Meanwhile on the barricades: An empirical exploration of youngsters and greybeards participating in protest demonstrations

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INTRODUCTION

Demonstrations are on the rise. It might be counterintuitive—recalling the turbulent sixties or the beginning of the eighties, when massive demonstrations against the deployment of cruise missiles took place—yet today there is never been more people hitting the streets to mount their grievances or express their solidarity to a particular cause (Dalton 1996). An observation that prompted some scholars to speak of a 'social movement society' (Meyer & Tarrow 1998; Tarrow 1998), highlighting both a greater frequency as well as a noticeable 'normalization' of protest (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001), which refers to the fact that, whereas taking part in demonstrations used to be an exclusive activity of particular segments of society like for instance working class and trade union members, nowadays everyone, professors as well as advocates, civil servants and nurses, elderly as well as young people are prone to hit the streets, climbing on that barricade (Dalton 1993). These findings coincide with an apparent shift from mainstream politics to social and political engagements outside the realm of institutionalized politics, broadening the 'repertoire' of political engagements (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Especially young people seem to be attracted towards new forms of political action like direct actions, street protests, and cultural jamming, often within loosely structured social movements and informal associations spurred by new information and communication technologies (Norris 1996; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003). New and global issues, such as climate change or neoliberal globalization draw on a much younger public, providing new opportunities for this generation to mobilize for collective action (Pleyers 2004). Still, others point to a general trend of declining engagement among the younger generation that is not counterbalanced by increased participation in alternative venues like social movements and protest demonstrations (Putnam 2000; Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau & Nevitte 2002; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & Delli Carpini 2006). The argument goes that differential engagements among young and older citizens are not explained by life cycle patterns, but instead by generational differences. The younger generations are just less interested and engaged than their parents used to be when they had the same age. In an emerging 'social movement society' it seems particularly interesting to take a close look at those presumed political apathetic youngsters that are engaged in unconventional actions, comparing them with the older generations, the ever active greybeards, that take part in the same actions.

Studies focussing on political engagement mainly draw on cross-sectional or—if lucky—longitudinal population surveys to tell something about the engaged and non-engaged citizenry. In this paper we take a slightly different stance. Here we do not want to compare the non with the active, but instead look, in a first section, closely at the political attitudes and protesting behaviors, organizational backgrounds and mobilization channels of different generations of citizens that obviously *did* take part in political actions outside the political realm, that is protest demonstrations. Four different groups will be compared, based on the distinction made by Zukin and colleagues (2006): first, a cohort comprising those born before 1946. Besides the few who might still lively carry the experience of World War I and II, this group principally contains the 'Silent Generation', "who paid their dues by working hard for a better life and upholding the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship" (p.14). Second, the well-known 'Baby Boomers', born between 1946 and 1964, notorious for their rebellion against the norms of the former generation and for years now "dictating politics and culture by their sheer numbers in a market-driven economy, and policy" (ibid.). The third cohort is labeled as 'Generation X', born between 1965 and 1976. Contrary to the former generation they grew up with much less familial and financial security, occasionally being accused for their presumably 'poor citizenship'. Finally, the last group contains those citizens who are born from 1978 onwards and who most noticeably grew up in an 'information age'. Zukin and his colleagues call this (premature) generation 'Dotnets' because of the defining presence of new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, permeating virtually every kind of life sphere (cf. Norris 2001). The way this Dotnet generation uses ICTs in order to affect social change principally outside mainstream politics will be treated in a second section.

This paper thus wants to compare four generations of activists, protesting today for or against diverse causes, in terms of *their general political backgrounds, their social movement and collective action background, and the way they use ICTs to engage in contentious politics.*

DATA AND METHODS

In order to compare the four different generations among a sample of protest participants we cannot use the available population surveys, like the Social Cultural Value (SCV) Studies in

Flanders or the European Social Survey (ESS). Within these general surveys the specific group of interest (here those participating in demonstrations) turns out to be so small that any possible statistical analysis becomes jeopardized. Table 1 supports this claim, presenting figures on participation levels in different political activities in the year 2006 for each of the four generations described above.

Table 1. Participation Levels of Different Political Activities in 2006 (in %)

	Generation				Total
	Silent	*Boomers*	*GenX*	*Dotnets*	
Attended political meeting	16.0	16.7	9.8	1.4	5.9
Sign a petition	37.7	30.3	15.3	10.0	31.0
Boycott or buy a product for ethical or ecological reasons	15.6	16.7	9.3	1.4	14.4
Take part in demonstration	7.7	7.1	2.3	1.4	6.5
Raise or donate money	6.8	5.6	4.2	2.9	14.7
None of the above activities	47.6	53.9	72.6	87.1	54.8
N	780	462	215	70	1527

Source: SCV Survey 2006. Figures are percentages based on cases.

Generally we see that most people have not participated in any of the activities listed. Moreover, there appear great differences between the different generations. The two youngest generations are at the time of interviewing by far the least active compared to the two older generations. Signing a petition is the most popular form of political engagement. Relatively few people attended a political meeting. Nearly 15 percent has boycotted or bought a product for ethical or ecological reasons last year. A same percentage raised or donated money to a cause. Only a small number of people took to the streets in 2006 (6,5 percent). Which leads us to the problem at stake, that is that we have only a limited number of currently active people in each generation that can be studied (respectively 60, 33, 5, and 1 respondent). Especially the lonely 'Dotnetter' is obviously problematic.

To solve this problem we will use a different dataset, called MIPS (Multi Issue Protest Survey), containing evidence of actual protesters who were interviewed while and immediately after they participated in a demonstration. Between February 2006 and December 2007 the research group Media, Movements & Politics (M2P) at the University of Antwerp, conducted protest surveys at principally all the large demonstrations (when estimated number of participants where above 5000, although we made some exceptions) that took place mainly in

the Belgian capital of Brussels. The period thus covers a time period of nearly two years, instead of only one year as in the SCV survey.

Following an innovative method surveys were distributed among protest participants (for detailed information on this method and possible selection bias see Walgrave & Verhulst 2007 and Walgrave & Rucht 2009). Depending on the estimated size of the demonstration every n-th row protesters were selected by a reference persons. At all ten demonstrations postal surveys were distributed of which 2596 were completed and sent back with the postage paid envelop. At some of the demonstrations smaller face-to-face surveys were conducted right before the postal survey was handed out. These surveys included only a limited number of questions, like age, sex, educational level, general interest in politics, and some issue related questions. For some of the variables we thus have a maximum valid number of 4691 respondents. In the appendix we give an overview of the different demonstrations in this dataset, some figures and facts, and the response rates of each survey. Not all demonstrations where covered though. For instance the Antiwar demonstration of 2006 which 'celebrated' the third anniversary of the American-led invasion of Iraq, was repeated in 2007. We did not include this latter demonstration since it probably would not offer very much additional information. The same goes for the Sans Papiers demonstration. The principal organizer of this event is the organization UDEP (Union pour la défense des sans papiers), which is a very active organization mobilizing quite often around the issue of illegal immigrants, human dignity and justice. Their February 25 demonstration was however one of the largest in the two-year period we cover here.

As shown in previous research, using a 'representative' sample of demonstrations approximates the 'largest mean' provided in population surveys, yet with the obvious advantage of having more and additional information on political attitudes, mobilization and organizational backgrounds (see also Walgrave & Verhulst forthcoming). Walgrave & Verhulst have convincingly illustrated this for the same MIPS dataset comparing a range of socio-demographic variables with the data presented in the European Social Survey (ESS). Taking all demonstrations together provided similar results as to the results generated by the ESS subsample of respondents who indicated to have participated in a demonstration in the past year. The main advantage of the MIPS dataset is that it includes information on the issue

around which people have been mobilized, on which we return in the next paragraph. The distinction between demonstration issues is virtually impossible using the ESS or SCV population surveys, since they simply do not ask for the kind of demonstration one did participate in.

DIFFERENT GENERATIONS FOR DIFFERENT DEMONSTRATIONS

In the following part we will first bivariately compare each demonstration in order to tell something about the interest of our four different generations to join a particular protest demonstration. Next we will introduce evidence on different variables like general political attitudes, past protest behavior, organizational and mobilization backgrounds across all demonstrations. In Table 2 we now introduce all demonstrations and the relative attendance of each generation. All demonstrations are assigned an equal weight.

Table 2. Different Generations Across Demonstrations (in %)

| | Generations | | | |
	Silent	*Boomers*	*GenX*	*Dotnets*
Sans Papiers	10.3	6.8	12.7	11.2
Anti-war	11.5	6.5	7.0	18.7
InBev	3.5	14.7	13.5	2.9
March for Joe	10.3	10.7	8.3	10.5
Silent March	11.3	11.9	8.6	6.6
VW Vorst	3.7	11.8	12.6	8.7
Flemish March	19.6	7.5	7.9	11.0
Belgian March	17.8	8.3	8.5	9.2
Climate Change	5.0	7.7	9.9	17.0
Purchasing Power	7.1	14.0	11.1	4.2
Total	100	100	100	100
N	680	1901	1001	1016

A first glimpse of Table 2 immediately makes clear that different issues attract different issue publics. Young citizens are particularly present at 'new social movement' events: anti-war, immigrant rights, and climate change. A finding that supports the claims made by Geoffrey Pleyers (2004). The share of youngsters is also relatively high at the nationalistic demonstration demanding Flemish autonomy, which was a demonstration staged by a student organization called the KVHV. Still the major part of the participants in this event is

much older, resembling the fact that the struggle for Flemish autonomy is principally rooted in much older organizations and generations (Walgrave, Van Laer & Verhulst 2008). 'Old social movement' demonstrations, typically sponsored by trade unions around issues such as a company restructuration and massive redundancies (InBev and VW Vorst) or declining purchasing power, are much less attended by young people. This is not all surprising since these demonstrations mostly deal with work related questions which is strongly related to the life cycle phase of older 'adult' people. Still there seems a great difference between the InBev and Purchasing Power demonstration on the one hand, and the VW Vorst demonstration on the other. A possible explanation is that the latter was very much framed as a 'solidarity' march with the employers of VW Vorst and numerous subcontractors, which might solicit among a broader range of potential protesters than the more confined demonstration of InBev focused on one single company. Another explanation, yet impossible to verify at this stage is that both companies differ extensively in terms of the age of their employee file, with VW Vorst having much younger employees. Mixed results are found at so-called 'new emotional' events (Walgrave & Verhulst 2006), like the March for Joe, and the Silent March in Antwerp. The share of youngsters is not particularly low, but certainly not as high as among the 'new social movement' events. As Walgrave & Verhulst (2006) point out these 'new emotional' events draw a much more diverse public onto the streets. Thus, we are to be expected to find more of each category of people, young and elderly. Finally we have the Belgian March that mobilized a large number of people to show their support for the federal state of Belgium, asking politicians not to loose time with communitarian issues, but instead to focus on the 'real problems' of the people. Walgrave, Van Laer & Verhulst (2008) have suggested that this demonstration shows very similar characteristics with the earlier mentioned white marches: with a lot of media support (in this case especially in the French speaking part of Belgium) appealing to a broad sentiment among the general public, hence attracting a fairly inexperienced protest public.

In order to test which demonstrations differ most in terms of age, we ran a one-way ANOVA with a post-hoc Bonferroni test. This test assumes equal variances and performs a pairwise comparison between group means using t-tests. The figures presented are simply the mean differences between the demonstrations in the left column and those in the first row. Thus, a negative mean difference of -3.27 between the Sans Papiers and the InBev demonstration

means that the former event mobilized a significant younger public than the latter. Likewise, a positive mean difference of 5.28 between the March for Joe and the Climate Change demo indicates that the former event mobilized a significant older public than the latter. With this Post-Hoc Test we are able to see which demonstration differs the most or looks very similar compared to all other demonstrations.

What jumps out in Table 3 is that the three mentioned 'new social movement' events (Sans Papiers, Anti-war, and Climate Change) significantly differ with all other demonstrations, but not that much from each other, each of them having mobilized a much younger public than the other demonstrations. The figures thus gave statistically significant evidence that these three demonstrations look very much the same in terms of age (the mean difference between the Sans Papiers and Anti-war event, for instance, is not significant). The Climate Change demo has drawn even a slightly younger public than the Sans Papiers demo. Another interesting result is the differences between the so-called 'old social movement' events. It is clear that this distinction between old and new, at least in terms of age, offers only mixed explanations. For instance, although the mean difference between the Purchasing Power and the InBev demo is not significant, indicating that both events look rather similar, the figure between the Purchasing Power and the VW Vorst demo shows that the latter still draws a much younger public. In fact, this demonstration apparently does not differ that much from evens like the Anti-war or the Sans Papiers demonstration. The same goes for the 'new emotional' event, the March for Joe, which only differs significantly from the Anti-war and the Climate Change demonstration. As mentioned above differences between both new emotional events (March for Joe and Silent March) on the one hand and the Belgian March on the other are statistically insignificant.

<p align="center">Table 3. Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test Displaying Mean Difference Between Demonstrations</p>

	Anti-war	InBev	March for Joe	Silent March	VW Vorst	Flemish March	Belgian March	Climate Change	Purchasing Power
Sans Papiers	n.s.	-3.27*	n.s.	-4.30***	n.s.	-4.60***	-4.98***	3.30*	-4.88***
Anti-war		-5.17***	-3.88**	-6.19***	n.s.	-6.50***	-6.87***	n.s.	-6.78***
InBev			n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	6.57***	n.s.
March for Joe				n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	5.28***	n.s.
Silent March					4.06***	n.s.	n.s.	7.60***	n.s.
VW Vorst						-4.36***	-4.74***	3.54*	-4.64***
Flemish March							n.s.	7.90***	n.s.
Belgian March								8.28***	n.s.
Climate Change									-8.18***

*Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

In the following paragraphs we now take all demonstrations together and try to shed more light on the differences between our four generations of protesters in terms of three groups of variables. First we will look at general political attitudes. Second we present figures on past protest behavior with an emphasis on repertoire diversity and the use of new communications technologies in order to affect social change. A third group of variables will look at organizational features and mobilization channels. These two are highly, yet not exclusively, interrelated. As shown above, different demonstration issues attract different issue publics. This implies that the possible differences between each generation on the following variables are related to the issue one has been mobilized for as well as to all other variables. In order to control for these issue difference and for the presence of the other variables we present a multinomial regression analysis in a subsequent paragraph.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND PAST PROTEST BEHAVIOR

Table 4 presents figures on both general political attitudes as well as on past protest behaviors and protest repertoire. In the outermost right column significance levels are presented of bivariate ANOVA tests, which gives an indication whether there is a significant difference between the four generations on each specific variable. Bivariate tests indicates that there are significant differences across generations on merely all variables, except the variables 'sign a petition' and 'participated in violent action'. In the case of signing a petition it is clear that practically everyone has ever signed one. In the case of violent action it is exactly the opposite: only a limited number of protest participants indicates to have participated in such protest action. For all other variables we can fairly state that our four generations differ to some extent. Post-Hoc tests are needed to identify which generational differences are significant.

As mentioned by other scholars there is a decline among younger generations in terms of general political interest and political engagements in various forms, both conventional as well as unconventional (Putnam 2000; Blais et al. 2002). If we look at general political interest we see that the Silent Generation in our dataset is significantly more interested in politics than each of the other younger generations. Differences across the latter three younger generations are each time non significant. If we look, however, to past protest and political behavior a different picture arises. The youngest generation (Dotnets) seems not particularly less active

in protest demonstrations than their older counterparts. On the contrary, in the past five years Dotnets have significantly more participated in street protest than GenX. Just as voting is just one form of political engagement, participating in a protest demonstrations too is just one part of the picture. Scholars have pointed towards the broadening 'protest repertoire' of citizens (Verba et al. 1995; Schussman & Soule 2005). In Table 4 we find out whether this broadening of the protest repertory is associated with generational differences, which indeed appears to be the case.

Table 4. Political Attitudes and Protest Behaviour

	Generations				Total	F Sig.
	Silent	*Boomers*	*GenX*	*Dotnets*		
Political interest mean (1 – 5)	3.78	3.62	3.53	3.63	3.63	***
N	678	1886	995	1013	4572	
Protest frequency past 5 years (%)						*
First time	26.3	26.5	31.8	21.9	26.7	
2 – 5	44.4	40.4	38.9	41.9	41.0	
6 – 10	18.0	16.6	13.9	18.1	16.6	
> 10	11.3	16.6	15.5	18.1	15.7	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	
N	399	1021	453	430	2303	
Repertoire diversity mean (0 – 7)	3.17	3.58	3.25	3.37	3.4	***
Protest repertoire (% yes)						
Contact politician	59.5	56.1	49.0	47.4	53.7	***
Sign petition	92.4	93.5	90.1	93.4	92.6	n.s.
Bought product for ethical reasons	74.4	82.8	75.8	86.3	80.5	***
Worn a pin/hang poster	59.0	63.1	54.1	67.9	61.4	***
Strike	42.5	63.1	49.3	36.7	52.0	***
Sit-in	13.9	22.7	24.0	26.5	22.1	***
Violent action	3.2	3.5	2.9	4.2	3.5	n.s.
Used internet for one of these actions (% yes)	42.8	51.8	57.4	77.3	55.9	***
N	417	1067	470	425	2380	

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Respondents were asked whether they have ever participated in one of the following actions: contacting a politician, signing a petition, buying a product out of ethical, political, or ecological reasons, wearing a pin or hanging a poster during a (political) campaign, participating in a strike, sit-in or, finally, violent actions. The measure of 'protest repertoire diversity' is simply the sum of all the answers on these different kinds of political actions, with

0 meaning that one did not participated in any of these activities, and 7 that one did participate in all of these actions. Of all generations the Boomers—the 'rebels' in our dataset—display to most diverse repertoire of protest activities. Post-hoc tests reveal systematic significant differences between the Boomers and the Silent generation as well as GenX. As regard to our youngest generation, the Dotnets, mean differences compared to the Boomer generation are non significant, indicating that both generations are rather similar in terms of protest repertoire diversity. Yet, we do not found significant differences between the Dotnets and the other generations as well. Either way we can conclude that the protest repertoire of the Dotnet generation is not particularly smaller than that of older generations, indicating that youngster *do* in fact have broaden their engagements outside mainstream politics with more and other less conventional ways of doing politics. Looking at the political activities in detail we furthermore see that the youngest generation, compared to the other generations, is particularly active in the field of political consumerism: 86 percent of the Dotnets indicate to have bought a product once out of political reasons. A statistical significant difference compared to the Silent and GenX generation. Finally, we must add a note on the 'tactical repertoire' of collective action that might fit with a particular social movement (Taylor & Van Dyke 2006). The Boomer generation particularly stands out compared to the other generations in the use of strikes as means to alter political change. As found in Table 1 this generation was significantly more represented on demonstrations staged by trade unions. Moreover, as we will soon find out in the next paragraph, this generation is also more likely to be member of a trade union or professional organization. Previous research points to the widespread use of sit-down strikes, labour walkouts, and secondary boycotts as a tactical mean by labour movements to pursue their cause (Taylor & Van Dyke 2006). In similar vain we could think of a 'tactical repertoire' linked to the youngest generation in our study. It is said that youngsters now turn to new forms of political action, particularly in an online context (Zukin et al 2007). To have an idea of the way new communication technologies are used to alter social and political change, respondents were asked whether they made use of the Internet to do one of the different actions mentioned earlier (contacting politician, signing petition, buying or boycotting a product, and so on). The results in Table 4 indicate that the use of ICTs is strongly associated with one's age. Especially the youngest generation, the Dotnetters—raised in an full-fledged cyber era—are very much likely to make use of ICTs in order to alter political change, systematically and significantly more likely than every other

generation. In a last section we will take a closer look at this significant finding. First we elaborate a little more on the different backgrounds of our four generations of protesters by introducing some evidence on organizational affiliation and mobilization channels.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUNDS AND MOBILIZATION CHANNELS

The fact that younger generations seems to be more attracted towards new and global issues, such as climate change, should also be reflected in their activities apart from participating in protest demonstrations, namely in certain social movement organizations. In addition, it is interesting to know more on mobilization patterns across different generations. As Putnam (2000) has stated, youngsters are less and less involved in various associations resulting in declining social capital, hence a more limited interest in politics or political engagements. This might be alarming, since a strong link is repeatedly been founded between diverse associational memberships and political engagement (Teorell 2003). Because we here have the opportunity to study a lot of citizens that *did* take part in a particular political action, we are able to find out whether youngsters are indeed less active in different organizations, and if so, whether they than have found alternative paths for mobilization. It is true that organizational ties are very important predictors of protest participation (Schussman & Soule 2005), yet if it is also true that youngster are less likely to join organizations, they might be mobilized in important ways by less formal relationships or by contacts online, through email or weblogs. Table 5 presents the evidence.

A first group of variables contains figures on membership in nine different organizations and associations. A second variable, membership diversity, is simply the summation of all active memberships for each respondent, which gives an indication of the overall organizational membership of each generation. A third group of variables is constructed following Walgrave & Klandermans (2009): respondents were asked via which different channels they were informed by the upcoming demonstration. These different channels were then ordered according to their degree of openness and formality. Mass media channels like newspapers or television are presumed to be very open (reaching out to merely everyone) and informal. Information via organizations and co-members are, on the other hand, presumed to be rather closed and formal. All variables show a significant F statistic when running bivariate ANOVA,

which means that our four generations differ on all variables to some extent. Post-hoc tests are used to found out which generations differ most.

Table 5. Organizational Backgrounds and Mobilization Channels

	Generations				Total	*F* Sig.
	Silent	Boomers	GenX	Dotnets		
Organizational membership (% yes)						
Religious organization	26.4	10.1	7.9	6.2	11.5	***
Trade union	26.6	41.8	29.0	9.6	30.8	***
Political party	26.2	20.4	18.9	16.7	20.3	*
Student organization	3.0	1.9	4.0	14.2	4.9	***
Environment	16.4	8.9	10.2	10.8	10.7	**
Global justice	10.4	7.1	4.3	12.7	8.2	***
Third World	16.8	9.9	8.2	12.9	11.2	**
Peace	16.1	4.8	6.5	8.2	7.6	***
Community organization	14.2	11.8	10.1	3.4	10.1	***
N (range)	270-314	817-920	371-393	380-387	1853-1989	
Membership diversity (mean, 0-9)	1.14	.99	.86	.82	.95	**
Mobilization channel (in %)						
Mass media	52.4	55.3	46.9	39.6	50.3	***
Friends/colleagues/family	23.4	35.3	43.9	56.0	38.5	***
Internet/email	34.8	42.6	43.9	51.5	43.0	***
Posters/flyers/ads	23.9	26.8	37.0	44.0	31.3	***
Organization	44.8	48.3	41.6	41.0	45.1	*
Total	100	100	100	100	100	
N	434	1082	488	437	2441	

*Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

Of all generations the Dotnets show the least diverse membership profile. For most of the organizations listed here our youngsters are significantly less active compared to the greybeards, especially as concerns religious, political, and peace movement organizations (significant difference with Silent generation), and trade unions and local community organizations (significant differences with all other generations). Dotnetters are, however, significantly more member of student organizations, and Global Justice movements.

Looking at mobilization channels we find that Dotnetters are principally mobilized via personal informal ways, like friends and family (56 percent), as well as via Internet and email (51 percent). Also posters and flyers are an important mean to reach out youth. Mass media channels are on the other hand more important for the older generations. Although young

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protest participants are less likely to be involved in various organizations, organizations as the most important mobilization channels are apparently not specifically linked to the older generations. This might imply that young people do not tend to be actively involved in one or another organization, but still are linked with these organizations through loose networks of friends and online contacts.

In the following paragraph we now present a comprehensive multivariate regression analysis, taking into account (nearly) all variables introduced above as well as the different demonstrations. By controlling for demonstration issues we can see which variables hold when explaining generational differences across issue. This analysis should make very clear which variables explain generational differences apart from the different interest of each generation to join particular causes which is of course related to the political, organizational and mobilization milieu one is a part of. This multivariate analysis can be considered as both supplementary as well as a summary of the above bivariate analyses.

SUMMARY: A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS EXPLAINING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

In the following table a multinomial regression analysis is presented since our variable to be explained is a nominal variable containing four categories. Hence, only three columns of figures are presented since the last category (generation Dotnet) is the reference category. Figures are expected betas or odds-ratios. Ratios smaller than zero indicate a negative correlation; figures bigger than zero indicate a positive relationship. Asterisks mark a significant correlation. The overall explanatory power of the model, indicated by the Nagelkerke R-square, is fairly high (.355), thus our model explains a good deal of the differences between our four generations.

So, what is most distinguishable in the table 6? First of all it shows that the Dotnet generation differs in important ways from the three other generations, yet not always in the same way. The least significant differences are found between the second youngest generation, GenX, and the Dotnetters. These two generations differ, however, in important ways in terms of organizational membership. Overall, controlling for a lot of other variables, political interest

now turns to be insignificant. As regard to past protest behavior and protest repertoire we find only significant differences between the Boomers and Dotnetters.

Table 6. Multinomial Regression Analysis Explaining Generational Differences Across Diverse Demonstration Types with 'Dotnet' as Reference Category

	Silent	Boomers	GenX
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
Political attitudes/behavior			
Interest in politics	1.115	.994	1.115
Protest frequency	.766	**.772***	.889
Protest repertoire diversity	.849	**1.181***	.953
Organizational membership			
Religious organization	**5.804***	**2.375***	**2.600***
Trade union	**3.570***	**3.898***	**1.990***
Political party	1.366	1.457	1.336
Student organization	**.061***	**.082***	**.105***
Environment	**2.332***	1.197	**2.318***
Global justice	.578	.739	**.229***
Third World	1.640	1.650	1.388
Peace	2.151	.886	1.478
Community organization	**4.468***	**3.141****	**2.865***
Mobilization channel			
Mass media	**2.035****	**1.887****	1.438
Friends/colleagues/ family	**.218***	**.415***	**.600****
Internet/email	**.414***	**.645***	.754
Posters/flyers/ads	**.345***	**.440***	.863
Organization	**2.106****	1.055	.932
Demonstration dummies			
Sans Papiers	.402	.195***	.278*
Anti-war	.552	.122***	.147***
InBev	.674	1.641	2.675
March for Joe	.197**	.178***	.155***
Silent March	.361	.309*	.280*
VW Vorst	.227*	.344*	.733
Flemish March	2.067	.507	.283*
Belgian March	3.006	.568	.480
Climate Change	.244*	.199***	.280**
Nagelkerke = .355			

*Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Figures presented are odd-ratios.*

Interesting to note is that Boomers are less likely to have participated in past protest demonstrations, but they have a significant more diverse tool kit of protest actions (dissimilar to the findings earlier). Thus, contrary to for instance the findings of Pattie and colleagues (2003), we do not find that especially the youngest generation has a wider set of protest

repertoires. What appear to be the case is there is some sort of trade off between certain forms of political actions. Older generations are more likely to have contacted politicians or participated in strikes, while Dotnetters are more likely to buy or boycott products for political or ecological reasons, or to have participated in sit-ins. Here too older generations are significantly more likely to be a member of religious, labor or community organizations than the Dotnet generation. The latter, however, is much more active in student organizations and Global Justice movements (at least compared to GenX). The significant findings for the different demonstration dummies indicate important differences between the generations in terms of demonstration issues. Which confirms our analyses on different demonstration publics earlier in this paper.

EPILOGUE: INTERNET, GENERATIONAL DIVIDE AND PROTEST PARTICIPATION

In a final part we turn back to some common claims about protest participation, innovative use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and generational differences. As stated, different authors have noticed an apparent shift from mainstream politics towards engagements outside the institutional realm, a trend most noticeable among younger generations. Spurred by new communication technologies, according to some scholars, they now turn towards unconventional ways of social and political activities in order to affect social and political change (Pattie et al. 2003).

In order to shed some light on this issue we ran a logistic regression analysis explaining 'Using Internet for social change'. This variable is binary coded with 0 'does not' and 1 'does make use of Internet in order to affect social change'. All variables included in the analysis are the same as used in the previous section, except for our four generations who are now independent, control variables. Since we are mainly interested here in the way different generations of activists use ICTs in various form political actions we do not include the complete model here, but confine ourselves to one graph. This graph presents the predicted probabilities of using Internet for social change for each generation contrasted with protest repertoire diversity. So we can see in this graph for each generation what is the predicted probability of using Internet for social change on various levels of protesting activities.

Figure 1. Regression Lines of Predicted Probabilities of Using Internet for Social Change Across Four Generations and Protest Repertoire
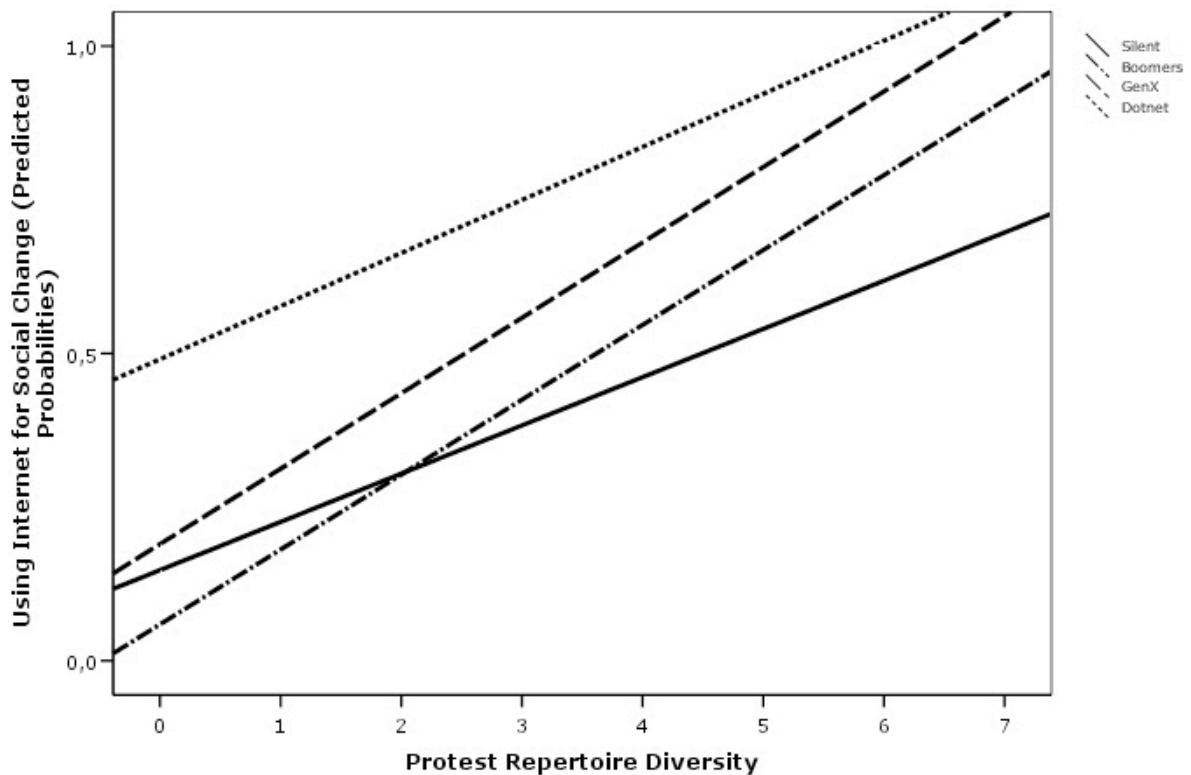
The graph clearly shows that the predicted probabilities of using ICTs for social change increases with the amount of protest actions one has experiences with. This means that, regardless of age or generation, the more people are active in various forms of protest actions, the more they are likely to use ICTs to do so. Bennett & Givens (2009) introduced the concept of 'complex identities', with which they refer to those activists that are increasingly active in various forms of innovative forms of political engagements. These activists need ICTs to manage their multiple engagements (Walgrave, Bennett, Van Laer & Breunig forthcoming). The explanation might seem straightforward, yet it reflects the inherent advantages and possibilities of this new and fast medium. As the graph shows it is the youngest generation that is by far the most likely age cohort of using ICTs in various forms of protest action. All other regression lines are systematically lower than the line representing our Dotnet generation. Moreover, starting from one form of political action it is only the Dotnet generation that is likely to do this by means of new communication technologies.

CONCLUSION

We started this paper with two observations: on the hand the emerging 'social movement society' representing the normalization and institutionalization of unconventional methods of protest and political participation, and on the other hand the apparent decline in political interest and engagements among young citizens. Both phenomena have sparked the systematic comparison of four generations of activists in this paper. Four generations who are all acting in this movement society but possibly pursuing different causes, having different backgrounds and ways of doing so.

A first important finding is that at all major demonstrations in Belgium between February 2006 and December 2007 young people are not equally represented: they show a particular interest for issues like anti-war (here against the war in Iraq), global justice, and climate change. These new and global issues provide new opportunities to mobilize young people. This finding is partly reflected in the type of organization young activists nowadays are active member of. Generally, their engagement in particular social movement organizations is rather low, traditional organizations, such as trade unions or political parties, are not popular at all. Global justice movement organizations on the other hand do attract young activists more than older activists.

Generational discrepancies between the youngsters and the greybeards are not reflected in systematic differences concerning political interest, past protest behavior, or engagements in political actions other than protest demonstrations. On the contrary, the past five years our youngest generation did show up at various demonstrations in sheer numbers compared relatively with the elderly. Furthermore, young people today do not participate in protest demonstrations because they show particular less interest in general politics, nor have they a less diverse action repertoire, but they might focus on different forms of political action. Young activists use a different toolkit of action repertoires: they are more likely to engage in cultural forms of political action, like buying or boycotting specific products for ethical, political or ecological reasons, whereas the more aged activists rather contact politicians or participate in strikes within their respective work related environments. One outstanding feature of young activists is that they disproportionally make use of new communication technologies like the Internet and email. In terms of mobilization ICTs function as an

innovative means to reach out to these young people. Yet, they also use these ICTs to engage in various forms of social and political action, much more than do older generations.

Finally, this paper has tried to show that population surveys as a popular source of studying political participation has some limits especially when it comes to the study of protest demonstrations and collective action.

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Table A. Overview Multi-Issue Protest Survey Dataset (MIPS)

	Sans Papiers	Anti-Iraq war & occupation	InBev	March for Joe	Silent March	VW Vorst	Flemish March	Belgian March	Climate Change	Purchasing Power
Place	Brussels	Brussels	Leuven	Brussels	Antwerp	Brussels	St-Genesius-Rode	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels
Date	25/02/2006	19/03/2006	28/03/2006	23/04/2006	26 /05/2006	2/12/2006	6/05/2007	18/11/2007	8/12/2007	15/12/2007
Aim	More rights and more respect for illegal immigrants	3 year anniversary of war and occupation of Iraq	Against reforms and their consequences for InBev Labour forces	Against violence and in memoriam of Joe Van Holsbeeck (murdered teenager)	Against racism, in memoriam of four victims of racist killings	Against massive redundancies at big car factory	For the independence of a Flemish nation	For the unity of the Belgian nation	Against climate change	Against rising prices and declining purchasing power
Estimated attendance	7000 – 10000	2500 – 5000	1800 – 2000	80000	20000	20000 – 25000	1000 – 1500	20000 – 35000	3000	20000
Postal surveys - distributed:	858	915	722	1018	1281	878	554	515	610	398
- completed:	149	315	98	437	573	272	238	202	189	125
Response (%)	17.4	34.4	13.6	42.9	44.7	31.0	43.0	39.2	31.0	31.4