample was under the age of 18.

3 Our survey was designed to allow us to distinguish between instrumental, ideological and identity-based motivations, each measured by two questions. Using principal component analysis (PCA), we found responses to all six motivation items loaded positively onto one component with an eigenvalue greater than 1 ($\lambda = 2.56$), indicating a general ‘strength of motivation’ dimension. In other words, people who scored strongly on one motivation tended to score strongly on the others, and, conversely, people who scored weakly on one motivation tended to score weakly on the others. Therefore, instead of distinguishing between different types of motivations, we selected to create a motivation dummy variable so that 1 stands for people selecting ‘strongly agree’ on at least 4 out of 6 motivations.

4 Theory separates approach (anger, frustration) and avoidance (fear, worry) emotions. Although PCA suggested that respondents who scored strongly on one emotion tended to score strongly on the others (all four emotions items loaded positively onto one component with eigenvalue greater than 1 [$\lambda = 2.01$], we noted that the second component had a relatively high eigenvalue (0.90). Although the Kaiser (1960) criterion suggests that only components with an eigenvalue greater than 1 should be retained, we noted that the second component paired up the approach (positive unrotated principal component loadings) and avoidance (negative loadings) emotions. A graphical scree test (Cattell, 1966) confirmed that it made sense to retain two components since after the second component, the line of the graph decreases, indicating that the subsequent components are simply “factorial scree”. Based on this, we coded emotions into two separate dummy variables, one for approach and one for avoidance emotions where individuals selected answer options ‘quite’ or ‘very much’ on both emotions in the relevant pair.