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RESIDUES OF A MOVEMENT: THE AGING OF THE AMERICAN PROTEST GENERATION

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The theory of political generations asserts that enduring and relevant political consequences result from critical experiences during the formative years. This study draws on a national three-wave panel study of young adults surveyed in 1965, 1973, and 1982 to test the theory with respect to the Vietnam era protest movement. College-educated protestors and nonprotestors are compared with themselves and with each other over time. Generational effects are categorized into absolute, relative, and equivalent continuity. Very strong continuities emerge for attitudes associated with the protestors' political baptism. Although erosion effects appear in more contemporary affairs, the protest generation remains quite distinctive. However, its limited size dampens the generation's political impact and qualifies the general thesis in a fashion that probably characterizes other examples of political generations also.

Seldom has a youth movement swept a nation the way the student protest movement did the United States from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. Beginning with a handful of dissidents, it quickly fanned out to embrace hundreds of thousands as active participants and sympathizers. While the movement had enormous political import at the time, the question remained as to its lasting effects. Certainly some of the institutional reforms spawned partly in response to the movement's demands remain in place. And the political memories of the era are deeply etched with images of the protestors and their actions.

Another kind of lasting impact, the effects on individuals caught up in the movement, is more problematic. At the time of the unrest, it was freely prophesied by some that the New Left politics of these unconventional activists would follow them to the grave. Other observers contended that the inexorable processes of aging and historical circumstance would bend and shape their politics into the mainstream, middle-of-the-road variety. More generally, however, the question was how this cohort, distinguished by its espousal of causes and its forceful efforts to achieve results, would fare as it marched through time.

The general rubric under which such questions are discussed is that of political generations. Mannheim's ([1928] 1972) classic essay on the topic sets the terms for the development of a political generation and its subdivisions, generation units: "Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those

groups within the same actual generation which work up the materials of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation-units" (119). The generational thesis basically holds that the events experienced by youth during their formative years will have an enduring impact that is manifested in the political process. Thus, generational replacement becomes one of the engines of social and political change when and if new biological generations undergo novel experiences. Individuals coming of age during periods of pronounced stress and drama, epochal events, or rapid socioeconomic change are often said to be uniquely identified in a political sense—hence such labels as the "depression generation," the "silent generation," and the "protest generation" within recent U.S. history.

Modern survey research has not always been kind to the generational thesis (e.g., Cutler and Bengston 1974; Searing, Schwartz, and Lind 1973). In addition to the challenge of life stage explanations as a source of change, the thesis is confronted with historical or period effects in the form of broad-ranging social, economic, and political forces having an impact on all segments of the populace. Nevertheless, the theory remains attractive, in part because there are always enough striking examples at the extremes to suggest the wider existence of such phenomena. In many respects the so-called protest generation (or generation unit) provides an acid test of the thesis, for during its formative time it possessed strong political preferences, shared experiences, a common enemy, direct political action, and solidarity. If generational effects cannot be located among the protestors of yesteryear, the thesis suffers badly. If such effects can be identified, not only is the thesis supported but we can draw implications for the content and style of U.S. politics.

In using the term *generation effects*, by which, for convenience sake, we also mean generation *unit* effects, there is a tacit understanding that the long haul is being taken into account. Whether the approach is prospective or retrospective, analysts wish to establish the uniqueness of the group(s) under study as being of more than transitory significance. Continuity in outlooks and behavior is a common way of identifying a generation.

Three types of continuity can be defined. The first, *absolute continuity*, is most frequently what one has in mind. For example, a generation unit's response to the same attitude object must be roughly constant over time. The more fickle the response pattern seems to be, the less inclined we are to call it a generation. Note that the absolute continuity test treats the generation unit in isolation as it moves through time. Other generations and generation units may subsequently come to resemble the generation unit in question, thus erasing the distinctiveness. This is an important qualification of the absolute continuity test.

Absolute continuity is also, in some respects, a narrow and stringent test for it would demand an unchanging political and personal world. A second test of a generation's uniqueness, therefore, lies in its *relative continuity*. By this we mean the generation's ongoing position relative to other generations and the generation unit's ongoing position relative to other units in the same generation. From this perspective, relative continuity is a valid test. The question becomes, How distinctive does the generation remain with respect to the same type of political phenomena in the face of secular or other forces having an impact on all members of the population under study? Indeed this test is commonly employed in birth cohort analysis by detrending or adjusting the data to take account of general population movements.

Both of these tests assume relatively fixed political objects over time. As time

passes, however, the political agenda changes, issues rise and fall, political personalities and groups come and go. If a generation is to remain recognizable, it should behave in a consistent and predictable fashion even though the specific political objects and practices involved are different from those of the past. A third test of generational continuity, then, examines the generation's response to new political stimuli not present at the generation's inception. We can think of this third test as *equivalent continuity.*

Studying Generations

While Mannheim and others (e.g., Block, Haan, and Smith 1969; Braungart 1984; Feuer 1969; and Kenniston 1968) have lavished attention on the genesis and unfolding of youth movements and political generations, they have been less forthcoming about the subsequent lives of such groups. Contemporary empirical efforts emphasizing a longitudinal approach to the study of generations have been of two main types. One is the tracing of localized, easily identified individuals and groups that seem to have elements of generational phenomena attached to them. The various small-scale studies of student activists are of this genre (e.g., Fendrich 1977; Hoge and Ankney 1982; Nassi 1981; and Whalen and Flacks 1984). Although such studies may provide the fine texture of putative generations, they often suffer from parochialism and the lack of adequate comparison groups.

The second and more visible effort has occurred as analysts of large-scale survey data attempt to trace, by the rather indirect means of birth cohort analysis, the political histories of presumptive political generations (e.g., Abramson 1983; Baker, Dalton, and Hildebrandt 1981; Delli Carpini 1984; Holsti and Rosenau 1980; Inglehart 1977; and Nunn, Crockett, and Williams 1978). Valuable as these latter studies have been, they are limited by the coarse-grained, multipurpose materials of most national survey studies, the heterogeneity of general probability samples, and the weaknesses (offset by some advantages, to be sure) of repeated observations of the same cohorts rather than of the same individuals. Thus, most large surveys cannot easily isolate generations or generation units in the Mannheimian sense of the term.

The findings to be presented in this paper draw on a three-wave panel study of youths (and their parents). Beginning with a national probability sample in 1965, the study was extended in 1973 and again in 1982.[1] It is sufficient for present purposes to note that the unadjusted three-wave retention rate for the youth sample is 68%. Systematic analysis reveals very few differences between panel drop-outs and panel stayers. At the time of the original inquiry these respondents represented a probability sample of the high school senior class of 1965. Those who went straight on to college degrees became the college graduates of 1969. A look backwards reveals that this cohort lies dead center of the protest movement.

In reporting on the results from the 1965–73 panel, we took advantage of this historical timing by giving separate attention to those respondents who had been actively caught up in the movement, primarily in the form of its opposition to the Vietnam War. We concentrated on college graduates who had protested, partly because we wished to avoid the confounding effects of college training when comparing protestors and nonprotestors. Nearly 3 in 10 (N = 129) of all college graduates had taken part in at least one demonstration, protest march, or sit-in. Such a high rate of unconventional participation departed dramatically from that of the general population (e.g., Evans and Hildebrandt 1979 and, for an exception that proves the rule, Sniderman

1981). Analysis of attitudinal change during the panel period indicated that both selection effects and conversion effects were involved. Protestors were somewhat different prior to the protest era but dramatically different afterwards. Of course, not all of that change could be attributed to protesting and related phenomena, but multivariate analyses demonstrated surprisingly strong independent effects based on protest behavior.[2]

Since the third wave of the study was completed in 1982, we are in a position to assess the further history of the protest generation. Despite some further attrition from 1973 to 1982, we still have in hand 106 college degree protestors and 259 nonprotestors. The advantages of the data set over the small case studies are the presence of preprotest observations, a quasi-control group in the form of nonprotestors, and a representative sample. The advantages over national cross-section studies are the availability of enough cases of protestors for analysis purposes, a developmental rather than static design, and the capacity to perform both aggregate and individual-level analysis.

Two major clusters of political attitudes will be treated: 1) partisanship and civil liberties and 2) attitudes toward specific groups and issues. Absolute continuity in generational effects will be assessed mainly by observing mean or grouped tendencies over time. Relative continuity will be determined by comparing the protestors and nonprotestors at each point in time, recalling that the two groups are of the same age, have virtually the same level of education, and have shared the same general social and political history. Equivalent continuity will be given less explicit emphasis in this paper, appearing most directly in the section dealing with opinions on specific issues. Our analysis will be primarily at the aggregate level, for how the unit behaves in a collective fashion is the revealing test of generational residues.

Partisanship and Civil Liberties: Baptismal Effects

We shall subsequently demonstrate that the liberal complexion of the protestors faded somewhat between 1973 and 1982 with respect to a large array of political attitude objects. However, that was by no means a universal experience. In two key domains the legacy of the protest experience was profound and persistent, and it is important to understand why this absolute and relative continuity prevailed.

Parties and Elections

One of the preeminent ways in which conflicting values and goals are expressed institutionally is through the electoral system. Although protestors often railed against the establishment's conduct and used unconventional means of expressing their displeasure, it is significant that they did not abandon the electoral process. Indeed, they were more active in electoral politics than were the nonprotestors over the 17-year stretch covered by our study. In addition, their high turnout rate at the polls always matched or exceeded that of nonprotestors. Finally, it will be recalled that much protest activity took place within the realm of electoral politics, as witnessed by such events as the 1968 Democratic convention, the support given to New Left candidates within the Democratic party, the bitter anti-Nixon demonstrations, and the reform movement within the Democratic party in the early 1970s.

It is well known that early voting experiences, in addition to one's "inherited" partisanship, play a key role in shaping future partisanship and voting behavior. As an impressionable group that came of age at a time when its only acceptable and realistic political alternatives were in the Democratic party, it seems likely that the protestors would carry the Democratic imprint well into their adult lives. For all of its perceived shortcomings, the Demo-

Table 1. Party Identification among Protestors and Nonprotestors, 1965–1982 (in percentages)

	1965		1973		1982	
Party Identification	Non-protestors	Protestors	Non-protestors	Protestors	Non-protestors	Protestors
Strong Democrat	16	14	7	16	4	17
Weak Democrat	22	25	20	31	23	36
Leaning Democratic	12	26	19	31	16	21
Independent	10	6	12	14	10	7
Leaning Republican	10	7	23	4	17	10
Weak Republican	20	13	12	2	18	7
Strong Republican	10	9	7	2	11	2
Total	100	100	100	100	99	100
Number of cases	260	105	259	105	256	104
Tau-c	.06		.33		.32	

cratic party provided the natural home for the protestors, if they were to have a party home. We shall demonstrate the extent to which this is true in two ways: 1) by looking at party identification as reported in the 1965, 1973, and 1982 surveys; and 2) by reconstructing presidential candidate preferences for the 1964–80 period.

To capture party identification, we rely on the standard questions used in the Center for Political Studies election series, questions that array respondents along a seven-point continuum ranging from a strong subjective attachment to the Democratic party to a strong attachment to the Republican party, with Independents being located in the middle. Somewhat surprisingly, the soon-to-be protestors left high school only marginally more Democratic than were the eventual nonprotestors (Table 1). In fact the combined figures for strong and weak Democrats are virtually identical: 39% for protestors and 38% for nonprotestors. Protestors were, therefore, not strongly self-selected in a partisan sense. Any differential affinity with the Democratic party exhibited subsequently would have to emerge as a result of later movements.

By 1973 both groups had shifted, but in *opposite* directions. Whereas the protestors became decidedly more Democratic (48%) the nonprotestors became somewhat less so (27%), gravitating instead toward Independent status. The large gain in the tau-c ordinal statistic showing the intergroup difference attests to the marked overall shift. Over the ensuing nine years, the two groups changed only modestly at the aggregate level and scarcely at all in terms of basic identification with the Democratic party. With several elections and untold political spectatorship behind them, the protestors by 1982 showed the indelible imprint of their political baptism. The critical shift came in the protest years, and the fixation came in the 1973–82 era, as they aged from 26 to 35.

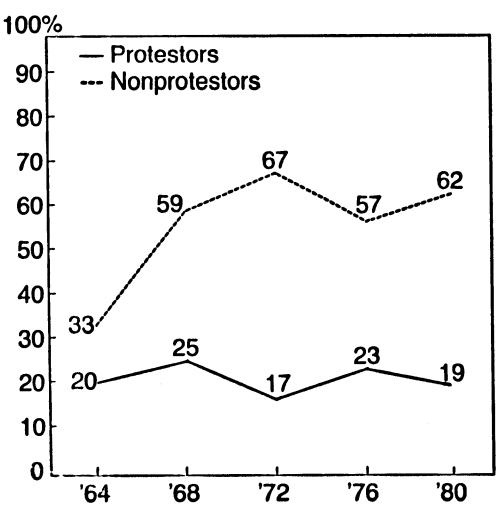
Looking at the data from an individual basis shows this process in a different way. The over-time continuity coefficient (r) among protestors during the first panel period was .27, whereas it jumped to .53 during the second period. Given the slower rate of change in later life, there is good reason to believe that the protestors have crystalized their partisan attachment to the Democratic party and will carry it throughout their lives (Jennings and Markus 1984).

If protestors remain distinctive according to party identification, the same is

more vividly so in terms of electoral behavior. During each of the three soundings, the respondents reported on their voting behavior and preferences in the preceding presidential elections. Putting the information together provides a track record for the five presidential elections reaching from 1964 to 1980. We will use reported preferences for those respondents who did not actually vote. There are two reasons for doing so. First, due to their age, scarcely any of the respondents could have voted in the 1964 elections, and a substantial minority were still too young even in 1968. Second, a comparison between reported voters and nonvoters reveals few differences in terms of the preference distributions. Primarily because the Anderson candidacy of 1980 affected the Democratic share of the vote, the results are reported in terms of Republican preferences (Figure 1).

Aside from blacks, it would be difficult to imagine a less-committed band of college-educated Republican voters than that represented by the protestors. Along with those who were not destined to become protestors, a minority of them supported Goldwater in 1964. But that proved to be a one-time experience. In every subsequent election, the nonprotestors rang up resounding Republican majorities. Meanwhile, no more than a quarter of the protestors supported the GOP candidate. As a result, what had been a very modest difference between the two groups in 1964 ballooned into a persisting one that never fell below 35% over the following four elections.

Figure 1. Preferences for Republican Presidential Candidates, 1964–1980



Again, the protest years are clearly implicated as the decisive ones. Both the 1968 and 1972 elections transpired while the protest movement was still alive and, if not well, at least kicking. In fact, the McGovern candidacy of 1972 was in many ways a consequence of the movement by the protest generation and other dissident elements within the party. Their voting behavior in the 1968 and 1972 elections appears to have virtually cemented the protestors to Democratic candidates, for even the moderate Gerald Ford was unable to capture much of their support in 1976. Individual-level analysis strengthens this view of persisting Democratic loyalties. Over the last three pairs of presidential elections (1968–72, 1972–76, 1976–80), the over-time correlations (r) were .46, .68, and .58 respectively. Comparable figures for the nonprotestors were .53, .47, and .49. Significantly, the protestors had the higher stability over the last two pairs of elections.

Elections have a way of reducing diverse political opinions and preferences to a very few choices. In the U.S. case, the reduction is severe. Within this context, the values and goals of the erstwhile protestors continue to be seen by them as being most closely approximated in the Democratic party. Had the protest era and the personal involvement of the protestors not occurred, it is by no means certain that this set of people would have become so wedded to the party. Forged in the fire of the protest years and annealed by the constrained choices offered by the

U.S. electoral system, the Democratic bias of the protestors seems destined to endure. However, the third-party candidacy of John Anderson in 1980 demonstrates the vulnerability of protestors to non-Democratic appeals. Whereas Anderson received but 7% of the total national vote and 10% of the nonprotestors' vote, he gained 23% of the protestors' support. But the Anderson candidacy was a rarity, and by 1984 the choice for the protestors was between Reagan and Mondale. There is little doubt about how protestors and nonprotestors were to divide their votes, though it seems highly likely that the protestors would have been solidly in the Gary Hart camp during the battle for the Democratic nomination.

Civil Liberties

One of the earliest manifestations of the waves of student protest to sweep the country was the Berkeley free speech movement of 1964. In one way or another, civil liberties and civil rights became intertwined with a protest movement that had as its major focus the Vietnam War. Indeed, the civil rights movement, already well under way, often attempted to form coalitions with the antiwar movement, and vice versa. Because the legitimacy of the very act of unconventional behavior frequently hinged on a claim to first amendment freedoms, the protest movement was particularly sensitive to the classic questions of civil liberties. Of course, the passions of the demonstrators were sometimes said to infringe on the first amendment freedoms of other citizens. Nevertheless, the subscription in principle to classic doctrines of civil libertarianism seemed to form a part of the creed for all but the most revolutionary of protestors.

Previous analysis (Jennings and Niemi 1981, chap. 11) demonstrated the gap that had appeared between protestors and nonprotestors by 1973 with respect to beliefs about civil liberties. The question to be examined here is whether the protestors maintained their high commitment to the sometimes rather abstract principles of civil liberties. How did these commitments fare as social causes subsided and as worries about the health of the economy increased? And did nonprotestors continue to be less enthusiastic about these principles, thus keeping the distance fixed between themselves and the protestors?

Our first approach to these questions relies on a three-item measure dubbed the civic tolerance scale.[3] This index has four categories and, among college graduates, is highly skewed toward the upper, more tolerant end of the scale. Presented in Figure 2 are the proportions of protestors and nonprotestors scoring high—4—across the three surveys. It is clear that these high school seniors of 1965 destined to be part of the college protest crowd were only marginally more tolerant than those not so destined. Self-selection effects were minimal. Both groups had scored large gains by 1973, attributable in

Figure 2. High Support for Civic Tolerance

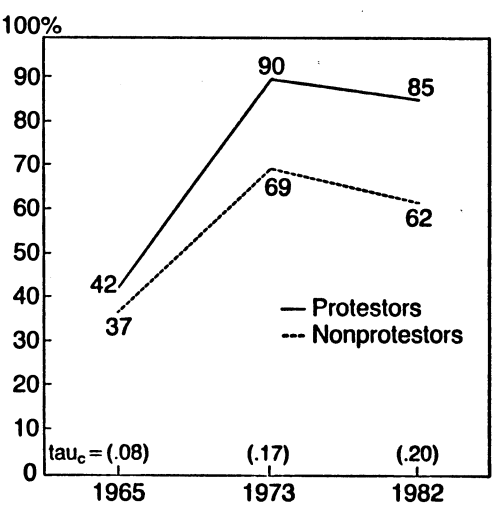
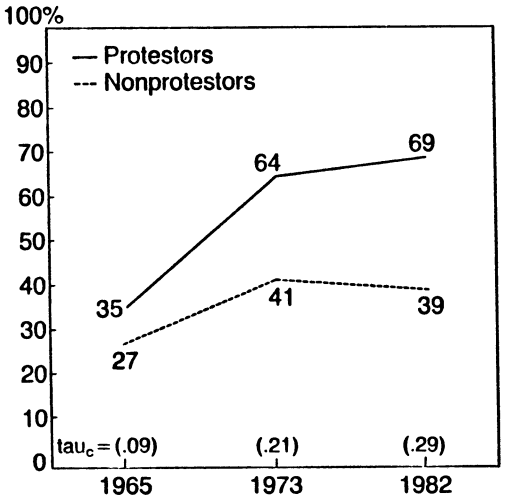


Figure 3. Opposition to Prayer in Public Schools



great part to their college training. However, the protestors achieved a massive gain. Nine years later, both groups had retreated just a shade, and the gap between the two had actually widened by a fraction. Overall, the protestors maintained both absolute and relative continuity.

A key part of civil libertarian beliefs in the United States is the separation of church and state. A number of historical battles have been waged over this principle. One of the recurring ones in recent history has been that of whether prayers (silent or aloud) should be allowed in public schools. During the Reagan years this particular issue has inspired considerable passion on both sides. Somewhat fortuitously, we began asking a question on this topic in 1965 and repeated it in 1973 and 1982. The results are presented in Figure 3, in terms of opposition to the concept of prayers in school.

Again, it should be noted that protestors differed very little from nonprotestors prior to the protest era. While both groups had increased their opposition by 1973, the rise was especially sharp among protestors. As with the civic tolerance measure, solidification seems to have set in at this point. Over the next nine years, neither group altered much in the aggregate. What change did occur saw the protestors becoming even more opposed to the idea and nonprotestors a shade less so. Consequently, the relative difference actually increased over time. The separation that had set in by the end of the protest era appeared to be a lasting one.

A final measure lies more in the realm of civil rights than of civil liberties as these terms are understood in the United States. Racial integration of the schools was for many years, including those of the protest period, a highly flammable issue. At one time it served as the litmus test for defining a civil rights advocate. Partly because they linked their own movement, spiritually if not physically, to that of the civil rights movement, it would be surprising if our cadre of protestors had not been early supporters of school integration. Of interest is whether that support has deteriorated in the wake of growing antipathy to the concept by the public at large.

The question employed asks about the propriety of the federal government's role in ensuring school integration. As shown in Figure 4, the nascent protestors were already more liberal on this issue than were nonprotestors in 1965, though each group had a solid prointegration majority. The protestors' support hovered around 75% at each of the three soundings, thus demonstrating extraordinary absolute continuity. An almost dogmatic quality is attached to their persistence because nationally the trend was plunging downward. Providing a dramatic illustration of this trend, the nonprotestors' support for integration dropped over 30% across the entire 17-year period. Not only was the relative position of the protestors maintained, it was greatly enhanced.

Taken together the findings on partisanship and civil liberties speak to the emergence of strong, enduring differences

between the protestors and their same-aged, equally well educated fellow cohort members. Special circumstances surrounding their induction into political activism account in part for the staying power of the protestors' convictions in these two areas. The structuring of the electoral system helps perpetuate the partisan loyalties of the protestors, and the long-lived and rather classical character of the civil liberties domain helps perpetuate the protestors' high degree of liberalism. If one were looking for ammunition to support the theory of political generations, the partisanship and civil liberties arenas suffice in handsome style. But they provide only one of several possible outcomes, as will be shown.

Group Interests and Policy Views: Erosion Effects

Our analysis of the 1973 data established beyond doubt the extraordinarily left-leaning quality of the protestors' political views with respect to a number of policy issues and group interests, both absolutely and relative to nonprotestors. For many observers of the protest generation the key question was whether they would carry their reform-oriented, liberal set of beliefs and values into their adult years. A politics contributed to by activists on the Left would be far different from one lacking that contribution. As they made their way through life, would the protestors remain true to their ideological wellsprings or would the press of the larger environment and the vicissitudes of everyday life make it all but impossible to preserve the rather extreme views of the early 1970s?

Group Evaluations

A first approach to this question utilizes the evaluations accorded various sociopolitical groups on the so-called *feeling thermometer*, a device running from 0° to 100°. The higher the degrees, the more positively the individual feels about the object being evaluated. Nine groups were the subjects of questions in 1973 and 1982. Five of them—the military, big business, conservatives, Republicans, and the police—are generally identified with the more conservative elements in the polity. Protestors took a much more benign view of these groups in 1982 than in 1973. Although only the police managed to reach an average rating well above the 50° mark, all groups achieved substantial gains. One quick answer to our initial question, then, is that the protestors moderated considerably in their negativeness toward groups associated with the conservative establishment. In an absolute sense, they did retreat from their earlier positions, thus undercutting the notion of a persistent generation effect.

Yet absolute scores are only part of the story. Evaluations could rise, but the protestors might still be keeping themselves apart from other members of the college graduate cohort. Relative differences

Figure 4. Support for Federal Role in School Integration

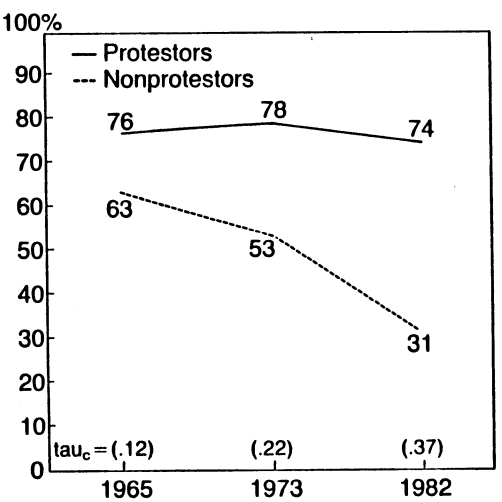


Table 2. Mean Ratings of Conservative Social and Political Groups

Social or Political Group	1973 Non-protestors	1973 Protestors	1973 tau-c	1982 Non-protestors	1982 Protestors	1982 tau-c
Military	49	28	.43	59	42	.36
Conservatives	54	39	.40	58	48	.28
Big business	44	31	.35	47	45	.08
Police	65	53	.32	74	67	.18
Republicans	56	48	.31	58	50	.23

Note: Mean ratings are based on the 0°–100° feeling thermometer technique. Tau-c coefficients are based on the full range of data.

would stay in place if the nonprotestors also upped their ratings. As it turns out, the nonprotestors also became more generous, thus keeping protestors relatively less approving of conservative groups. Because the increases among nonprotestors were less marked, however, the two groups grew closer together. This shrinking distance is expressed in summary form in Table 2 by the tau-c correlations, which show the relationship between protest status and group ratings. Protestors still stood out as being much less conservative, but time (and what it summarizes) had worked its will on them.

The marked mellowing of the protestors' views of establishment groups stands in contrast to their very modest increase in affection for four liberal groups (not shown). While protestors had felt more sympathetic to liberal groups in 1973 than had nonprotestors, the difference was far less than it was for conservative groups. This difference grew slightly by 1982, thanks in large part to the fact that nonprotestors failed to increase their evaluations of any liberal groups. Nevertheless, the gap between protestors and nonprotestors remained larger for conservative groups, a finding that suggests that the differentiated effect of the protestors had been and remains more anti-conservative establishment than pro-liberal challenge.

Inequalities in Influence

A basic complaint of protestors was that power was distributed so unequally in U.S. society. Along with other dissidents, they called for more representation of resource-poor groups in the decision-making process. They believed such changes were not only in the spirit of participatory democracy but would have the effect of improving public policies. At a very immediate level, the protestors clamored for more student power on their campuses and for more representation of youth in various institutions in the polity at large. To ascertain their perceptions and prescriptions about group influence, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt certain listed groups had too much, too little, or about the right amount of power. Table 3 presents the results for five social groupings that are widely perceived to be relatively powerless in an objective sense, or at least less powerful than their opposites.

Considering first the absolute changes over time, the protestors were universally less disturbed about the inequalities of influence by 1982. Even in the case of women, whose movement most closely approximates the spirit of the protest era, perceptions of too little influence dropped a shade. For the other groups the declines were more precipitous, reaching their

Table 3. Attributions of Group as Having Too Little Influence

	1973			1982		
Group	Non-protestors (%)	Protestors (%)	tau-c	Non-protestors (%)	Protestors (%)	tau-c
Blacks	37	78	.37	32	61	.27
People on welfare	36	63	.25	26	50	.25
Young people	38	65	.24	36	36	.01
Women	53	78	.20	49	72	.19
Poor people	74	92	.15	66	79	.12

Note: Percentages represent those respondents saying that groups have too little influence. Tau-c coefficients are based on the full range of responses.

extreme with respect to young people. If ever an argument could be made for a self-interest explanation of attitudinal change, the shift in ratings of young people is surely one of them. It may be true that the protestors, now in their mid-thirties, do not want the young people of today—who are most assuredly less liberal than the protestors—to have more influence. But it seems likely that life-stage progression, too, provides an explanation.

Nonprotestors had been considerably less distressed than were the protestors by the plight of resource-poor groups in 1973. They shared in the same general movement downward over time, but their changes tended to be less severe. As a result the difference between the two subgroups lessened decidedly in the cases of the poor, blacks, and young people. Both the absolute and relative singularity of the protestors were diminished.

It is worth noting that the same process applies to groups widely perceived as having too *much* influence. Whereas 94% of the protestors said in 1973 that big business had excessive influence, the same was true of "only" 78% in 1982. By comparison, the drop was from 87% to 79% among nonprotestors. On balance, then, erosion effects were at work across the board, acting to temper the singularity of the protestors. However, they still differed substantially from their nonprotesting classmates well beyond the protest era itself.

Issue Orientations

What sparked the protest movement were issues—civil rights, freedom of expression, decision-making power, and, above all, the Vietnam War. With respect to the latter, it is hardly surprising that in 1973 over 9 in 10 of the protestors declared that the United States had erred in becoming involved in Vietnam. The figure had inched upward by 1982. Although a solid majority of the nonprotestors felt similarly, the proportion was lower, being 6 in 10 in 1973 and 7 in 10 in 1982. So strong were the protestors' feelings about policy outcomes in 1973 that two-thirds felt "a change in our whole form of government is needed to solve the problem facing our country." Only one-third of the nonprotestors felt likewise. Wide differences also separated the two sets of college graduates on a number of policy issues put to them in 1973. An especially crucial test by which to evaluate the generational quality of a cohort rests in the presence of consistent policy preferences over time. It becomes important, then, to observe any changes in the issue positions occupied by our respondents between 1973 and 1982.

Table 4. Liberal Responses on the Self-Placement Scale

Issue	1973 Non-protestors (%)	1973 Protestors (%)	1973 tau-c	1982 Non-protestors (%)	1982 Protestors (%)	1982 tau-c
Liberal/conservative self-placement	45	83	.46	28	63	.36
Providing jobs	29	62	.39	13	36	.28
Legalizing marijuana	55	83	.38	34	61	.31
Rights of accused	50	81	.32	24	46	.25
Helping minorities	47	78	.31	24	53	.28
Equality for women	77	91	.24	84	90	.16

Note: Percentage entries represent those respondents selecting the three most liberal positions on the seven-point scales. Tau-c coefficients are based on the full range of data.

One of the techniques employed for ascertaining issue orientations consisted of self-placements on issue scales running from one to seven, with each end anchored by a verbal statement describing the attitudes of people occupying that position. Five identical scales were employed in 1973 and 1982. A sixth scale was a general ideological continuum, anchored by *extremely liberal* on one end and *extremely conservative* on the other, with *middle of the road* being the center position. For present purposes, we have simply summed the percentages for the three most liberal positions on the scales.

At the absolute level, the protestors became decidedly less liberal over time (Table 4). On all measurements save one, they registered a decline of at least 20% in terms of the sum of liberal responses. What stands out in addition to the absolute reductions is the diversity of issues being tapped. Economics, civil rights, morals, and the criminal justice system are all represented here, as well as the encapsulating liberal-conservative dimension. Again, only in the domain of women's rights did the protestors show little retreat from their liberal stances of the past.

If the test of a political generation is absolute continuity at the aggregate level, then protestors do not pass with flying colors. They fare somewhat better when placed in a relative context. Nonprotestors in 1973 were far less liberal than their protesting peers. With one exception, women's equality, they too became more conservative over the next nine years. Similar forces—whether historical, life-stage, or both—were obviously affecting both groups. Still, the nonprotestors shifted less in an absolute sense. Protestors remained considerably more liberal but, as summarized by the tau-c correlations, they were no longer as different. Their claim to being a true generation (unit) had been substantially muted.

One of the difficulties with using an identical stimulus to tap political attitudes at different points in time is that the stimulus may not be equally salient at these several points. The meaning of the stimulus may have also changed over time (Sears 1983). For example, asking for an evaluation of Richard Nixon in 1982 was, for all but inveterate Nixon foes, asking about a different stimulus object than asking about him in early 1973. Another way of testing for generational strength is to determine if reactions to new stimuli follow a predictable pattern. Protestors should adopt liberal positions, both absolutely and relatively, with respect to newly emerging issues. If they do, we have generation effects in the form of equivalent continuity.

With these thoughts in mind, we asked several new issue questions in 1982 designed to tap attitudes about salient contemporary issues. One dealt with the issue of reducing government services in the area of human services, such as education and health. This was a prominent issue in the 1980 election campaign and continued to be featured throughout Ronald Reagan's first four years. Judging from their responses to the question, protestors still carry much of the liberal baggage from their earlier years. Whereas some 6 in 10 of them opted for the liberal position on this issue, the same was true of only 3 in 10 of the nonprotestors. Another question dealt with the highly emotional issue of abortion. While 73% of the protestors chose the most permissive alternative presented to them, 54% of the nonprotestors did likewise. Similar, though less marked, findings emerged with respect to the issue of the government's role in solving the problems of older people.

Our results based on employing more timely issues in 1982 are not dissimilar to those based on the replicated issue questions. Protestors definitely brought their more liberal political ideology to the "new" issues also. But the gap between them and the nonprotestors was, on average, less than that found on the issues in 1973 and more in the vicinity of the replications used in 1982. Policy differences remained, but the crystal-sharp definition of the early seventies had become a bit blurred.

Methodological Artifact?

We have now established that the veterans of the protest movement maintained absolute and relative continuity in domains salient at the time of their political baptism but that they suffered both absolute and relative discontinuities in many other respects. One possible explanation for this turn of events is purely methodological. Given the extremely liberal scores of the protestors in 1973, the law of statistical regression might act to moderate their subsequent scores in 1982. The notion of statistical regression is that some portion of the extreme scores are not true scores. Subsequent assessments will find these extreme scores regressing toward their true values. Because the nonprotestors tended to have less extreme scores than did the protestors, they would experience fewer regression effects.

There are a number of reasons why regression effects are an unlikely source of our findings. In the first place, regression effects are not usually associated with general populations (or samples) grouped or categorized according to a priori criteria. Whether regression effects apply to groups defined according to an external criteria, in this case *protesting*, seems problematic. In a sense the extreme scores of 1973 constitute a validation of the respondents' classification of themselves as protestors.

Other points argue against artifactual results. Regression effects are usually associated with achievement and attitude inventories. As we discovered in a separate analysis of political participation, however, protestors on average also registered more declines in that area than did nonprotestors—though they still remained highly active by ordinary standards. Because participation is one of the more reliably measured of all political variables, it seems unlikely that the protestors' extreme scores of 1973 and subsequent drops could be attributed to measurement error. Yet another reason exists for doubting the role of regression effects. The section on partisanship and civil liberties showed high constancy (and even gains) over time among the protestors, even though as a group they had by far the more extreme scores at the time of the 1973 soundings.

Taking into account these various arguments, it seems most unlikely that statis-

tical regression plays much of a role in the frequently observed gains in conservative political attitudes. There are plausible grounds for arguing that the protestors' more severe movements were anchored in "real" shifts. Moderating and countervailing influences could be expected to dampen more visibly the attitudes of individuals holding more extreme opinions. Moreover, the protestors looked upon themselves as having become more conservative during the 1973–82 period. Retrospective self-appraisals obtained through open-ended and issue self-placement scores revealed that the protestors far exceeded the nonprotestors in terms of ideological distance travelled since 1973 (Jennings 1984). Of course, they still remained far more liberal than the nonprotestors, but the protestors had a definite sense of having shifted their center of gravity to the right.

Conclusion

Recent speculations in the United States have been directed toward the so-called baby boomers, those individuals born in the great postwar boom era and now in their thirties. Coincidentally, one portion of these baby boomers also contributed heavily to the protest generation. Baby boomers appear to be more conservative politically than what might be expected. Surveys show them giving large support to the Reagan candidacies and emphasizing economic issues, for example, though they are far from being conservative on social issues. The paradox being cited is the disjuncture between memories of the protest movement and this apparent conservatism. Our results speak directly to this seeming paradox; they also help us understand one way in which generation effects are preserved and continue to affect the political process well beyond their point of origin.

Our results address contemporary developments in two ways. First, they demonstrate that these baby boomers *did* become more conservative in a number of politically relevant ways over time. The more ideologically extreme segments, the protestors, underwent more movement than the less extreme ones. And this was true whether the test was one of absolute, relative, or equivalent continuity. Given the highly politicized nature of the protestors, there is little reason to think that these shifts are simply an expression of "what's in the air," all the more so because they could render reasonably articulate reasons for having become more conservative (Jennings 1984). Popular impressions had a basis in reality, though exaggerations abound.

Second, as more prudent observers always recognized, the protest movement was never a majority movement. Rather, protestors comprised a generation unit, as we have been at pains to point out. Even among our college graduates, who are themselves a minority of the class of 1965, the protestors constituted a minority. As our analysis of the partisanship and civil liberties data revealed, this minority proved spectacularly steadfast and distinctive with respect to issues and objects accompanying their political baptism. Numerically, however, the protestors are a minority within a minority. In this respect, then, there is no necessary paradox at all.

At a more general level, our results illustrate two points about the theory of political generations. First, generational persistence, while real, is subjected to stringent tests over time. In the present case, the residues of the protest movement were remarkably strong in some respects, thereby giving the lie to projections of quick assimilation. Nevertheless the gradual erosion of some attitudinal differences between protestors and nonprotestors indicates that over an extended period of time it becomes increasingly difficult to stay unique. Bearers of the generational ethos are vulnerable to the same general societal drifts and major events as

are other segments of the population. They are also susceptible to life-stage demands that can undermine that ethos. As has been observed in a number of contexts, time often has a way of smoothing out certain prior differences within a population, including those of a generational sort.

A second general point is that the continued manifestations of a political generation may be quite localized but nevertheless quite potent. Trace elements may appear only sparingly among general populations, a not uncommon finding in surveys of mass publics. Among more politicized, passionate, and skillful subpopulations, however, the residues of the formative experience may be strong indeed (Converse 1986). Thus, if one listens to certain contemporary debates or observes political influentials in action, the imprinting of the generational experience is often patent. Because of their influence, elites and near elites can continue to represent the orientations of a political generation even when these orientations are not widely shared by mass publics. In this sense Mannheim's formulation is well-served, for he was basing his generalizations on the intensive analysis of politically active university students. Our protestors illustrate this formulation superbly because they have remained extraordinarily active politically. It seems quite likely that the same unfolding has characterized other historical instances of political generations. The theory of political generations needs to recognize and maintain the distinction between applications to mass publics versus more specialized yet critical groups. Each is important, but they denote different processes and outcomes.

Notes

A version of this paper was presented at a conference on Youth in Western Democracies, November 1984, in Cadenabbia, Italy. I acknowledge the financial support of the National Institute on Aging, which sponsored the third wave of the data collection. I am grateful to Laura Stoker for her assistance and to Gregory B. Markus and Ethel Klein for valuable comments.

1. Details of the design and results from the first two waves are contained in Jennings and Niemi 1981; a first report of the three-wave study is found in Jennings and Markus 1984.

2. This topic is treated in some detail in Jennings and Niemi 1981 (chap. 11). Physical controls and statistical controls were used in order to test for the workings of other plausible explanations for the observed results. In particular, college major, school size, and public-versus-private status were used as physical controls. In addition, regression coefficients were calculated for the effect of protest behavior controlling for several background variables as well as several pre-1973 attitudinal variables. Conservatively, the protest experience could be said to be associated with dramatic behavioral and attitudinal differences in 1973 that were far less visible in 1965. Less conservatively, it could be argued that the protest experience helped *forge* these emergent differences.

3. The three items offered in an agree-disagree format ran 1) "If a person wanted to make a speech in this community against churches and religion, he should be allowed to speak," 2) "If a communist were legally elected into some public office around here, the people should allow him to take office," 3) "The American system of government is one all nations should have."

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