All the Cool Kids Are Doing It:

The Effects of Group Involvement on Non-electoral Participation

Aarika Patel
A&S Class of '09
SOC 212, Spring 2008
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN

Abstract

Though much research has focused on the reasons people join in non-electoral acts, only recently have studies focused on the importance of social networks. Using the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey, I examine the impact of group involvement on non-electoral participation and compared the impact of non-religious group involvement with religious group involvement. The results indicate that group involvement had the strongest impact on non-electoral participation compared to gender, race, age, education and religion. Furthermore, non-religious group involvement was the type of group involvement that had the strongest effect on non-electoral participation.

Studies on non-electoral participation have generally focused on the movements of the 1960's. Non-electoral acts are attempts to change political policy beyond electing government officials and include strikes, boycotts, and petitions. Early theories on protest movements tried to explain why people participated in these seemingly irrational acts. However, participation in protests is no longer seen as an irrational act (McAdams, 1986). Protest and other non-electoral acts are seen as viable options for changing government policy in addition to using established electoral processes (McVeigh and Sikkink, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Protests do not occur sporadically or in an unorganized fashion. People have to be recruited to participate in non-electoral acts. While past studies have focused on the characteristics of non-electoral participation, I focus on the recruitment process for non-electoral participation.

Previous studies of non-electoral participation focused more on the biographical availability of protestors rather than their relationship with the community. McAdams offered a long-held theory that students constituted the majority of protest participants because, being single, without a career, and without children, they had less to risk and had more time to devote to a protest. These studies did bring to light an important notion – the difference between participants and non-participants is not necessarily a difference in the commitment to a cause (McAdams, 1986).

A recent development in the literature on non-electoral participation suggests that characteristics of individuals are not enough to explain their participation. For example, these studies propose that being asked to protest is the stronger predictor of who will protest. They suggested that students were more likely to participate in non-electoral acts because they were more likely to be asked to participate (Klandermans 1997; McVeigh

and Smith, 1999; Schussman and Soule, 2004; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Studies found that people use their social ties to recruit for non-electoral acts and that these ties can come in the form of a formal organization (Klandermans 1997; McAdam 1982; Schussman and Soule, 2004). People in the same organizations often share the same values and would be more willing to participate in acts that promoted these values (Gamson, 1992).Because this theory focuses on the relationship between people, it also explains why married people or people with career commitments are involved in non-electoral participation, a phenomenon McAdams could not reconcile with his theory.

Furthermore, past studies have limited their scope by only studying protest movements. However, non-electoral acts include more than engaging in a protest march or sit-in. New literature takes into account lesser forms of non-electoral participation, including signing petitions. These acts are important because they are also outside of the electoral process yet the literature has rarely focused on these acts. McAdams focused on biographical availability, but different forms of non-electoral participation take different amounts of time and commitment. Signing a petition would not require that a participant have plenty of free time to spare. McAdams's theory then does not account for forms of non-electoral participation that require little time for participants (Schussman and Soule, 2004; McAdams, 1986).

Finally, I argue that the type of group involvement affects who will be involved in non-electoral participation. Past literature has emphasized the role of the church in promoting and supporting protest (McAdams, 1982; Morris, 1981). Again, this literature focuses on the Civil Rights movement and specifically the role of the African-American church. Aldon Morris found that the "church functioned as the central political arena in

black society" (Morris 1981: 748). While Morris focused his study on how a social movement manifests, he noted the role of groups in non-electoral participation. Even when churches were not directly involved in the protest movement, they informed their congregations about protest. Then, the church was a place where people were encouraged to be involved in non-electoral participation (Morris, 1981).

Studies that focused on religious denomination have found that Christians believe that they should try to change society for the better. While religious beliefs and identities varied among protestors, the variation did not cause people to not participate in non-electoral participation (McVeigh and Sikkink, 2001). The effect of religion was the same as the effect of organizations. The church was a place where people were more likely to share the same values and beliefs. Then, it would be easy for people to recruit for non-electoral acts that upheld these values. I believe that even now churches have maintained a status as a political arena, especially when religious beliefs can affect political beliefs (Gamson, 1992, Layman, 1997).

Past literature has pinpointed biographical availability, interest in the issue or in politics, and prior non-electoral acts as predictors in who will become a protestor (McAdams, 1986; Petrie, 2004; Schussman, 2004). Only recently have studies focused on the effect of social networks. Studies have shown the importance of the recruitment process in non-electoral participation. While the characteristics of the participants may affect the time of types of social networks they have, the social network is the main tool in motivating people to participate in non-electoral acts. These social networks consist of formal groups or organizations that do not necessarily have to be related to politics. Rather, these groups allow for people who share the same interests or values to exchange

ideas and information, including information about how to participate in non-electoral acts.

Hypothesis

Previous research hypothesized that people are more likely to participate in a non-electoral act if they are asked by someone they know. People increase the number of people they know by involving themselves in formal groups, be it religious groups like a prayer circle or recreational groups like a bowling league. Based on this past research, I hypothesize that

A. People who are involved in formal groups are more likely to participate in non-electoral acts than those who are not involved in formal groups.

B. Membership in religious groups will have a stronger positive effect on non-electoral participation than membership in other groups.

Method and Sampling

I used the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey to do a cross-sectional study of formal group involvement and non-electoral participation. In the 2000 survey, indexes were created to consolidate answers on a particular topic. For my dependent variable, I created a composite index based on the Social Capital Benchmark Survey's protest index, excluding membership in political groups and labor unions. For my independent variable, I created a composite index based on the formal group involvement index.

The Social Capital Benchmark Survey is a telephone survey conducted in 2000 in the continental United States using the Genesys system which uses random digit dialing. The primary sampling unit is an eight digit partial phone number. The secondary unit is

the random selection of the remaining two digits. The third sampling unit is households with telephones. The final sampling elements are adults in households who could speak English or Spanish, since the survey could be conducted in either language. A household would be called up to eleven times before being dropped. Surveyors chose respondents by asking for the person over the age of eighteen who had the latest birthday. If a respondent refused, the household was dropped. Another respondent from the same household was not used. To ensure diversity in the respondent population, African-Americans and Hispanics were oversampled so that there was a minimum of 500 in each group. The total number of respondents was 3,003. The codebook offers a number of response rates, one being the Adjusted Cooperation Rate. This rate does not include disconnected phone numbers, households with language or health barriers that would not allow them to participate, and non-residential numbers like offices. This calculation most accurately reflects the response rate and was 42.3 %.

Measures

I am researching the effect of group involvement on participation in non-electoral activity. My dependent variable is non-electoral political activity. I will be using questions 26a (petitions), 26b (political meetings or rallies), and 26d (protests, boycotts, or marches). The responses range from 1= Yes and 2 = No. While SCBS has a protest index, I will not be using it because of its inclusion of political groups and labor union membership. Political group involvement does not automatically mean non-electoral participation. A political group could be an election alliance whose sole purpose is to get more people to register to vote. They then are trying to increase electoral participation. Because the survey did not ask specifically about the type of political group, I could not

be certain that the political groups were trying to stimulate non-electoral participation. I will not classify labor union membership as non-electoral participation also. While labor unions may use non-electoral acts such as protests, they are not constantly doing so. Therefore, membership in a labor union does not necessarily mean people will also be involved in non-electoral participation. Because there are few respondents who participate in non-electoral activities, rather than using a composite index, I will create a dummy variables for whether people have been involved in any type of non-electoral participation so that 0 = No and 1 = Yes to any type of non-electoral participation.

My key independent variable is formal group involvement, which is measured by the SCBS through a series of questions about the respondents' group involvement over the previous twelve months. The list of organizations ranges from church groups to PTAs; the last question (33r) asks the participants if they belong to any other type of club or organization. (See Appendix A).

I will be using these responses in two ways. First, I will compare respondents who are involved in any type of organization (coded as 1) to those who are not involved in any (coded as 0).Second, I will compare types of groups specifically religious and non-religious groups. I will use a dummy variable to measure if the group involvement is religious or not so that 0 = non-religious group and 1 = religious group.

I will control for gender, race, age, education and religion's effect on non-electoral participation. These factors have been identified in past literature as having an effect on non-electoral participation. I am including these variables to make sure that any effect group involvement has on non-electoral participation cannot be explained by gender, race, etc. (See Appendix A)

There are some limits in this study because I am conducting a secondary analysis of survey data. For instance, there are no follow up questions regarding non-electoral participation. Respondents were not asked how they found out about the protest, petition, etc. While question 34 asks if the respondents' groups took any local social or political reform, it does not specifically ask respondents how the groups try to accomplish these reforms. The group could be trying to help pass a reform act. Then, the group is focusing on electoral participation. Also, there are no follow up questions about how involved a person is in a particular group, only general questions about the frequency of attending any community activity.

Results

Less than half of the survey participants (43.1%) responded that they had been involved in some type of non-electoral participation (see Table 1). I created a composite to indicate whether respondents were involved in any type of formal group. To see if there was a relationship between non-electoral participation and formal group involvement, I first ran a crosstabulation (see Table 2) between the non-electoral composite and the group composite. The resulting chi square value was significant, indicating that there is a relationship between formal group involvement and non-electoral participation.

----------Insert Tables 1 and 2 Here----------

I also created a new measure of group involvement – religious group involvement and non-religious group involvement. The chi squares for religious group involvement by non-electoral participation and for non-religious group involvement by non-electoral participation were significant. However, there appeared to be a little difference between

the impact of non-religious group involvement and religious group involvement on non-electoral participation. The respondents were almost split in half in those who did participate in non-electoral participation and those who did not.

I then ran crosstabulation for my control variables. While all the variables except Protestant religion and age had significant chi-squares, lambdas for the control variables showed that only age and education had significant relationships with non-electoral participation.

----------Insert Table 3 Here----------

I then performed logistic regression using the protest composite as the dependent variable and the group composite as the independent variable (Table 4, Model 1). The bivariate effect of formal group involvement was significant, indicating that that people involved in formal groups are 4.52 times more likely to be involved in non-electoral political participation than those who are not involved in formal groups. When the control variables were added, the effect of group involvement remained significant, indicating a strong, positive effect of formal group involvement on non-electoral participation. Therefore, people who are involved in formal groups are 3.8 times more likely to be involved in non-electoral political participation than those who are not involved in formal groups, when all else is held constant. My hypothesis that group involvement has a positive effect on non-electoral participation does hold, and people involved in groups are more likely to be involved in non-electoral participation.

Furthermore, the only control variables to have significant effects were education, being in a religion other than Protestantism or Catholicism and being black (Table 4, Model 3). Education had the strongest effect from the control variables with odds that a

more educated person would be 1.27 times more likely to participate in non-electoral acts than a person with fewer years of education. While the previous literature described the effects of age, race, and marital status on non-electoral participation, there was little research devoted to the link between education and non-electoral participation. I suspected that the effect of education was actually impacting whether people joined formal groups. To understand the effect of education on formal group involvement, I performed logistic regression (Table 5). While the other variables had significant effects, education had the biggest impact, predicting that people who have higher levels of education are 1.45 times more likely to be involved in a formal group. This then suggests that education has an effect on group involvement which is then affecting non-electoral participation.

I also performed logistic regression using religious group involvement and non-religious group involvement as the independent variables (Table 4, Model 2). The effects of these types of group involvement were significant. People who were involved in a religious group were 1.34 more times likely to be involved in non-electoral participation than those not involved in religious groups. People who were involved in non-religious groups were 4.35 more times likely to be involved in non-electoral participation than those not involved in non-religious groups. When other control variables were added, the type of group involvement remained significant (Table 4, Model 4). Among the control variables, only identifying oneself as blacks, preferring a religion other than Protestantism or Catholicic, and education had a significant effect. Education again had a significant effect but not to the same extent as type of group involvement. More education increases the odds that people are involved in non-electoral participation.

People who were involved in formal religious groups were 1.4 times more likely to participate in non-electoral participation than those who were not involved in formal religious groups, net of controls. People who were involved in non-religious groups were 3.6 times more likely to be involved in non-electoral participation than people who were not involved in non-religious groups, with all other variables held constant. Involvement in non-religious groups has a stronger effect on non-electoral participation than does involvement in religious groups, net of other controls.

This result was surprising since past literature has indicated that religious groups were more likely to encourage members to be involved in forms of protest. However, this analysis compares respondents in these types of groups to those not in these groups. It did not compare non-religious groups to religious groups. Therefore, people who were in religious groups could also be in non-religious groups. These variables were not mutually exclusive just as the control variables were not mutually exclusive. However, the analysis compares the strength of the variables' effect. While both types of groups had a strong effect on non-electoral participation, non-religious groups had a stronger impact.

----------Insert Table 5 Here----------

Discussion and Conclusion

As I predicted, group involvement does affect whether people participate in non-electoral acts. While non-religious groups appeared to have a greater effect than religious groups on non-electoral participation, I believe that this result actually indicates the need for further study. The analysis of the types of groups was limited by comparing the effect of group membership to no group membership. I believe that an analysis that compared non-religious groups to religious groups would give further insight in comparing the

members within groups. Furthermore, this study was limited because a lack of specific questions about how people learned about the non-electoral acts in which they participated. If respondents were asked about how they found out about protest participation, then their answers would reflect if group involvement had a direct impact. Also, if I could have had the respondents' level of participation with each group they were in, I could draw conclusions about the impact of the degree of group involvement. This study then cannot make definite conclusions about how group involvement affects non-electoral participation; only that group involvement has a positive effect on non-electoral participation.

References:

Gamson, William. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Klandermans, Bert. 1997. *The Social Psychology of Protest*. Blackwell.

Layman, Geoffrey. 1997. "Religion and Political Behavior in the United States: The Impact of Beliefs, Affiliations, and Commitment from 1980 to 1994." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61: 288-316.

McAdam, Doug. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press.

_____. 1986. "Recruitment to High Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 64.

McVeigh, Roy, and Christian Smith. 1999. "Who Protest in America: An Analysis of Three Political Alternatives – Inaction, Institutionalized Politics, or Protest." *Sociological Forum* 14: 685-702.

McVeigh, Roy and Sikkink, David. 2001. "God, Politics, and Protest: Religious Beliefs and the Legitimation of Contentious Tactics." *Social Forces* 79: 1425-1458.

Miller, Arthur, Patricia Gurn, Gerald Gurin, and Oksans Malachuk. 1981. "Group Consciousness and Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science* 25: 494-511.

Morris, Aldon. 1981. "Black Southern Student Sit-in Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization." *American Sociological Review* 46: 744-767.

Petrie, Michelle. 2004. "A Research Note on the Determinants of Protest Participation: Examining Socialization and Biographical Availabilty."*Sociological Spectrum* 24: 553-574.

Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Touchstone.

Schussman, Alan, and Sarah Soule. 2005. "Effects of Group Involvement on Political Participation." *Social Forces* 84: 1083.

Verba, Sidney, Kay L. Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press.

2000. *Social Benchmark Survey*. Ed. Saguaro Seminar at John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Storrs, CT :The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Analysis

	Variable	Valid Cases	Responses	Percentage of Yes Responses
Dependent				
	Protest Composite	2987	Any Non-electoral Participation	43.1
Independent				
	Group Composite	2998	Any Formal Group Involvement	79.9
	Religious Group		Any Religious Group Involvement	17.2
	Non-religious Group	2998	Any Non-religious Group Involvement	79
Control				
	Religion	2967	Protestant	46
		2967	Catholic	26.9
		2967	Other	25.8
	Race	2951	White	69
		2951	Black	18.3
		2951	Other	10.9
	Gender	3003	Male	40
	Age	2948	42 years*	2.1
	Education	2980	Some College*	22.8

*. Median Category

Table 2: Crosstabulation of Non-electoral Participation

	Any Formal Group Involvement		Religious Group Involvement		Non-Religious Group Involvement	
	No	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**
No non-electoral participation	82.4%	50.3%	59.1%	45.2%	82.3%	50%
Any non-electoral participation	17.6%	49.7%	40.9%	54.8%	17.7%	50%
Total (N)	597	2385	2472	513	622	2360

Table 3: Measures of Association

Predictors **Dependent Variable - Protest**

Composite

	Chi Square	Lambda
Formal Group Involvement	200.9 ****	.000 *****
Religious Group Involvement	33.33 ****	.038 *
Non-religious Group Involvement	209.94 ****	.002
Religion		
Protestant	.03	.000 *****
Catholic	4.75 *	.000 *****
Other	4.21 *	.000 *****
Race		
White	13.35 ****	.000 *****
Black	4.73 *	.000 *****
Other	6.86 *	.000 *****
Gender	.07	.00 *****
Age	108 **	.061 ****
Education	219.2 ****	.12 ****

***** - Structurally equal to zero

**** – p<.001

*** p<.01

* – p<.05

Table 4:Regression coefficients for group involvement on non-electoral participation

Dependent Variable - Protest Composite

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Predictors	b Exp(B)	b Exp(B)	b Exp(B)	b Exp (B)
Formal Group [a] Involvement	1.51 4.52****	___	1.34 3.8****	___
Religious Group [a] Involvement	___	.29 1.34***	___	.34 1.4***
Non-religious Group [a] Involvement	___	1.47 4.35****	___	1.28 3.60****
Protestant[a]			.07 1.07	.05 1.05
Other Religion* **			.23 1.26*	.24 1.27*
Black[a]			-.22 .8*	-.25 .78*
Other Race* **			-.15 .86	-.18 .84
Gender [b]			.08 1.08	.07 1.08
Age			0 1	.000 1.000
Education			.24 1.27****	.24 1.27****
R^2	.09****	.10****	.150****	.16****
N	2856	2855	2856	2855

[a] Coded 0 = No 1 = Yes
[b] Coded 0 = male 1 = female
**** p<.001
*** p<.01
* p<.05

Table 5: Regression coefficients for the effect of education on group involvement

Dependent Variable – Group Composite

Predictors	b	Exp(B)	b	Exp(B)
Education	.36	1.43****	.37	1.44****
Black[a]			.34	1.41*
Other Race[a]			-.32	.73*
Gender[b]			-.315	.73
Age			.01	1.01**
R^2	.08		.098	
N	2893		2893	

[a] Coded 0 = No 1 = Yes
[b] Coded 0 = male 1 = female
**** p<.001
** p<.01
* p<.05