Activism Against Nuclear Weapons Build-up—Student Participation in the 1984 Primary Campaigns[1]

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This study presents longitudinal data concerning factors that influence student participation in political campaigns for candidates opposed to nuclear weapons build-up. Participation in campaigns was stimulated by nervousness about the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war, a feeling of moral obligation to act to try to prevent nuclear war, and several additional factors. The factors that contributed to participation in political campaigns are quite different from the factors found previously to be associated with other types of activism against nuclear weapons build-up. These findings suggest varied strategies for recruiting people to participate in different types of activism.

Many teenagers and adults in the United States and European countries believe that nuclear war is likely to occur within the next few decades, and most believe that a nuclear war would be devastatingly destructive (Beardslee & Mack, 1982; Public Agenda Foundation, 1984; Solantaus, Chivian, Vartanyan, & Chivian, 1985). Nevertheless, relatively few people are engaged in activism to try to reduce the risk of nuclear war, even if activism is defined broadly to include writing letters to government officials or participating in political campaigns, meetings, demonstrations or other group activities concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear war-related policies. This observation is similar to the findings for other social and political movements, for which it has also been observed that relatively few of those who sympathized with a cause were active in support of the cause (Keniston, 1973; Walsh & Warland, 1983).

These observations raise the question: What additional factors are required to stimulate a person who supports a particular position on a political or social

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issue to engage in activism in support of this position? Previous research has shown that activism against nuclear weapons build-up and nuclear war is associated not only with opinions opposed to the nuclear arms race, but also with feelings of moral obligation to be active, beliefs that the risk of nuclear war can be reduced by citizen action, friendship with others who are active on these issues, and awareness of a group that the person agrees with and can work with (Tyler & McGraw, 1983; Waldron, Baron, Frese, & Sabini, 1988). Similarly, research concerning activism on other issues has shown that activism is related to a variety of factors including feelings of moral responsibility to be active, beliefs concerning the desirability and efficacy of activism, social ties to activists, and the availability of effective tactics and organized group activities in which to participate (Bolton, 1972; Keniston, 1973; McAdam, 1983; Turner, 1981; Walsh, 1981; Walsh & Warland, 1983; Zurcher & Snow, 1981).

In interpreting the observed associations between various characteristics and activism it is important to recognize that a given characteristic may be a consequence of activism as well as a cause of activism (Keniston, 1973; Waldron et al., 1988). For example, not only do social ties to activists contribute to activism, but also activism stimulates friendships with other activists (Beardslee, 1983; Keniston, 1973; Zurcher & Snow, 1981). In order to distinguish between causes and consequences of activism, it is useful to have longitudinal data. Evidence that a characteristic assessed at an initial survey is related to increased activism during a subsequent follow-up period strengthens the argument that this characteristic is a cause, rather than a consequence, of activism.

One other issue adds to the complexity of the analysis of factors that contribute to activism. It appears that the characteristics associated with activism vary depending on the type of activism, the issue, and the context in which the activism occurs (Bolton, 1972; Keniston, 1973). For example, participation in conventional political activism, such as political campaigning, has been more common among middle-aged adults, whereas participation in unconventional activism, such as protest demonstrations, has been more common among young adults and teenagers (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). A study of black adults found that those who were satisfied with their lives were more likely to have joined the NAACP, whereas those who were dissatisfied with their lives were more likely to have participated in civil rights demonstrations (Crawford & Naditch, 1970). Available evidence also indicates that some protest movements have been triggered in large part by particular events, such as the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident (Walsh, 1981), whereas other protest movements appear to have been stimulated more by the development of effective tactics for addressing chronic grievances, such as the lunch counter sit-ins and freedom rides of the civil rights movement in the early

sixties in the South (McAdam, 1983). In summary, many different factors contribute to social and political activism, and the relative importance of particular factors varies greatly in different cases.

In this context, we have undertaken a study of activism among university students in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up. We have previously reported the characteristics that were associated with activism in the cross-sectional data for three samples of students (Waldron et al., 1988). The present paper reports longitudinal data based on a follow-up survey for one of these samples. Only one type of activism occurred frequently enough during the follow-up period for reliable analysis in the longitudinal data, namely, campaigning for a candidate at least partly on the basis of his/her opposition to nuclear weapons build-up. The main contested elections in the area during the follow-up interval were the primaries for the Democratic party nominations for President and for Representative to Congress. For comparison to our findings concerning campaigning, we present an analysis of characteristics associated with trying to convince others of opinions opposed to nuclear weapons build-up.

Sample and Methods

The sample for this study was recruited in three sociology and psychology classes at an urban university. The response rate for the initial survey was approximately 48% (209 participants from approximately 440 students in these classes). The sample for the analyses presented in this paper consisted of the 94 students who completed an initial survey on January 19–25, 1984, and a matching follow-up survey on April 19–23, 1984. Follow-up was incomplete because 99 of the participants in the initial survey did not complete a follow-up questionnaire and 16 of the follow-up questionnaires could not be matched with an initial questionnaire due to difficulties with the identification codes. The students for whom we have follow-up data appear to be similar to the students for whom we lack follow-up data. For example, there were no differences between follow-up participants and follow-up nonparticipants in age or sex or in most of the opinions and attitudes assessed in the initial survey; differences in these opinions and attitudes were significant at the .05 level for just 5% of the items, a level of significant findings that would be expected purely due to chance variation. Clearly the sample cannot be considered representative, even of students at this university, so generalizations must be made with caution. Nevertheless, the students in the sample reported a broad range of opinions on nuclear weapons-related issues, and the sample appears to be suitable for the analysis of relationships between activism and other variables.

The questionaires used in the initial survey and the follow-up survey were nearly identical. These questionnaires consisted of multiple-choice questions on several topics including a broad range of opinions concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear war (34 items), emotional reactions to these issues (8 items), opinions concerning activism on these issues (10 items), whether the student had social ties to activists (4 items), and several personal characteristics such as the personal importance of various aspects of the student's life (10 items), age, party affiliation, etc. In addition, students were asked whether they had participated in five different types of activism either in support of or in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up and whether they had tried to convince others of opinions that favored or opposed nuclear weapons build-up. The content of selected items is indicated in Table 1. Copies of the questionnaires are available from the first author.

As discussed in the Introduction, the goal of the present analysis is to evaluate relationships between variables assessed at the initial survey and increases in activism during the follow-up period. The only type of activism that was sufficiently common during the follow-up period for this type of analysis was "campaign[ing] for a referendum or candidate at least partly on the basis of his/her position on these issues," specifically, campaigning for candidates who "opposed nuclear weapons build-up." Twelve of the 89 students with all the requisite data for analysis reported this type of campaigning during the follow-up period. Participation in campaigning was reported very rarely at the initial survey, presumably due to the absence of relevant elections during the preceding fall.

Trying to convince another person of opinions opposed to nuclear weapons build-up had been reported by about two fifths of the students at the initial survey. Because we were interested in identifying characteristics that preceded activity, we analyzed the correlates of beginning to try to convince others during the follow-up interval for the students who did not report trying to convince others at the initial survey. Of the 52 students included in this analysis, 12 began trying to convince others in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up during the follow-up period.

The analyses presented in this paper relate characteristics assessed in the initial survey to beginning to campaign or beginning to try to convince others during the follow-up period. The only exception is that information on party affiliation was collected only at follow-up and party affiliation has been included in some of the analyses on the tentative assumption that party affiliation remained relatively constant during the 3-month follow-up period.

The bivariate relationships between the predictor variables and beginning to campaign or to try to convince others were tested with t-tests or Fisher Exact Probability tests, as appropriate. For these analyses we report only results with $p \leq .05$ in two-tailed tests of significance.

Table 1

Initial Characteristics Associated with Subsequently Beginning to Campaign or Beginning to Try to Convince Others, in Opposition to Nuclear Weapons Build-up

Variables[a]	Significance (p) of relationship to	
	Campaigning	Trying to convince
Opinions concerning nuclear weapons policies and nuclear war		
Higher estimated percent killed in U.S. in nuclear war with S.U.	—	.05
Higher estimated probability of being killed in nuclear war with S.U.	—	.01
To reduce the risk of nuclear war, support:		
Cultural exchange and other means to enhance understanding between U.S. and Soviet people	.04	.02
Foster economic ties and international cooperation between U.S. and S.U.	.02	—
Slow-down modernization of nuclear weapons and/or take unilateral initiatives toward nuclear weapons control	—	.04
Emotional reactions to nuclear arms race and possibility of nuclear war		
Nervous	.002	.03
Frightened	.02	.04
Angry	.01	.02
Frustrated	.05	—
Opinions concerning activity on nuclear weapons issues		
Feel morally obliged to act to try to prevent nuclear war	.0001	.04
Being active is/would be satisfying	.04	.04
Disagree that activity might make a bad impression on those who influence career success	.04	—
Personal and political characteristics		
Personal relationships important	.02	—
Activities for social or political change important	.01	—
Other activities not important	.02	—
Affiliated with the Democratic party	.01	—

[a]Variables not significantly related to beginning to campaign or to try to convince others are not listed; these include an additional 22 opinions concerning nuclear weapons policies and nuclear war, 3 emotional reactions, 7 opinions concerning activity on nuclear weapons issues, and 4 personal characteristics.

— indicates relationship not significant ($p > .05$)

Multivariate relationships were assessed using stepwise discriminant analysis (SAS Institute, 1982). A discriminant analysis is a multivariate statistical technique that is in some ways similar to a multiple regression, but a discriminant analysis is the method of choice for identifying the best set of variables to discriminate or distinguish between two groups, such as those who campaigned and those who did not (or those who began trying to convince others and those who did not). The discriminant analysis takes into account the fact that many of the predictor variables are intercorrelated. At each step the method chooses the variable that most clearly distinguishes or discriminates between members of the two groups, taking into account all variables that have been chosen as discriminating variables in previous steps. Variables were added sequentially to the set of discriminating variables until no additional variable discriminated with a $p \leq .10$. For each discriminant analysis, only items that had a significant bivariate association with campaigning or trying to convince were included in the set of possible discriminating variables in order to minimize the loss of cases that occurs when there is a missing value for any of the variables entered in the analysis.

The results of the discriminant analyses should be interpreted with caution. The data do not fully meet the assumptions of the method concerning the distributions of the variables, although fortunately the method is robust with regard to these assumptions. Also, because of the relatively low number of participants who began to campaign or to try to convince others and because of the intercorrelations among the potential discriminating variables, there probably is some unreliability in the specific variables that are reported as significant discriminators. Because of these limitations, the discussion will focus on results that are clearly supported by both the bivariate analyses and the discriminant analyses.

Results

Table 1 shows the characteristics assessed in January 1984 that predicted participation in a political campaign in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up during the 3-month follow-up period. Most of the predictors of participation in campaigning can be grouped in three categories: (a) emotional reactions to the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war, especially feeling nervous; (b) opinions concerning activity on nuclear weapons issues, especially feeling morally obliged to act to try to prevent nuclear war; and (c) personal priorities for different types of activity, for example, greater importance given to activities for social and political change and less importance given to other activities. Participation in campaigning was related to only 2 of the 34 items that assessed opinions concerning nuclear weapons, nuclear war, and policies to reduce the risk of nuclear war; this proportion of significant findings is so

low that it may be due solely to chance variation. None of the four measures of social ties to people who were activists on nuclear weapons issues was related to campaigning. One final characteristic that did predict campaigning was affiliation with the Democratic party, which was the only party with significant contested primaries in the university area during this period.

In contrast to campaigning, trying to convince others of opinions opposed to nuclear weapons build-up showed somewhat more significant associations with opinions on these issues (Table 1). Another difference in the patterns of association for campaigning and trying to convince others was that trying to convince others was not related to personal priorities for different types of activity or to Democratic party affiliation.

The pattern of results described thus far is supported by the discriminant analyses presented in Table 2. For campaigning, results are presented for discriminant analyses that included or excluded the party affiliation variable, because for this variable only it was necessary to infer the student's status in January based on his or her response to the April questionnaire (see Samples and Methods). In both of these discriminant analyses the strongest predictor of campaigning in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up was feeling nervous about the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war. Other important predictors of campaigning included a feeling of moral obligation to act to try to prevent nuclear war, less importance given to activities other than those for social and political change, and affiliation with the Democratic party. Comparison between the discriminant analyses for campaigning and the discriminant analysis for trying to convince others suggests that opinions concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear war were stronger predictors of trying to convince others than of campaigning.

Discussion

Both the bivariate analyses and the discriminant analyses indicate that several factors contributed to student participation in political campaigning in support of candidates opposed to nuclear weapons build-up. Students who reported at the initial survey that they felt very or moderately nervous about the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war were more likely to participate in campaigning during the follow-up interval. In contrast, in our previous analysis of cross-sectional data from the initial survey, self-reports of feeling nervous or frightened were not associated with a measure of activism that included primarily going to meetings, rallies or demonstrations, writing, calling or telegramming government representatives or officials, and joining groups or helping to carry out group activities (Waldron et al., 1988). The only emotional reaction that was significantly associated with these types of activism was anger. Similarly, in cross-sectional data for Canadian high school students,

Table 2

Discriminant Analyses for Beginning to Campaign or Beginning to Try to Convince Others, in Opposition to Nuclear Weapons Build-up

Discriminating variables	Partial
Analysis for those who campaigned vs. other students (party affiliation variable included)	
Nervous about the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war	.16
Affiliated with the Democratic party	.07
Activities other than those for social and political change not important	.07
Feel morally obligated to act to try to prevent nuclear war	.05
Canonical correlation squared	= .31
Analysis for those who campaigned vs. other students (party affiliation variable excluded)	
Nervous about the nuclear arms race and the possibility of nuclear war	.16
Feel morally obliged to act to try to prevent nuclear war	.06
Favor policy of fostering economic ties and international cooperation between U.S. and S.U.	.05
Activities other than those for social and political change not important	.04
Canonical correlation squared	= .28
Analysis for those who tried to convince others vs. other students	
Favor slow-down of modernization of nuclear weapons and/or unilateral initiatives toward nuclear weapons control	.12
Higher estimated percent killed in U.S. in nuclear war with S.U.	.14
Feel morally obliged to act to prevent nuclear war	.08
Canonical correlation squared	= .30

a comparison of students who reported feeling fear and anxiety about the threat of nuclear war almost every day with students who reported less frequent fear and anxiety showed no significant difference in the proportion who had taken any action against the threat of nuclear war (Solantaus et al., 1985, p. 84).

Two different explanations can be offered for the findings that feeling nervous about nuclear weapons issues predicted campaigning in the longitudinal data, but feeling nervous or afraid has not been associated with activism in cross-section data. First, the correlates of conventional political activism such as participation in campaigns may be different from the corre-

lates of other types of activism (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Second, the correlates of activism may differ between cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. For example, one hypothesis is that nervousness about nuclear weapons and nuclear war stimulates activism concerning these issues, and activism, in turn, may result in decreased nervousness. This hypothesis could account for our findings because nervousness reported in the initial survey predicted participation in campaigning during the follow-up period, participation in campaigning appeared to be associated with a decrease in nervousness during the follow-up interval, and, due to these two counteracting effects, cross-sectional data from the follow-up survey showed no association between nervousness and having participated in campaigning.

These observations provide some modest support for the widely used strategy of arousing anxiety and fear concerning the threat of nuclear weapons build-up in order to stimulate activism. However, available evidence also suggests an important caution; in order to stimulate activism, anxiety or fear arousal should be accompanied by specific proposals for potentially effective actions and strategies to reduce the threat of nuclear war. Data from our initial survey showed that the strongest correlate of activism was awareness of a group that the respondent agreed with and could work with (Waldron et al., 1988). One reason for the importance of such groups is that they generate and publicize specific activities that can be seen as part of a larger, potentially effective program to prevent nuclear war. In a similar vein, analysis of the history of the civil rights movement has indicated that recruitment of activists is greatly increased when effective tactics are available and communicated widely to potential activists (McAdam, 1983). Another major correlate of many types of activism is having activist friends and one reason for this may be that activist friends provide a credible and salient source of information about specific potentially effective activities in which to participate (Bolton, 1972; Waldron et al., 1988; Walsh & Warland, 1983; Zurcher & Snow, 1981).

In contrast, participation in political campaigning was not related to either awareness of a good group to work with or having activist friends. It appears that, due to the considerable publicity and high level of activity related to the presidential primaries, participation in campaigning did not depend on personal links to activists or differential exposure to the activities and positions of specific groups. For campaigning, the availability of an effective action to take was best represented by affiliation with the Democratic party, because this party had the only significant contested primaries in the area.

Data from the present paper and from our previous analyses (Waldron et al., 1988) suggest that opinions concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear war may be more closely related to trying to convince others of opinions opposed to nuclear weapons build-up and only weakly related to political campaigning or other types of activism. It appears that trying to convince others may be a

more direct expression of opinions on the issues, whereas activism may be influenced by more diverse characteristics such as awareness of a good group to work with or low priority for participation in other types of activities, which may have allowed more time for participation in campaigning.

One characteristic that predicted both campaigning and trying to convince others in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up was a feeling of moral obligation to act to try to prevent nuclear war. This finding is consistent with previous evidence that activism is stimulated by a feeling of moral responsibility to act (Keniston, 1973; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Tyler & McGraw, 1983). The importance of feelings of moral responsibility can be understood in the following context. The activism of any one individual can, in most cases, make only a tiny contribution to a goal such as the prevention of nuclear war; the benefit to the individual of this tiny reduction in the risk of nuclear war would not seem sufficient to justify the costs in time and other resources of participating in activism (Turner, 1981). Thus, it is to be expected that for most or all activists there would be additional motivating factors such as a sense of moral responsibility to act.

Additional motivating factors for activism include social approval of activism by significant others, feelings of solidarity with an activist group, and optimism concerning the potential success of the collective actions of the social movement in which the individual is participating (Turner, 1981; Waldron et al., 1988). This suggests that friendship with activists is important not only as a source of information about activities in which an individual can participate, but also as a motivator of participation in activism. An additional practical implication is that participation in activism may be increased if a group identifies and achieves intermediate goals that can mark progress toward a major long-term goal in order to maintain the optimism concerning success that contributes to activism.

In conclusion, the data from this study and previous studies indicate that many different factors contribute to activism and that the best approaches to stimulating activism may vary in different situations. For example, nervousness concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear war may be an important stimulant of participation in political campaigning in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up, whereas social ties to activists and exposure to a suitable activist group may make more important contributions to participation in other types of activism in opposition to nuclear weapons build-up.

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