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Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer¹

Doug McAdam
University of Arizona

This article proposes and argues for the importance of a distinction between “low-” and “high-risk/cost activism” and outlines a model of recruitment to the latter. The model emphasizes the importance of both structural and individual motivational factors in high-risk/cost activism; contending that an intense ideological identification with the values of the movement disposes the individual toward participation, while a prior history of activism and integration into supportive networks acts as the structural “pull” encouraging the individual to make good on his or her strongly held beliefs. The utility of the model is then analyzed in relation to a single instance of high-risk/cost activism: the 1964 Freedom Summer project. Data from project applications for 720 persons who actually went to Mississippi, as well as from 241 “no shows,” are used to explain the applicants’ chances of participation in terms of various factors. The results of this analysis generally confirm the importance of microstructural factors in recruitment to the campaign. Participants were distinguished from withdrawals primarily on the basis of their (a) greater number of organizational affiliations, (b) higher levels of prior civil rights activity, and (c) stronger and more extensive ties to other participants.

Among the topics that have most concerned researchers in the field of social movements is that of differential recruitment (Jenkins 1983, p. 528; Zurcher and Snow 1981, p. 449). What accounts for individual variation in movement participation? Why does one individual get involved while another remains inactive? Traditionally, these questions have been answered by consulting various “personalological” (Zukier 1982) accounts of

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movement recruitment. The basic assumption underlying such accounts is that activists possess some characteristic that either compels them to participate or that, at the least, renders them susceptible to movement recruiting appeals. Among the individual attributes that are most frequently cited as producing activism is a strong attitudinal affinity with the goals of the movement or a well-articulated set of grievances consistent with the movement's ideology.

Some authors attribute ideological leanings in an individual to the effects of early childhood socialization (Block, Haan, and Smith 1968; Lewis and Kraut 1972; Thomas 1971). Others describe them as a by-product of more immediate social-psychological dynamics. For example, relative deprivation theorists believe that the motivation for activism grows out of the perception—often triggered by a shift in reference group—that “one's membership group is in a disadvantageous position, relative to some other group” (Gurney and Tierney 1982, p. 34). Regardless of their differences, all grievance or attitudinally based models of activism locate the motive for participation within the individual actor. This assumption informs any number of otherwise different accounts of participation in political or religious movements (Block et al. 1968, 1969; Braungart 1971; Fendrich and Krauss 1978; Glock 1964; Flacks 1967; Geschwender 1968; Pinard and Hamilton 1984; Searles and Williams 1962; Toch 1965).

However, over the last decade, the emergence and increasing influence of resource mobilization and political process perspectives in the study of social movements have led to growing dissatisfaction with the individual motivational accounts of recruitment. The following statement by Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson cuts to the heart of these objections: “However reasonable the underlying assumption that some people are more (psychologically) susceptible than others to movement participation, that view deflects attention from the fact that recruitment cannot occur without prior contact with a recruitment agent” (1980, p. 789). The argument is that structural availability is more important than attitudinal affinity in accounting for differential involvement in movement activity. Ideological disposition toward participation matters little if the individual lacks the structural contact to “pull” him or her into protest activity. Consistent with this argument, a number of recent studies have demonstrated the decisive role of structural, rather than attitudinal, factors in encouraging activism (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1974; Bolton 1972; Harrison 1974; Heirich 1977; Orum 1972; Snow et al. 1980; Von Eschen, Kirk, and Pinard 1971).

Although this body of evidence is impressive, it may appear more decisive with respect to the recruitment question than it really is. The studies above suffer from two principal limitations. First, they tend to

focus on only the safest, least risky forms of activism, making the generalizability of the findings to other, riskier forms of participation uncertain. Second, virtually all of the structural or network studies of recruitment suffer from a certain imprecision in linking "prior contact" to later activism. In order to realize the full explanatory power of the structural perspective, its central concepts and ideas will have to be refined and further specified. What types of "prior contact" are especially productive of activism? Are informal friendship networks as effective as formal organizational affiliations? Within such networks, are "weak ties" as good a basis for recruitment as "strong ties"? Is the importance of these microstructural factors the same for all types of activism? In this paper, I will try to answer these questions as part of a critical application of the structural perspective to a single instance of high-risk activism: the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project. However, before I describe the study, it will first be necessary to expand on my earlier criticism of the structural perspective.

EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON LOW-RISK ACTIVISM

Too often, movement scholars write as if persons are unambiguously in or out of a movement. Terms such as "movement activists," "neutral third parties," and "public opinion supporters" suggest that, in any given case, the distinction between participants and nonparticipants is obvious. In this conception, activism/inactivism emerges as a clear-cut dichotomy, similar to the difference between members and nonmembers in formal organizations. Recruitment is seen as analogous to the process by which a person formally affiliates with an organization.

Clearly, this view oversimplifies both the recruitment process and the reality of movement participation. Except insofar as one affiliates with formal movement organizations, people do not "join" social movements in the same sense that they join formal organizations. And only in the limiting case of formal affiliation with a movement group is there an unambiguous distinction between members and nonmembers of the movement. The problem is that the member/nonmember distinction may miss the greater number of persons who are, by some definition, "active" in the movement. What about someone who donates a small sum of money to the movement in response to a direct-mail appeal? How are we to categorize the individual who expresses strong, consistent support for the movement in public opinion surveys? Is the person who attends a speech by a movement leader "in" or "out" of the movement? In answering such questions, the member/nonmember conception of movement participation is of little value. The reason is simple: the boundaries

of a movement are never as clearly defined as those of formal organizations. Movements are much more ephemeral. Demarcating the boundaries of a movement (in any other sense than the uninteresting one of formal affiliation with a movement organization) in order to distinguish participants from nonparticipants is extremely difficult.

This being so, how can we ever hope to study movement recruitment? If movements resist boundary demarcation, how can we know whether a person has been successfully recruited into one of them? The only way, I think, is to shift the focus of analysis from these unwieldy abstractions known as movements to specific demonstrations, actions, campaigns, or other bounded forms of activism. We *can* study the process by which an individual comes to participate in a particular instance of activism.

If we take this shift in focus seriously, we must also confront the complexity and diversity of the recruitment process. Instead of assuming, as have most structural or “personological” theorists, that there is a single dynamic by which persons are recruited into movements, focusing on discrete instances of activism forces us to face the possibility that there may be as many different recruitment dynamics as there are distinct forms of activism. Would anyone really want to argue that the same mix of factors that explains riot participation accounts for the signing of a nuclear freeze petition?

Minimally, it would seem necessary to distinguish between low-risk/cost and high-risk/cost forms of activism in studying the recruitment process. As I use it here, the term “cost” refers to the expenditures of time, money, and energy that are required of a person engaged in any particular form of activism. For example, signing a petition is a very low-cost activity, whereas volunteering to organize among the homeless entails a high cost of time and energy. As an analytic dimension, “risk” is very different from cost. Risk refers to the anticipated dangers—whether legal, social, physical, financial, and so forth—of engaging in a particular type of activity. While the *act* of signing a petition is always low *cost*, the *risk* of doing so may, in certain contexts—during the height of McCarthyism, for example—be quite high. Similarly, organizing among the homeless may be costly but relatively risk free. The important point for our purposes is that certain instances of activism are clearly more costly and/or risky than others.

Studies of the recruitment process, however, have failed to recognize this distinction. By focusing their attention exclusively on “safe” forms of activism, they have implicitly assumed that recruitment is unaffected by the levels of risk and cost associated with the action. In fact, a plausible case could be made that the mix of structural and attitudinal factors that encourages high-risk/cost activism differs from that characteristic of low-risk/cost activism.

Low-Risk/Cost Activism

In low-risk/cost activism, attitudes appear to be important only insofar as they place individuals in the "latitude of rejection" (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). That is, certain prior attitudes will virtually preclude a segment of the population from participating in even the safest forms of activism. However, in the case of most (or certainly many) movements, the size of the pool of recruits—the "latitude of acceptance"—is still many times larger than the actual number of persons who take part in any given instance of activism. Klandermans and Oegema (1984) provide an interesting illustration of the size of these respective groups in their study of recruitment to a major peace demonstration in the Netherlands. Basing their argument on before and after interviews with a sample of 114 persons, the authors conclude that 26% of those interviewed fell within the "latitude of rejection" as regards the goals of the demonstration. That left nearly three-quarters of the sample as potentially available for recruitment. Yet only 4% actually attended the rally. It is precisely this disparity between attitudinal affinity and actual participation that requires explanation. One thing seems clear, however; given the size of this disparity, the role of individual attitudes (and the background factors from which they derive) in shaping low-risk/cost activism must be regarded as fairly limited.² If 96% of all those who are attitudinally available for activism choose, as they did in this case, not to participate, then some other factor or set of factors is mediating the recruitment process.

Empirically, the factor that has been consistently shown to bear the strongest relationship to low-risk/cost activism is that of prior contact with a recruiting agent (Briet, Klandermans, and Kroon 1984; Gerlach and Hine 1970; Heirich 1977; Orum 1972; Snow et al. 1980; Von Eschen et al. 1971; Zurcher and Kirkpatrick 1976). The explanatory power of this factor derives, I suspect, from the significant social costs of nonparticipation that such contact introduces into the calculations of potential recruits. In the face of the relatively small personal risks/costs associated with "safe" forms of activism, these social costs are likely to be compelling. Imagine, for example, the case of a college student who is urged by his friends to attend a large "anti-nuke" rally on campus. In deciding whether to attend, the potential recruit is likely to weigh the risk of disappointing or losing the respect of his friends against the personal risks of participation. Given the relatively low cost and risk associated with the rally, this hypothetical recruit is likely to attend, even if he is fairly apathetic about the issues in question. And this, I suspect, is true in most

² This judgment is consistent with the conclusions reached by McPhail and Miller (1973) on the basis of their exhaustive review of 215 studies of the relationship "between personality orientations, attitudes, and a variety of behaviors."

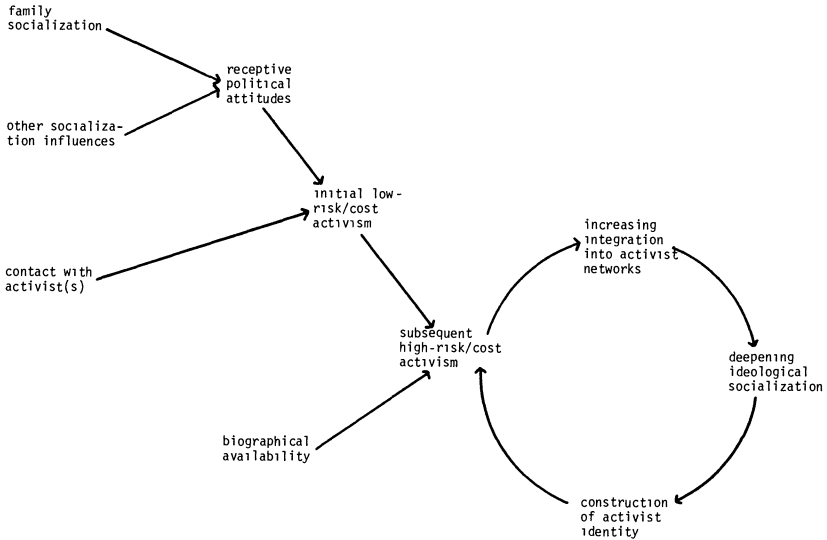


FIG. 1.—Model of recruitment to high-risk/cost activism

instances of recruitment to low-risk activism. Some crude calculation of social as against personal costs prompts people to participate in safe, relatively cost-free forms of activism.

High-Risk/Cost Activism

These “safe” forays into activism may have longer-range consequences, however, for they place the new recruit “at risk” of being drawn into more costly forms of participation through the cyclical process of integration and resocialization that is shown in figure 1. To illustrate the process, let me return to the hypothetical example above. Suppose the beleaguered recruit gives in to the entreaties of his friends and attends the rally. Once he is there, three things are likely to happen. First, through his friends, he will almost surely meet activists whom he did not know previously, thus broadening his range of movement contacts and increasing his vulnerability to future recruiting appeals. Second, in talking with others at the rally and listening to the scheduled speakers, our budding activist may well develop a better and more sympathetic understanding of the anti-nuke movement. Finally, the behavioral norms of the rally may encourage the recruit to “play at” being an activist for the duration of the event. However, as self-perception theory (Bem 1972) and the research on identity transformation suggest, it is precisely these tentative forays into new roles that pave the way for more thoroughgoing identity changes. Playing at

being an “activist” is a prerequisite to becoming one. As a result, the recruit may well leave the rally better integrated into the movement and more ideologically and personally disposed toward participation than on arrival. The likelihood of participation in other instances of low-risk/cost activism is thus increased. Moreover, each succeeding foray into safe forms of activism increases the recruit’s network integration, ideological affinity with the movement, and commitment to an activist identity, as well as his receptivity to more costly forms of participation. It is this type of gradual recruitment process that is likely to foster high-risk/cost activism.

This does not, of course, mean that low-risk/cost activism inevitably leads to more intense movement involvement. If it did, there would be nearly as many people occupying nuclear plant sites as attending anti-nuke rallies. In fact, there are not. Undoubtedly, many factors account for this disparity. It may be that certain psychological or attitudinal dispositions render some individuals immune to the cyclical commitment process sketched above. Second, there is no guarantee that our budding activist’s initial foray into the movement will encourage subsequent involvement. He may not meet anyone new at the rally. He may be repelled by the “extremist” ideology or goals that are espoused at the demonstration. Or he may reject the role of activist as being inconsistent with his “true” identity.

There is, however, a third and, for my purpose here, more important factor that may also serve to short-circuit the cyclical recruitment process. That factor is referred to as “biographical availability” in figure 1. Biographical availability can be defined as the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities.

The costs and risks of protest activity are not equal for everyone. Suppose, to the earlier description of our hypothetical college student I add the information that he is neither married nor employed. Clearly the costs and risks he must weigh before entering into more intense forms of activism are much less than they would be for, say, a full-time custodial employee of a nuclear plant with a family of five to support. The extent and number of such constraints further condition the availability of a person for high-risk/cost activism.

In the light of the above discussion, it becomes imperative that those researching movement recruitment clearly specify the type and extent of activism that they are studying. If the model sketched in figure 1 has any validity whatsoever, the correlates of low- and high-risk/cost activism are likely to be very different. While those involved in fairly safe forms of activism may well be distinguished from nonparticipants primarily on the basis of their prior contact with a recruiting agent, the characteristic profile of a high-risk activist will likely be considerably more detailed and

exclusive. Participants in high-risk/cost activism are expected to (*a*) have a history of activism, (*b*) be deeply committed to the ideology and goals of the movement, (*c*) be integrated into activist networks, and (*d*) be relatively free of personal constraints that would make participation especially risky.

THE STUDY

This paper applies the perspective on recruitment sketched above to a single, highly visible instance of high-risk/cost activism, the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project. That campaign brought hundreds of northern college students, most of them white, to Mississippi for all or part of the summer of 1964 to help staff freedom schools, register black voters, and dramatize the continued denial of civil rights throughout the South. It would be hard to imagine many more costly or potentially risky instances of activism than the Freedom Summer campaign. Volunteers were asked to commit an average of two months of their summer to a project that was to prove physically and emotionally harrowing for nearly everyone. Moreover, in this effort they were expected to be financially independent. Thus, they were asked not only to give up their chance of summer employment elsewhere but also to support themselves while in Mississippi.

The project itself began in early June, when the first contingent of volunteers arrived in Mississippi, fresh from a week of training in Oxford, Ohio. Within days, three project members—Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman—had been kidnapped and killed by a group of segregationists which included several Mississippi law-enforcement officers. That event set the tone for a summer in which the remaining volunteers endured beatings, bombings, and arrests. Moreover, most did so while sharing the grinding poverty and unrelieved fear that were the daily lot of the black families who housed them.

As a preliminary to their participation in the campaign, all prospective volunteers were required to fill out detailed applications providing information on, among other topics, their organizational affiliations, college activities, reasons for volunteering, and record of previous arrests. On the basis of these applications (and, occasionally, subsequent interviews), the prospective volunteer was either accepted or rejected. Acceptance did not necessarily mean participation in the campaign, however. In advance of the summer, many of the accepted applicants informed campaign staffers that they would not, after all, be taking part in the summer effort. Completed applications for all three groups—rejects, participants, and withdrawals—were copied and coded from the originals, which are now in the archives of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for the Study of

Nonviolence in Atlanta and the New Mississippi Foundation in Jackson, Mississippi.³ A total of 1,068 applications were coded in connection with this study. The breakdown of these applications by group is as follows: 720 participants, 239 withdrawals, 55 rejections, and 54 whose status as regards the summer project is unclear. Together these applications provide a unique source of archival data for assessing the relative importance of various factors in recruitment to high-risk/cost activism.

The strength of the study derives largely from its ability to address, if not totally resolve, two problems that have plagued past research on recruitment. The first is the ignorance of risk and cost as factors affecting the recruitment process. As a clear instance of high-risk/cost activism, the Freedom Summer project provides a useful contrast to the safer forms of participation that have typically been studied. The second weakness centers on time-order measurement problems. If the significance of either structural or individual attitudinal or background factors in accounting for recruitment is to be assessed, subjects should ideally be studied *prior* to their involvement in the particular instance of activism. Too often, however, activists are studied after the campaign has begun. This is especially true of attitudinal comparisons of activists and nonactivists.

Typically, the two groups are compared on the measures that are deemed significant, and the involvement of the activists is attributed to any attitudinal differences that are uncovered between the two groups. This approach leaves the effects of activism unexamined. What proof is there that the attitudinal differences between activists and nonactivists do not result from rather than cause activism? Participation in as intense a campaign as Freedom Summer could hardly be expected to have a less than profound socializing effect on the individuals involved. One advantage of this study is that it permits a systematic comparison of the characteristics of participants and nonparticipants *in advance* of the summer campaign. The fact that all participants (as well as those who withdrew) were required to fill out applications prior to the summer solves the time-order problem.

RESULTS

Attitudinal Differences

Attitudinal accounts of activism are based on the assumption that people participate in social movements because of some underlying ideological

³ My deep appreciation goes to Louise Cook, head librarian and archivist at the King Center, and Jan Hillegas—herself a Freedom Summer volunteer—of the New Mississippi Foundation for all their help in locating and copying the application materials used in this project. Without their help, this research would have been impossible.

affinity with the movement. At one level, this claim is unobjectionable. Certainly the Freedom Summer volunteers were supportive of the general goals and ideals of the civil rights movement. At times, certain of the network accounts of movement recruitment seem to imply that even this rudimentary association between attitudes and activism is unnecessary for involvement (see McCarthy and Zald 1977, p. 1215). The claim is that structural availability may often render attitudinal affinity irrelevant. However, empirical support for the above has been confined to studies of low-risk/cost activism, in which strong ideological support for the movement may *not* be required for participation. By contrast, participation in instances of high-risk activism would appear to depend on an intense attitudinal and personal identification with the movement. Certainly this was true in the case of the Freedom Summer volunteers. The real question is, Were the volunteers' prior attitudes sufficient in themselves to account for their participation? My answer here is a qualified no. Although there were small, suggestive differences between the preproject ideological motivations of participants and withdrawals, these differences would appear insufficient to account for their divergent actions that summer.

Not surprisingly, *all* of the applicants—participants and withdrawals alike—emerge as highly committed, articulate supporters of the goals and values of the summer campaign. The application process itself virtually guaranteed this outcome. In order to apply, interested parties had to seek out a campus representative of the project and obtain a five-page application. The applicant then had to fill out the form and in many cases submit to a formal “screening interview” by the campus coordinator of the summer project (or traveling SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] staffer). In short, the fact that applying to the project required considerable effort on the part of the applicant no doubt ensured a natural selection in the application process. Presumably, only those with considerable attitudinal affinity for the project would have been willing to expend the time and energy required to apply.

One question from the application provides a kind of crude confirmation of this presumption. Applicants were asked simply to explain why they “would like to work in Mississippi.”⁴ *All* the answers to this item reflected an overwhelmingly positive approach to the goals of Freedom Summer as well as to the movement in general. What is more relevant

⁴ Not all applicants were asked this open-ended question. The project used at least six different application forms and only two of them contained this item. In all, 300 of the participants and 136 of the withdrawals answered the question. A comparison of those who answered and those who did not answer did not indicate any significant differences between the two groups.

here is that participants and withdrawals differed only slightly in the thematic content of their answers (see table 1).

An open-ended list of 17 motivational “themes” was used to capture the applicants’ reasons for applying to the project. In addition, a single dichotomous code was used to indicate whether the answers reflected either a “self” or “other” motivation for participating. Statements that stressed the *personal* challenge of the campaign or the *individual* benefits of the experience (e.g., teaching experience) were coded as “self-interested” motives. Those that reflected more general, “selfless” concerns were categorized as “other-oriented” motives. However, neither of the above code dimensions captured any significant distinctions between participants and withdrawals. The average number of motives ascribed to each group that were categorized as “self-interested” or “other-interested” did not differ statistically.⁵ Nor did the 17 thematic code categories produce a characteristic motivational “profile” for participants that was distinct from that of withdrawals. Both groups tended to rely on the same mix of themes to explain their reasons for participating.

Admittedly, the single open-ended question described above hardly tells us all we would want to know about the underlying attitudes and values of the applicants. What is clear is that the participant’s ideological identification with the project was not, as some extreme versions of the structural perspective would suggest, irrelevant to their later participation. Instead, the participants’ consistently strong attitudinal support for the project seems to have been a prerequisite for their later involvement. What is equally clear, however, is that it was not sufficient to ensure that involvement. Participants and withdrawals are virtually indistinguishable on both attitudinal dimensions.

If the motivations for participation for both withdrawals and participants do not differ significantly, what does? One possible answer to this question is that it is the *intensity*, not the nature, of the potential recruits’ convictions that accounts for differential recruitment. Applying this to the Freedom Summer applicants, one could hypothesize that the participants were similarly, but more intensely, motivated toward participation than the withdrawals. Unfortunately, the applications provide no measure of attitudinal intensity to test this theory. There is, however, one intriguing hint of greater attitudinal intensity in the narratives of those

⁵ Although not statistically significant, the greater number of other-oriented motives mentioned by participants in their narratives is certainly suggestive. Also interesting, in view of the singular importance that many theorists attribute to selective incentives (e.g., Olson 1965), is the fact that participants did not list any more self-oriented motives—or selective incentives—than withdrawals. Following Olson and the rational choice theorists (see Hechter, Friedman, and Applebaum 1982), we would have expected withdrawals to have listed significantly fewer such motives.

TABLE 1

MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM SUMMER PROJECT

MOTIVES	PARTICIPANTS (<i>N</i> = 300)		WITHDRAWALS (<i>N</i> = 136)	
	%	No.	%	No.
Self-oriented:				
As a vehicle for personal witness	39	116	32	44
As a vehicle for personal education (to learn about the "plight of the Negro" or the "southern way of life" etc.)	21	64	24	32
As a vehicle for expiating guilt	4	12	6	8
As a vehicle for personal growth ("to test myself," etc.)	3	8	6	8
To affiliate formally with SNCC or the civil rights movement	24	72	26	36
As a vehicle for formal academic study	1	4	3	4
To experience the excitement of the project ("to be where the action is," etc.)	4	12	6	8
To gain teaching or other career-related ex- perience	11	32	3	4
Other self-oriented motives	4	12	4	16
Total* . . . . .	...	332	...	160
Other-oriented:				
To aid in the full realization of democracy in the United States	12	36	18	24
To help improve the lot of blacks generally	82	246	65	89
To aid in the equalization of black edu- cational opportunities	15	44	21	28
To aid in the equalization of black po- litical opportunities	13	40	6	8
To demonstrate white concern for black civil rights	3	8	9	12
To dramatize the depths of racism in the United States	3	8	6	8
To act as an example to others	7	20	0	0
To demonstrate the power of nonviolence as a vehicle for social change	5	16	3	4
Total† . . . . .	...	418	...	173

* Average number of self-oriented motives per participants = 1.11, per withdrawals = 1.10.

† Average number of other-oriented motives per participants = 1.37, per withdrawals = 1.21.

who actually participated in the summer project. The participants' narratives are, on the average, nearly twice as long as those of the withdrawals. Although this finding is difficult to interpret, one plausible explanation is that the volunteers had stronger motivations to participate in the project, which was indicated by their spending more time and energy on their applications.

Prior Contact with Recruiting Agent

Another answer to the question of differential recruitment might be that more participants than withdrawals had had "prior contact" with a recruiting agent, as a structural or network account of recruitment would predict. However, there is a certain imprecision in the definition of "prior contact." The central idea underlying the concept is clear enough; activists are expected to be more integrated than nonactivists into networks, relationships, or communities that serve to "pull" them into activism. The imprecision centers on the identity of the "networks, relationships, or communities" that facilitate recruitment. The literature identifies at least three different agents as midwives to the recruitment process. The first of these, formal organizations, can facilitate recruitment in two ways. First, individuals can be drawn into a movement by their involvement in organizations that serve as the associational network that gives birth to a new movement. This was true, as Melder (1964) notes, in the case of the 19th-century women's rights movement, in which a disproportionate number of the movement's recruits came from existing abolitionist groups. Curtis and Zurcher (1973) have observed a similar pattern in the rise of two antipornography groups. In their study, the authors provide convincing data to support their contention that recruits were drawn overwhelmingly from the broad "multiorganizational fields" in which both groups were embedded.

Second, established organizations can serve as the primary source of movement participants through what Oberschall has termed "bloc recruitment" (1973, p. 125). In this pattern, movements represent a merger of existing groups rather than an organizational offshoot of a single group. Hicks, for example, has described how the Populist party was created through a coalition of established farmers' organizations (1961). Lipset and Wolin attribute the rapid rise of the free-speech movement at Berkeley to a similar merger of existing campus organizations (1965). Both of these patterns highlight the organizational basis of much movement recruitment and support Oberschall's general conclusion that "mobilization does not occur through recruitment of large numbers of isolated and solitary individuals. It occurs as a result of recruiting blocs of people who are already highly organized and participants" (1973, p. 125).

Individual activists have also been identified as an important agent in the recruitment process. Here it matters little whether the potential recruit is involved in formal organizations. Instead, the emphasis is on the necessity for prior *personal* contact with a *single* activist who introduces the recruit to the movement. Empirical support for the importance of a prior relationship with a single activist can be found in the work of Gerlach and Hine (1970), Snow et al. (1980), and White (1970).

There are two empirical questions to be asked about these relationships. First, are they more important than formal organizations in encouraging activism? Second, what *type* of relationship is more effective in recruiting other activists? Here, Granovetter's (1973) distinction between "strong" and "weak" ties is of special interest. Granovetter and others have found that weak ties are more crucial to diffusion processes than strong ones. Does this pattern hold true in the Freedom Summer project? Did participants know more volunteers prior to the summer than did withdrawals? And, if so, were those prior contacts primarily weak ties or strong ones?

Finally, in addition to these two agents—organizations and individual activists—there is a third that would seem to apply only to high-risk/cost activism. I am referring to the movement in which the high-risk episode is embedded. The process depicted in figure 1 would lead to the expectation that high-risk/cost activism will grow out of a cyclical process of activism and deepening personal and ideological commitment to the movement. Here "prior contact" does not refer to ties to specific organizations or persons but to integration into the role of activist and the subcultural "world" of the movement. In such instances, the process of internalization—as regards both the role of activist and the ideology of the movement—may make contact with a tangible recruiting agent unnecessary. As their commitment to the "cause" deepens and attachment to an activist identity intensifies, potential recruits may actually initiate contact with the project in question.

In assessing the importance of these three types of "prior contact," I will look at each separately in order to see how well they differentiate Freedom Summer participants from withdrawals. Then the effects of all three will be measured simultaneously by means of a logit regression equation predicting participation in the summer project.

1. *Organizational affiliations.*—One of the strongest predictors of participation is the total number of organizational affiliations listed on their applications by the two groups. Table 2 clearly shows that participants belong to more organizations than do withdrawals. To highlight this contrast, I compare the percentage within each group who belong to less than two organizations with that of those who belong to more than two. Of the withdrawals, 48% fall into the former category as compared with

TABLE 2
ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS OF THE FREEDOM SUMMER APPLICANTS*

No. of Organizations	PARTICIPANTS		WITHDRAWALS	
	%	No.	%	No.
0.....	14	99	18	43
1.....	21	143	30	71
2.....	23	157	20	48
3.....	19	131	15	36
4.....	13	87	10	23
5+.....	11	74	7	17
Total.....	101	691	100	238

NOTE.—Average number of organizations by project status: participants = 2.4, withdrawals = 1.9. Difference significant at the .01 level using a two-tailed *t*-test.

only 35% of the participants. In contrast, 66% of the participants but only 52% of the withdrawals belong to two or more organizations. Comparing the mean number of organizational affiliations for each group only underscores this finding. Participants belong to an average of 2.4 organizations, whereas the comparable figure for withdrawals is 1.9.

But, as table 3 indicates, participants and withdrawals differ not only in the number but also in the types of organizations they belong to.

TABLE 3
PARTICIPANTS AND WITHDRAWALS WHO BELONG TO VARIOUS
TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	PARTICIPANTS		WITHDRAWALS	
	%	No.	%	No.
Civil rights organization.....	50	347	40	96
Peace or disarmament group.....	12	84	7	18
Socialist organization.....	3	23	2	6
Human relations council or organization.....	7	49	4	9
Democratic or Republican party organization.....	13	91	11	26
Other political organization.....	16	108	12	29
Church or religious group.....	22	150	18	43
Student club or social organization.....	20	140	24	56
Student government.....	8	57	9	21
Student newspaper.....	6	43	7	17
Academic club or organization.....	12	81	16	37

Participants are members of more explicitly political organizations than are withdrawals. Especially significant, given the focus of the summer project, is the difference in the percentage of each group that includes civil rights organizations among their affiliations. Of the participants, 50% do so as against 40% of the withdrawals. Similar percentage differences appear in all other major categories of political organizations. Conversely, withdrawals are drawn disproportionately from social or academic organizations. Thus, not only do participants belong to more organizations, but the preponderance of political groups among these organizations means that participants were probably exposed to more pressure or encouragement to honor their applications.

Combining this information on the formal group affiliations of participants and withdrawals, it is possible to assemble a kind of organizational "profile" of both groups. Participants belong to a greater number of organizations and to more explicitly political ones than do withdrawals. To a greater extent than withdrawals, then, participants appear to have been integrated into formal political groups that may well have drawn them into the project.

2. *Prior ties to other applicants.*—The data also allow me to measure the strength and type of interpersonal ties between the applicants prior to the summer project. One question on the application asked the subject to list at least 10 persons whom they wished kept informed of their summer activities. Reflecting the well-articulated public relations goals of the project, this information was gathered in an effort to mobilize a well-heeled, northern white liberal constituency capable of pressuring a reluctant federal government to modify its stance on civil rights issues. Judging from the names they provided, most of the applicants seem to have been aware of this goal. The most common categories of names supplied by the applicants were those of parents, parents' friends, professors, ministers, and any other noteworthy or influential *adults* they had contact with. Quite often, however, applicants would list another applicant or a well-known activist. This enabled me to construct a measure of the interpersonal ties connecting participants and withdrawals to (a) other Freedom Summer volunteers, (b) known activists, and (c) withdrawals from the project. In doing so, I was careful to distinguish between "strong" and "weak" ties (Granovetter 1973). Persons listed directly on the subject's application were designated as strong ties. Weak ties were defined as persons who, although they were not listed on the subject's application, were nonetheless linked by way of an intervening strong tie.

The interesting finding is that participants supplied many more names of other participants and known activists than did withdrawals. The differences are especially pronounced in the two strong tie categories, with participants listing more than twice the number of volunteers and

nearly three times the number of activists as the withdrawals. This makes a great deal of intuitive sense. Although weak ties may be more effective as diffusion channels (Granovetter 1973), strong ties embody greater potential for influencing behavior. Having a close friend engage in some behavior is likely to have more of an effect on someone than if a friend of a friend engages in that same behavior. Apparently, the above was true of the Freedom Summer project. Participants were much more likely than withdrawals to have had ties—especially strong ties—to other volunteers.

It is also worth noting that participants listed a smaller percentage of withdrawals in both strong and weak tie categories than did the withdrawals. However, the relevant comparison lies not in these percentage differences but in the distribution of participants and withdrawals among all ties to other applicants listed by the two subject groups. Here the contrast is especially striking. Of the 202 strong ties to other applicants listed by participants, only 25 were to persons who later withdrew from the project. This is a withdrawal rate of 12%, as compared with the 25% rate for the study as a whole. The suggestion is clear: having a close friend apply mitigates against the individual's later withdrawal from the project. On the other hand, 30% (12 of 40) of the withdrawal's strong ties were to persons who later withdrew from the project. Just as having a close friend participate in the project increased the subject's chances of participation, so, too, did the withdrawal of a close friend decrease those chances. Withdrawals were not only less likely to list another applicant as a friend, but those they did list were two and one-half times more likely to be withdrawals than those who were mentioned by participants.

Finally, I can assess the combined effect of each applicant's interpersonal ties by assigning an individual numerical value to each of the six classes of contacts shown in table 4. The following unnumbered table shows the value assigned to each category of tie based on its hypothesized effect on the subject's likelihood of participation:

Category of Tie	Numeric Value
Strong tie to participant	+3
Weak tie to participant	+2
Strong tie to activist.	+2
Weak tie to activist	+1
No tie.	0
Weak tie to withdrawal.	-1
Strong tie to withdrawal.	-2

Using these point values, I computed an "interpersonal contact score" for each applicant. The distribution of these scores for both groups of

TABLE 4
PARTICIPANTS AND WITHDRAWALS REPORTING STRONG AND WEAK TIES

	PARTICIPANTS				WITHDRAWALS			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Strong tie to participant	25	177	75	540	12	28	88	213
Weak tie to participant.	21	150	79	567	14	33	86	208
Strong tie to known activist.	11	81	89	636	4	10	96	231
Weak tie to known activist	5	35	95	682	3	7	97	234
Strong tie to withdrawal	3	25	97	692	5	12	95	229
Weak tie to withdrawal	7	52	93	665	8	19	92	222

applicants is shown in table 5. Clearly, there is a strong positive relationship between participation and the weighted sum of an applicant's interpersonal ties; the average score for participants was nearly two and one-half times greater than that for withdrawals. More dramatically, of those applicants listing at least one interpersonal tie, 19% of the withdrawals, but only 4% of the participants, had scores below zero. Taken together, these findings suggest a simple conclusion. Both the nature and greater number of interpersonal ties enjoyed by participants would appear to have had a significant effect on their decision to go to Mississippi.

3. *Extent of prior civil rights activism.*—The final comparative measure of integration into activist networks concerns the extent of prior civil rights activism by both participants and withdrawals. As I argued earlier, high-risk/cost activism is often expected to grow out of a history of prior

TABLE 5
INTERPERSONAL CONTACT SCORES BY APPLICANT STATUS

SCORES	PARTICIPANTS		WITHDRAWALS	
	%	No.	%	No.
-1 to -4	2	11	5	11
0	64	459	76	184
1-3	13	96	8	19
4-6	7	49	6	14
7-9	7	47	3	7
10+	8	55	2	6
Total	101	717	100	241

NOTE.—Average score by applicant status: participant = 2.36, withdrawal = .97. Difference significant at the .001 level using a two-tailed *t*-test.

TABLE 6
PARTICIPANTS AND WITHDRAWALS BY LEVEL OF PRIOR CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVITY

LEVEL OF PRIOR ACTIVITY*	PARTICIPANTS		WITHDRAWALS	
	%	No.	%	No.
None.....	24	174	34	81
Low.....	31	224	37	88
Moderate.....	25	177	19	46
High.....	20	145	10	24
Total.....	100	720	100	239

NOTE.—Average activity score by project status: participants = 5.4, withdrawals = 3.9. Difference significant at the .001 level using a two-tailed *t*-test.

* The four activity categories correspond to the following range of scores on the activity scale: none = 0, low = 1–4, moderate = 5–10, high = 11+.

involvement in less intense forms of movement participation. Certainly this is true of the Freedom Summer volunteers.

Both participants and withdrawals were asked to list on their applications all previous involvements in civil rights activities. In coding these activities, I assigned a numerical value to each reflecting its intensity relative to all other forms of civil rights activism. So, for example, participation in the Freedom Rides was assigned a score of seven, while contributing money to a civil rights organization had a designated point value of only one. I then gave each subject a final activity score that was the sum of the point totals for the activities reported on their applications. A comparison of the distribution of these scores for both participants and withdrawals is shown in table 6.

As expected, participants showed significantly higher levels of prior involvement than did withdrawals. The mean activity scores for the two groups were 5.4 and 3.9, respectively. This difference is significant at the .001 level. Moreover, a closer look at the data shows that the differences are more pronounced at the extremes of the distribution such that the proportion of participants judged to have “high” activity scores were twice as great as the comparable figure for withdrawals. At the other extreme, more than a third of the withdrawals but less than a quarter of the participants reported no previous civil rights activity. Consistent with the model sketched earlier, a history of prior activism *would* appear to be related to high-risk/cost activism.

Extent and Type of Biographical Constraints

Having confirmed the importance of network integration and prior activism to participation in the Freedom Summer project, I have only to assess the impact of the one remaining variable included in figure 1. Termed

“biographical availability,” this variable is intended to measure the relative costs and risks associated with participation. The argument is that those with less time to engage in activism or more personal responsibilities constraining involvement will be less likely to participate even if they are predisposed (and their structural location enables them) to do so.

As a crude measure of the extent and nature of these constraints a series of application items inquiring into the subject’s current marital, employment, and educational status were coded. For marital status, I used a simple dichotomous code of zero for unmarried and one for married. Employment status was coded on a three-point scale, with zero designating those who were unemployed, one those working part-time, and two those who were full-time employees. Finally, the following four categories were used to capture the subject’s current educational status: 0 = June 1964 graduate, 1 = not in school at present, 2 = current undergraduate student, and 3 = current graduate student.

The categories of all three constraint codes were arrayed in order of increasing constraint. Thus a significant negative correlation between summer status and any one of the constraint codes would indicate the expected negative effect of marital, employment, or educational constraints on participation.

On balance, however, the data fail to confirm the hypothesized relationships. In fact, both the marital and employment scales were associated positively with participation. Being married or holding a full-time job actually enhanced the applicant’s chances of going south. Only educational status exerted the anticipated negative effect on participation. The effect of educational status was especially pronounced at either end of the scale, with June 1964 graduates much more likely and current graduate students much less likely to participate in the project than the total applicant population.

How can we account for this anomalous finding? One plausible answer is that the level of biographical constraint among the applicants did not show enough variation to justify any conclusions about the effects of the variable. That is, when compared with the general public, most of the Freedom Summer applicants seem to have been remarkably free of personal constraints that might have inhibited participation. For example, of the applicants, only 11% as compared with the majority of the adult public were married. Similarly, only 22% of the applicants were employed full-time. Of this subgroup, nearly 70% were teachers out of school for the summer. Moreover, an additional 6%—all participants—were employed as activists. Thus, when compared with the general public, the characteristics of the summer applicants can be argued to attest to the importance of biographical availability as a factor conditioning recruitment to high-risk/cost activism.

TABLE 7

AGE OF FREEDOM SUMMER APPLICANTS BY PROJECT STATUS

AGE	PARTICIPANTS		WITHDRAWALS	
	%	No.	%	No.
18-19.....	18	131	23	56
20-21.....	32	226	40	96
22-23.....	18	124	22	52
24-25.....	12	85	6	14
26+.....	20	141	10	23
Total.....	100	707	101	241

NOTE.—Average age by project status: participants = 23.6, withdrawals = 21.8. Difference significant at the .05 level using a two-tailed *t*-test.

This conclusion is further supported by an analysis of the age composition of our two subject groups. Overall, withdrawals tend to be significantly younger than participants. As table 7 shows, after age 18, the ratio of participants to withdrawals increases steadily with age. The important idea reflected in these data is that biographical availability bears a curvilinear relationship to age. It is ordinarily assumed that young people are more available for activism than older persons. But clearly there is an age below which this simply is not true. Below a certain age, parental control limits one's availability for activism, even in the absence of such adult responsibilities as family or full-time employment. One withdrawal's account of her abortive involvement in the Freedom Summer campaign illustrates this dynamic:

I heard a SNCC person speak . . . [about the Freedom Summer project] at . . . [school] and was absolutely mesmerized. It was like I now had a mission in life. I remember filling out the application and racing back to my dorm to call my parents, thinking, of course, that they would be as thrilled with my "mission" as I was. So what happens?! My mom starts crying. Then my dad gets on and starts yelling about how he's not paying \$2,000—or whatever my tuition was—for me to run off to Mississippi; that I'm there to get an education and that if I have anything else in mind he'll be glad to stop sending the check. End of discussion. . . . I've always regretted that I didn't just say "to hell with you, dad," but under the circumstances there's just no way I could have. . . . *I was only a freshman. A year later I'm sure I would have, but at that point I'd only been out of the house for a few months and wasn't yet in my "defy the parents phase."*⁶ [emphasis added]

⁶ This account was taken from the transcript of a three-hour depth interview with a withdrawal from the summer project. The interview is one of the 80 I have conducted as part of a massive follow-up study of participants and withdrawals from the project. For a similar account of an age-related withdrawal from movement participation by another would-be (and later well-known) activist, see Harris (1982, pp. 40-41).

For most people, then, biographical availability is only really evident in that narrow range of years marked by the confluence of relative independence from parental authority and the absence of intense adult responsibilities. Of the two groups of applicants, participants fall more clearly in this range than do withdrawals.

Finally, I assess the combined effect of these various factors on the applicant's chances of participation. By treating the individual's summer status—either participant or withdrawal—as a dichotomous dependent variable, I attempt to explain participation by means of a logit regression equation that includes the following independent variables: age, gender, race, highest grade level completed, home region, college region, distance from home to Mississippi, major in school, number of organizational affiliations, interpersonal contact score, sum of personal constraints, and level of prior activism. The results of this analysis are reported in table 8.

The data presented in table 8 are generally consistent with the account of high-risk/cost activism sketched earlier. That account stressed the importance of four factors in the recruitment process. They were attitudinal affinity, integration into activist networks, a prior history of activism, and the absence of personal constraints on participation. Unfortunately, the relatively small number of participants and withdrawals who filled out the open-ended attitudinal item makes it impractical to include some summary measure of attitudinal affinity in the analysis. However, given the absence of any significant differences in the two attitudinal profiles reported in table 1, it is likely that the omission of such a measure here will have little effect on the overall explanatory power of the regression equation.

Of the three remaining variables, only the “sum of personal constraints” makes no significant contribution to likelihood of participation.⁷ However, should age (dichotomized here as “youth”—under 23—and “adult”—over 22) be thought of as reflecting significant variation in “biographical availability,” then these data offer some support for the impact of that factor. Age *is* significantly related to participation, with “adults” more likely to have gone to Mississippi than “youths.”

However, among the independent variables, the two integration measures bear the strongest relationship to variation in participation. Here several specific findings are worth highlighting. First, it should be noted that “level of prior activism” does *not* make a significant contribution to

⁷ In constructing this variable, I transformed the three constraint scales described in the text into the following dichotomous variables: not married/married, unemployed/employed, and out of school/in school. The first category of each variable was assigned the value of zero, and the second that of one. The subject's scores on each variable were then summed to yield a cumulative constraint score for each applicant.

TABLE 8

LOGIT REGRESSION ON EFFECT OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM SUMMER PROJECT (*N* = 794)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable (b)	Summer Status SE(b) ^a
Sum of personal constraints.....	.020	.088
Level of prior activism.....	.031	.017
Integration measures:		
No. of organizational affiliations.....	.173**	.058
Interpersonal contact score.....	.088**	.027
Major:		
Social science.....	-.216	.156
Other.....	-.112	.157
Home region:		
West North Central.....	.281	.296
New England.....	.049	.256
Mid-Atlantic.....	.082	.217
East North Central.....	.027	.224
West.....	.414	.309
South.....	.040	.262
College region:		
West North Central.....	-.356	.275
New England.....	-.207	.182
Mid-Atlantic.....	-.336	.174
East North Central.....	-.431*	.182
West.....	-.492*	.194
South.....	-.029	.247
Race = white.....	.055	.107
Gender = female.....	-.214*	.088
Age.....	.287*	.141
Highest grade completed.....	.021	.075
Distance from home to Mississippi.....	-.00003	.0003
Constant.....	-.376	1.06

NOTE.—Goodness-of-fit $\chi^2 = 853.939$, with 771 *df* (*P* = .020).

^a Withdrawals = 0, participants = 1.

* = *P* < .05.

** = *P* < .01.

variation in the dependent variable. Although participants clearly displayed higher levels of prior civil rights activity (see table 6) than withdrawals, these involvements did not significantly affect their likelihood of participation in the summer project. Apparently, the volunteers' involvement in Freedom Summer did not, simply grow out of their prior civil rights activities. Instead, even veteran activists required tangible contact with a recruiting agent—either organizational or interpersonal—to encourage their involvement. Thus, researchers who stress that either exist-

ing organizations or prior interpersonal ties facilitate recruitment will find support in these data.

The most interesting finding, perhaps, concerns the differential impact of various types of interpersonal contacts on likelihood of participation. Table 8 shows that among the independent variables it is the sum of a person's ties to other applicants or known activists (interpersonal contact score) that bears the strongest relationship to participation. However, when this variable is decomposed into the three dichotomous variables that constitute its principal components—presence or absence of (a) strong ties to participants or known activists, (b) weak ties to participants or activists, and (c) strong ties to withdrawals—the explanatory significance of the measure emerges in table 9 as being exclusively a function of strong ties rather than of weak ones. When I rerun the analysis substituting the three dichotomous contact variables for the single contact score, only the two strong tie variables remain significant. Having a close friend participate or withdraw from the project did, in fact, affect the subject's chances of participation, while the presence or absence of weak ties to other applicants seems to have had little impact in most cases.

SUMMARY

The evidence reviewed above clearly suggests the crucial importance of microstructural factors in shaping participation in the Freedom Summer campaign. Participants consistently score higher than withdrawals on both organizational and interpersonal items measuring integration into activist networks. While the differences between the two groups on these items are not always large, their direction remains consistent, suggesting only one conclusion: regardless of their level of ideological commitment to the project, it is the extent and nature of the applicants' structural locations vis-à-vis the project that best accounts for their participation in the Freedom Summer campaign.

Does this mean that the applicants' attitudes or values had no influence on their chances of participating? Absolutely not. Both their willingness to go through the application process and their answers to the open-ended item attest to the participants' high levels of attitudinal support for the project. The problem is, withdrawals exhibit similar levels of support on these measures. This is also true as regards the level of biographical constraints. Thus, attitudinal affinity and biographical availability must be considered necessary but not sufficient causes of participation in high-risk/cost activism. The suggestion is that neither a strictly structural nor an individual motivational model can account for participation in this or any other high-risk/cost activism. An intense ideological identification with the values of the campaign acts to "push" the individual in the

TABLE 9

LOGIT REGRESSION ON EFFECT OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON PARTICIPATION
IN THE FREEDOM SUMMER PROJECT, INTERPERSONAL CONTACT SCORE
DECOMPOSED ($N = 794$)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable (<i>b</i>)	Summer Status SE(<i>b</i>) ^a
Sum of personal constraints	-.011	.090
Level of prior activism . . . . .	.032	.018
Integration measures:		
No. of organizational affiliations . . . . .	.194**	.059
Interpersonal contact:		
Strong tie to participant or known activist . . .	.604**	.144
Weak tie to participant or known activist . . .	.259	.149
Strong tie to withdrawal	-.395*	.201
Major:		
Social science	-.258	.158
Other	-.140	.158
Home region:		
West North Central . . . . .	.236	.298
New England . . . . .	.065	.257
Mid-Atlantic . . . . .	.063	.218
East North Central . . . . .	.011	.226
West . . . . .	.444	.311
South . . . . .	.008	.263
College region:		
West North Central	-.340	.288
New England	-.245	.203
Mid-Atlantic	-.364	.193
East North Central	-.469*	.200
West	-.395	.216
South	-.029	.257
Race = white . . . . .	.063	.108
Gender = female	-.206*	.089
Age . . . . .	.315*	.142
Highest grade completed . . . . .	.030	.076
Distance from home to Mississippi . . . . .	.0001	.0003
Constant	-.348	1.12

NOTE.—Goodness-of-fit $\chi^2 = 843.761$, with 769 *df* ($P = .028$).

^a Withdrawals = 0, participants = 1.

* = $P < .05$.

** = $P < .01$.

direction of participation while a prior history of activism and integration into supportive networks acts as the structural “pull” that encourages the individual to make good on his strongly held beliefs.

Finally, I should reiterate that the model of recruitment that I propose here is only meant to apply to high-risk/cost activism. Entrance into low-risk activism is expected to adhere to a very different recruitment dy-

namic. Quite apart from the substantive findings reported above, this article is based on the following strong methodological recommendation. If the complexity of the recruitment process is to be recognized, it cannot be assumed that there is a single dynamic that determines entrance into all forms of activism. At the very least, the costs and risks attached to the form of activism being studied should be specified insofar as they are likely to affect the precise mix of factors that produces participation.

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