

1 PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM

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Student political activism is highly complex and many faceted. It is very difficult to explain and even more problematic to predict. It is not surprising that there is no overarching theoretical explanation for it. Yet understanding the configurations of student politics is important. Political leaders would do well not only to listen to student protest movements but also to understand their dynamics, since regimes have been threatened or even toppled by such protests. The academic community also needs to understand student activism because students have been key actors in movements for university reform and have also disrupted academic institutions. And the activists themselves should be fully aware of the history, politics, and potential of student protest movements since, as has often been said, those who do not know the past are doomed to repeat it. This chapter will posit some general perspectives on student politics, although it will stop short of that elusive goal of developing a comprehensive theoretical framework.

It is difficult enough to understand the saga of student movements in a single country. It is far more problematic to focus on the phenomenon in a worldwide perspective. Yet this chapter will consider student movements in a comparative context. This approach will permit us to focus with a much wider lens on student activism and to gain a broader understanding of the key issues. Student protest is a national phenomenon, or even an institutional one, for the most part, but there are nonetheless some useful cross-national comparisons to be made. Further, the experience of one country may well be useful in understanding the situation in another.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Student political activism did not start in the 1960s, although much of the research and analysis on the subject dates from that turbulent decade. There are

several key examples of student political involvement in the past that are not only historically significant but also indicate broader trends in student politics.

Students have had a long-standing romance with nationalism, and some of the earliest important student movements were related to nationalism. Students were an important force in the revolutionary movements of 1848 in Germany.¹ Although the 1848 struggles were not primarily student movements, students, professors, and intellectuals played a key role. The academic community was particularly concerned with pressing for democratic rights against absolute monarchies and in developing a broader nationalist focus for the movements, especially in the German states. Indeed the nationalist ideology that developed out of the 1848 movement provided a powerful force in the unification of Germany later in the nineteenth century and strongly influenced the movement for Italian unification around the same time. Perhaps related to the student nationalist focus in the nineteenth century, student organizations were again supportive of the nationalist-based Fascist and Nazi movements in the 1920s and 1930s in Italy and Germany. German student organizations were among the first groups to support Hitler.²

Nationalism also was a key motivating force during the colonial period in Africa and Asia. Virtually every nationalist and independence struggle had a strong component of student participation. In some instances, the university community was in the leadership in terms of articulating a vision of an independent nation and culture, while in others students were key players in the movement.³ Frequently students who were educated abroad actively articulated nationalist sentiments. The development of the concept of Indonesian nationhood and of a national language for the country emerged from a group of student intellectuals and became the basis for a successful nationalist struggle.⁴ Students in countries as diverse as India, Kenya, Vietnam, and Burma participated in efforts to free their countries of colonial rule. China, although never under direct colonial rule, was pressed by foreign powers. In 1911 and on several other occasions, students there spearheaded nationalist and revolutionary movements with the intention of modernizing China.⁵ While it is true that students were not the primary leaders of any of the anti-colonial nationalist movements, they were in many cases very active and influential in them.⁶

Student activism is generally oppositional in nature, but it was not always on the Left. In Germany and Italy, students supported rightist nationalist causes. In the Third World, nationalism was often leftist in orientation, frequently influenced by Marxist ideas, and students frequently constituted the left wing of more moderate nationalist movements. But students at times were cultural nationalists and were not necessarily leftist in their orientation. In short, student movements were often radical in orientation but not universally so.

Students were also involved in academic matters. The most powerful and influential university reform movement—the Latin American reform movement of 1918—was led by students. The movement, which began in Argentina and spread throughout the continent, reflected the growth of the Latin American

middle class and had far-reaching consequences for the university, which was transformed to include students in the process of governance, and for society as well.⁷ The tradition of the 1918 reform movement continued as a powerful force for a half-century.

In the West, with the exception of the student role in the revolutionary struggles of 1848, students were not a major force in politics until the 1960s. There were occasional upsurges of student political involvement, but they were sporadic, and although they had a considerable impact in the universities, they did not significantly affect the political system. Students were active in some European countries during the Depression years of the 1930s—on both Left and Right. The rightist trends in Germany and Italy have been noted, and some French students were also involved with right-wing student movements. In most other industrialized nations, students were generally on the political Left. In the United States, which experienced a major student political movement during the 1930s, student organizations were exclusively liberal or radical.⁸ Students were much more of a force in some Third World nations in the historical as well as the contemporary context. They were highly influential in nationalist movements and were considered to be a legitimate part of the political equation.

Historically student political involvement was sporadic and generally not crucial to political developments. And with a few notable exceptions, students were not a deciding factor. In the West, student movements arose from time to time. To have predicted specific upsurges would have been very difficult, and it is difficult to discern historical patterns in a comparative framework. In the colonized nations, students were a more constant force and had a greater impact.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A "PERMANENT REVOLUTION" IN THE UNIVERSITY

One of the key characteristics of student activist movements is their sporadic nature. Student movements generally last only a short time—a year or two is rather long, although there are instances of more sustained activism. Just as it is difficult to predict the rise of activist movements, it is as great a challenge to predict their demise. There are a variety of structural and perhaps psychological reasons for this situation. The rhythm of academic life is both a help and a hindrance to activist movements. Student life in most academic systems permits a good deal of free time, which can be devoted to politics. In the traditional European systems, examinations were infrequent, and the pace of studies was almost entirely determined by the student. This meant that student leaders could devote themselves exclusively to politics and still maintain their student status. In the more regulated American system, with its frequent examinations and the course credit system, sustained activism is more difficult.⁹ It is perhaps not surprising that many academic systems, particularly in the Third World, have been shifting from the laissez-faire European system to the more regulated American pattern. In the American system, the permanent-student syndrome, which

is evident in some European and Third World nations, is very difficult; as a result, student leadership is more transitory. It is clear that the structural realities of academic life in a specific academic system can have a significant impact on the nature and longevity of student movements.

Student generations are short, and this makes sustained campus political movements difficult since both leaders and followers change. Undergraduate generations change every three or four years. Further, even in the most laissez-faire academic system, pressure to pass examinations and complete degrees is intense toward the end of the program, and students are less likely to be involved in activist movements.¹⁰ The rapid turnover of participants makes it difficult to sustain a movement. Further, campus generations may have quite different orientations and interest, and the tradition of activism is sometimes transitory. On the other hand, student movements may be impatient for results precisely because the leadership realizes that the movement may be short-lived. On issues relating to university reform or campus conditions, there is often a special desire to achieve results so that the current student generation can benefit from the change.

Sociological factors also militate against sustained student movements. In most countries, university students are from relatively affluent sectors of the populations. In the industrialized nations, and to some extent in the Third World as well, the issues that stimulate student political activism are of broad political questions, sometimes related to ideological matters. Frequently students are not struggling for their own direct benefit but rather for idealistic causes. This may mean that they are less deeply committed to the struggle than if they were fighting for an issue that could directly affect their lives. The often idealistic nature of student movements may be both a stimulus and a limiting factor for sustained student activism. For a variety of reasons, student activist movements are generally not sustained beyond an academic year or two and seldom lead to permanent organizations or to political parties. Further, although student movements frequently try to link up with organizations, movements, or political parties outside the universities, these links are not usually successful or, even if made, do not often last very long.

RESPONSES TO ACTIVISM

One of the reasons that student movements are not sustained relates to the outside response to activism. Student movements seldom function in a purely campus environment.¹¹ They are often concerned with wider political or social issues and consciously try to influence developments beyond the university. Even when the movement is campus focused, the impact frequently extends beyond the university. Student movements depend, to some extent at least, on the reaction of the larger society to activism. On some occasions, particularly in the Third World, campus activism relates directly to key political issues in the society and leads to significant social unrest; sometimes it contributes to the downfall of the regime. This is unusual in the industrialized world. However, student movements

depend on the reactions of the mass media, on key social groups outside the universities, and on other extra-campus factors.¹² When students are reflecting an important social concern, such as the issue of civil rights in the United States in the early 1960s, they are likely to attract both the attention of the mass media and the support of significant segments of the population. American students helped to stimulate both the civil rights movement and the struggle against the war in Vietnam in the 1960s precisely because they were articulating wider social concerns.¹³

Where student activism is traditionally accepted as a legitimate element of the political system, it is more likely that activism will have an impact on the larger society. In many Third World nations, where students were an important part of independence movements and have an established place in the society's political mythology, activist movements are seen as a normal part of the political system.¹⁴ In the industrialized nations, students are not seen as legitimate political actors, and society and the established authorities react with less sympathy to student activism generally. The historical traditions of activism play a role in how the larger society responds to student movements.

The relationship between the mass media and student activism is complex and important. In the industrialized nations, the response of the mass media to activism has been a key factor in determining the impact of student movements. During the 1960s, the media gave student politics quite a bit of attention in many nations, and student demonstrations, featured in the press and on television, succeeded in demonstrating the message. At other times, the media have ignored student politics, relegating it to a phenomenon relevant only to the universities. In this situation, activists may not be able to extend their influence beyond the campus. It is frequently difficult to predict either the nature or the scope of media attention. For example, student efforts to force universities to give up their investments in South Africa in the 1980s received considerable attention from the mass media, while campus protests against U.S. foreign policy in Central America did not get as much coverage. There will be greater media attention if the protests take place at the center of political power—as was the case in France when students demonstrated against proposed educational reforms. Student activist leaders often try to engender media attention since they recognize the importance of media coverage.

Government response to student activism is also of great importance. Such response can range from ignoring student protests entirely to violently repressing demonstrations. In the West, the general predilection of governmental authorities is to ignore student protests and let university authorities handle them. Only when demonstrations are substantial do they engender response. Western governments in general do not accept student protests as legitimate political expression, and they try to ignore them. With some notable exceptions, governmental authorities try to deal with student protests in the least volatile way possible, although violence frequently occurs, leading often to increased student militancy and attracting sympathy.

Violent repression of student activism is more characteristic of the Third World, where student movements are seen as a direct threat to the political system. Repression can sometimes put an end to demonstrations and stifle a movement, but it also has the potential for increasing both the size and the militancy of the activist movements. For example, repression of student demonstrations in Argentina and Uruguay contributed to the rise of urban guerrilla movements which caused considerable disruption and unrest. Governments in Nigeria and in Burma, among others, have closed universities and sent students home in response to activism. Sometimes this brings activist movements to an end, but occasionally the students simply export activism to the countryside, and the result is even more widespread unrest. There are many examples of violent repression of student movements, with leaders being jailed, tortured, and sometimes killed. Repression frequently works in the short run but may well sow the seeds of later unrest. In the West, repression has sometimes been used against student movements, but with mixed results. Efforts in France and in West Germany to repress student movements in the 1960s resulted in the deaths of students at the hands of the police, and this increased the scope, size, and militancy of the movement.¹⁵ In the United States, repression took several forms in the 1960s. FBI and other police authorities attempted, with some success, to infiltrate student movements in order to disrupt them from the inside. Authorities also acted against demonstrations, sometimes with violent results, as at Kent State and Jackson State universities in 1970.¹⁶ The result of the killings of students by police and troops during protests against American incursions into Cambodia during the Vietnam War was national student protest, which closed several hundred universities and colleges and had a significant national impact. While there has been no tabulation of the impact of repression of student movements, it seems likely that it is just as likely to stimulate further protest as to end the demonstrations. Nonetheless, severe and sustained repression generally can bring a specific student activist movement to an end.

University authorities frequently have to respond to activist movements since they are often aimed at campus issues and take place on campus. It is difficult to generalize about the responses of university authorities to student dissent since there is considerable variation over time and in different countries and institutions. With only a few exceptions, they are seldom prepared to deal with student protest. Academic decision-making processes do not move quickly, and activist movements are not perceived as normal parts of university life. Frequently different factions among the faculty make response difficult. Academic disciplinary procedures are often not geared to protest movements. In some instances, academic authorities involved directly with the campus situation prefer to move slowly but are pressed by government or other extra-campus powers to move quickly and decisively. Such prompt action against protests frequently further stimulates activism and sometimes escalated tactics to include building take-overs and other illegal actions.

In many instances, campus authorities sought to negotiate with student activists

and reached accommodation with them. These negotiations tended to reduce campus violence and the destruction of property. In a few cases activism aimed at university issues resulted in considerable change. This was notably the case in West Germany, where student demands for reform yielded some results in the 1960s.¹⁷ More frequently, students were able to achieve little in terms of lasting change in higher education procedures or policies. In the United States, for example, despite massive protests during the 1960s, there was little lasting significant change in American higher education.¹⁸ However, more limited change has been possible as a result of student pressure on universities. In India, protests have frequently resulted in the removal of university administrators or the improvement of local conditions.¹⁹ In the 1980s, the campaign to convince American universities to divest themselves of stocks in South Africa-related corporations yielded significant success. Thus, institutional response to protest, while difficult to predict, has sometimes obtained some of the changes demanded by students, although full success has seldom been achieved from the student viewpoint.

The response to student activism in terms of the media, government, and the university has been mixed. Governmental authorities in some countries fear student politics and often react with repression. The mass media sometimes pay careful attention to activist movements and the demands of the students, while at other times student politics has not received much publicity. Media attention is greater at times of social turmoil in the society. Academic authorities also react in different ways depending on historical circumstance, external pressure, and the governance processes of the university. While it is difficult to predict the response of external constituencies to student movements, there is no question that external response is a key variable in student activism.

WHO ARE THE ACTIVISTS?

Just as it is important to analyze the historical circumstances and the external reactions to student politics, it is necessary to look at the activist leadership. This section is intended to provide a very broad portrait of activist leadership in a comparative context. While there has been some sociological research concerning activist student leadership in the United States, in several Western European nations, and in India, the data are limited, and thus the general comments made here are quite tentative in nature.²⁰ There are also some significant variations among different nations. Nonetheless, it is useful to present a broad portrait of activist leadership.

Activist movements are almost always minority phenomena. Leadership cadres constitute a tiny minority of the student population. It is also the case that with few exceptions, the entire movement remains a minority of the total campus population. Even in the most dramatic upheavals, such as at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964 or during the 1968 events in Paris, most students did not participate in demonstrations. In major activist movements, the proportion

of students involved is quite significant but usually under half the total. For most movements, including those that are quite successful and receive considerable attention from the mass media, only a minority of the student population is directly involved. There are, in a sense, three rings of activist participation: the core leadership, a tiny minority and often significantly more radical than most other participants; active followers, who are well aware of the issues and willing to demonstrate; and a much larger group of students, who are sympathetic to the broad goals of the movement but are rather vague about the specific aspects and are only sporadically, if at all, directly involved. Outside these rings is a large group of uninvolved students, some of whom may oppose the goals of the movement and many of whom are apathetic. The dynamics of student movements are not unlike those of other social movements, although the specific aspects of campus life—an age-graded population, a fairly close community, common social class backgrounds, and other elements—make student movements somewhat unusual.

The core of student leadership tends to be politically aware and often ideologically oriented. Student leaders are more likely than their less active compeers to be members of political organizations prior to their involvement in activism. Activist leadership is often politically involved during periods of campus quiet, and in many instances, student political leaders are part of an existing political community. Activist leadership has several general characteristics:

- Student activists tend to study in the social sciences and, to some extent, humanities. Sociology and political science are common. There has also been a propensity for students of mathematics to be involved in activist movements. Overall the political attitudes and values of social science students are more to the left than students in many other areas, especially applied professional fields. There seems to be a kind of self-selection of activist students into the social sciences. The social sciences also focus on the study of society and of social problems, and these questions may create a critical perspective in some students. Social science faculty members tend to have more radical views than the rest of the academic profession in general, and these critical views may also influence students.²¹
- Activist leaders tend to come from somewhat more affluent families than the general student population. University students overall come from wealthier families than the norm in virtually every nation, and activists come from the top families in terms of income and status. This factor is magnified in the Third World, where income differentials are immense.
- Leaders come from families that are very well educated and in which mothers as well as fathers have a fairly high level of education. The families tend to be more urban in orientation and background, a key factor in Third World nations. In short, the families are more cosmopolitan than the norm.
- It has been argued by some that the child-rearing and general attitudinal patterns of the families of activists are more liberal than the general population and that the configuration of child-rearing, attitudes, and backgrounds of the families of activists contributes

significantly to their involvement in politics. Most of the data for such research have come from the United States; there is very little corroboration from a comparative perspective.²²

- In the United States and Western Europe, using data from the 1960s, some scholars have argued that activist students tend to be among the best students.²³ The data on this matter are, however, not very extensive.
- Activist leaders often come from minority groups in the population. In Japan and Korea, the small Christian population has contributed a disproportionate number of student leaders. In France, Protestants have been involved in activism. In the United States, Jewish students have been significantly engaged in activism.²⁴ It may be that socially conscious and fairly affluent minorities tend to some extent to become involved in social movements.

There are many variations in these patterns of activist leadership and participation. This description holds mainly for activists of the Left—and since Left activism has predominated in most countries since the Second World War, this pattern of leadership has received most attention. It may not hold true for the important fundamentalist Islamic student movements in the Muslim world and may not prevail for campus-based student groups in India, where the concern is often with local issues rather than ideological questions. Available data are largely from the industrialized nations and relate to the era of the 1960s, a decade of abnormally high levels of activism.

THE ACTIVIST IMPULSE

We know fairly little about the nature of activist leadership. We know even less about why students turn to activism and what precipitates student demonstrations and movements. Indeed analysts and officials alike are generally surprised by outbreaks of activism in the universities. Further, there are significant variations by country and historical period. Nonetheless, it is useful to look at some of the factors that may contribute to the outbreak of student activist movements.

A variety of psychological motivations have been discussed. Lewis Feuer has argued that “generational revolt” plays a key motivating role in student activism and that activist movements and students are acting out the “struggle of the children against the parents.”²⁵ Most other scholars, however, find little validity to the generational revolt theory. Others have argued that students have a propensity to “anti-regime attitudes because of the nature of the campus culture, youthful idealism, and the like.”²⁶ Kenneth Keniston has argued that student activists have a higher moral sense than their uninvolved compeers since they have a commitment to act on their values.²⁷ One of the few cross-national studies of student activists found a complex set of attitudes and values that contributes to activism.²⁸ While there is considerable disagreement concerning the psychological motivations for student political activism, it seems clear that psychological

dispositions and orientations, as well as sociological factors, must be part of the activist impulse.

The most important factor stimulating the sort of student activism that has had a societal impact is a key political event or issue with a broad social impact. The student movements that have been significant to the larger society have been stimulated by societal political events. In an earlier period, nationalism was key—both in Europe in the nineteenth century and in the Third World during the pre-1945 colonial era. Students participated in large-scale social movements, sometimes taking a key leadership role. In the United States, students were concerned about foreign policy issues—against U.S. involvement in European conflicts and about the deepening economic depression during the 1930s in a period of intense political activism on campus.²⁹

In the contemporary period, broader political issues have been the main stimulants for large-scale student activist movements. Issues such as nuclear war, civil rights and civil liberties, and the war in Vietnam were the main motivating forces for American student protest during the 1960s.³⁰ In Europe, societal politics were also the main element during the turbulent sixties. French students reacted against the authoritarianism of the de Gaulle regime, and students in West Germany organized an extra-parliamentary opposition to the coalition government of the conservative Christian Democrats and the leftist Social Democrats.³¹ In most of the other European nations where activism was a major force, it was also extra-campus political issues that were the major motivating force.

In the industrialized nations, educational and campus-based issues are sometimes relevant to student activism, but such questions do not usually stimulate mass movements. In the United States, a feeling in the 1960s that the American "mass university" was not meeting student needs was clear, but there is no evidence that this discontent contributed significantly to massive student activism. Educational reform was also a minor element of the agenda of the movement. Similarly, in Western Europe, reform of higher education played a role in France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, but it was not the key motivating force.

The underlying motivating factors contributing to student activism are complex. No doubt, psychological proclivities play a role. So too do economic realities. Students worry about jobs and about their role in society after graduation. It is evident that, at least in the industrialized nations, major student movements have been stimulated not by campus issues but rather by broader social and political concerns.

THE IMPACT OF ACTIVISM

Despite the fact that student political activism is largely a minority phenomenon, that it is sporadic in nature, and that student leaders do not reflect the rank and file of the student population, the impact of student movements has been

immense. While the most dramatic effects of student activism concern the overthrow of governments (limited largely to the Third World), there are many other less volatile but nonetheless important results.

In July 1988, the prime minister of Burma stepped down after twenty-six years in power, his resignation precipitated by two months of student demonstrations. The agitation resulted in a number of deaths but did not stop.³² About a year earlier, student protests in South Korea led to concessions by the government that resulted in elections and significant political change. Such student-induced changes have been most evident in the Third World; however, students in industrialized nations also have occasionally directly influenced politics. In 1968, French students forced President de Gaulle to flee the country for a French military base in West Germany and brought the political system to the verge of collapse.³³ A few years earlier, student demonstrations against Prime Minister Kishi in Japan forced his resignation. And in the United States, student dissent against the war in Vietnam was a key factor in influencing Lyndon Johnson not to run for a second term as president.³⁴ More frequently, as in the case of the extra-parliamentary opposition in West Germany in the 1960s, student activism does not force political change but rather focuses attention on social or political problems. Thus, the direct and indirect political impact of student movements is considerable but at the same time infrequent.

Student activists frequently serve as a social and political barometer of their societies. Through the issues that they focus on, they sometimes point to flashpoints of concern, sometimes before these issues reach a social boiling point. This may be particularly true for authoritarian societies, where free political expression is not permitted, and for Third World societies, where students are among the best-organized and most articulate groups in the country. Campus-based organizations are frequently given more latitude than would be the case elsewhere in society, and students are often more interested in social issues in any case. The concerns expressed by student organizations may well spill over to the rest of society later.

Students have also had a considerable cultural impact. Student attitudes about cultural norms are frequently more liberal than is the case for the broader society, and the trends on campus may influence broader societal norms later. In the United States, trends evident on campus later spread to the middle classes and, to some extent, to the society at large. For example, concerns about civil rights were expressed first in the universities in the early 1960s. The women's movement first gained strength on campus and then spread.³⁵ Permissive attitudes concerning abortion, marriage, and the use of drugs were first widespread among university students and then spread to the broader society. Indeed, it can be argued that one of the most important legacies of the activism of the 1960s in the United States was not political but cultural and attitudinal. Similar trends were evident in Western Europe. What are often seen as avant-garde campus trends eventually spread beyond the universities. Frequently, but not in all cases,

student activists are responsible for these trends and are most active in spreading them beyond the gates of the campus. The cultural impact of student activism is very difficult to measure but nonetheless important.

Curiously, the educational impact of student activism has typically been modest. In a few countries, such as West Germany, student articulated perspectives about university reform and were able to ensure that their ideas were implemented partially in the 1960s. In France, although students did not propose specific reforms, they agitated for change in higher education, and they were a key catalyst for such change. Generally, however, student activists may complain about the situation of higher education, but they have few concrete ideas for change and have not seen the university as a major battleground. Thus, their impact on the academy has been limited. In the United States, there was much criticism of higher education during the 1960s, but only one set of changes was strongly influenced by the student movement: the growth and institutionalization of women's studies and black studies programs. Student activism has frequently disrupted the normal functioning of universities and has sometimes subjected academic institutions to significant external pressure. One of the legacies of the activism of the 1960s in several Western countries has been societal discontent with higher education institutions, in part engendered by public reaction against student activism. In the United States, this contributed to declines in state budgetary allocations for public higher education in some areas.

Thus, student activism has had many impacts. In a few instances, the impact has been dramatic and immediate; more often, activism has had a less direct influence. It has contributed to the development of public opinion or has raised public consciousness about politics. At times, students have precipitated actions that they did not favor, such as the seizure of power by the military in South Korea or the repression of dissidents in Argentina. The ideas posited by student activists concerning politics, culture, and education have often gained acceptance in society later. The campus is frequently the source of avant-garde ideas that obtain a wider audience.

There is often a tendency to judge student movements on the basis of the direct impact that students have. But this is too simplistic; the impact of student activism is often less direct and less immediately visible. Students might contribute an idea that does not yield results until years later. For example, complaints by a minority of active students against in loco parentis in the 1950s and early 1960s led to the virtual abandonment of the practice a few years later. The styles in culture, attitudes, and music evident on the American campus gradually spread to the rest of the youth culture and beyond. And as students mature, they frequently bring some of the values and orientations learned on campus to the broader society. It is virtually impossible to quantify these less dramatic trends, but they are nonetheless quite important in assessing the impact of student activism.

THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS AND THE THIRD WORLD

While largely ignored in the literature, the dramatic differences between student activism in the Third World and the industrialized nations are key analytic variables. Third World students have overthrown governments and have frequently had a direct political impact. This has not been the case in the industrialized nations, where students only rarely have created political change.

Third World student activism is difficult to categorize. Student involvement in nationalist movements was a key factor in many nations in the independence struggles. In Latin America, in 1918 students stimulated a major reform in higher education that has influenced the university to the present time. Students have been instrumental in overthrowing governments in many nations in the Third World.³⁶ Yet despite their ability to precipitate political upheaval, students have never been able to take power, and their efforts in this area have often led to governments that have been highly unsympathetic to their goals. For example, although student dissent in Korea and Thailand caused the downfall of regimes, the military, not groups favored by the students, assumed political power in the 1960s. In Argentina, student unrest led not to a leftist government but to right-wing repression of students and others. In Uruguay, student-led activism was met with massive military repression. In other cases, students, while unable to seize power for themselves, were nonetheless successful in precipitating political change that was generally in a direction they favored. In 1987, student demonstrations in South Korea forced the government to call elections, and the result was a significant move toward democracy. While student activists did not feel that the change was large enough, most other Koreans saw it as highly significant. The pattern of student unrest in India and a few other Third World countries has focused on the universities themselves in an effort not only to express opposition to established policy but also to win improvement in difficult campus conditions and poor job prospects for graduates.³⁷ Indian student "indiscipline" has frequently resulted in campus disruption. On occasion, Indian students have also demonstrated against political officials and have sometimes forced them to resign. Thus, the spectrum of Third World student dissent is broad. Ideologies range from the most revolutionary Marxist theories to Islamic fundamentalism. Sophisticated ideological rhetoric characterizes some student movements, while others have no discernible perspective. Some movements aim at the overthrow of the government, while others are concerned with poor conditions in the dormitories.

There are many reasons why Third World students have been successful in politics, especially when compared to activist movements in the industrialized nations. Some of them follow:

- Third World nations often lack the established political institutions and structures of the industrialized nations, and it is thus easier for any organized groups, such as the student movement, to have a direct impact on politics.

- Students have, in many cases, been involved in independence movements and from the beginning of the state have been a recognized part of the political system. Thus, in contrast to the West, where activism is seen by most people as an aberration and an illegitimate intrusion into politics, Third World students are expected to participate directly in politics, and activism is seen as a legitimate part of the political system.
- Third World university students constitute a kind of incipient elite and in many countries believe that they are special. They are members of a tiny minority who have access to post-secondary education. Their prospects for later success in careers are good.¹⁸ The advantages, real and imagined, accruing to those who have a university degree and a historical sense of eliteness are a powerful combination.
- The location of the major universities of the Third World contributes to the possibility of activism. Many are situated in the capital cities, and a large proportion of the student population is within easy reach of the centers of power. This fact of geography makes demonstrations easier to organize and gives students a sense that they are at the center of power and have easy access to it.
- Relatively few Third World nations have effectively functioning democratic systems. As a result of this and of the widespread problems of illiteracy and poor communications, students are often seen as spokespersons for a broader population. They have, in a sense, authority beyond their small numbers, and those in power often take student demonstrations and grievances seriously for this reason. In many cases, seemingly small student agitations have been effective in quickly mobilizing larger social movements or have had a surprising impact on the authorities. In a sense, Third World students act as a conscience of their societies.
- Because Third World students, on the average, come from higher socioeconomic groups than their counterparts in industrialized nations, they have an added impact. While there are significant national differences and the situation is rapidly changing in terms of social class background as higher education expands, a substantial portion of the student population of many Third World nations comes from urban elite backgrounds, and they have, through their families, direct access to powerful segments of society.

These factors are a partial explanation for the relative effectiveness of student activist movements in the Third World in the past several decades. Although students in the industrialized nations, particularly during the 1960s, had an impact on their societies, their role pales into insignificance when compared to the Third World students movements. Further, Third World students have continued to be a force. They did not disappear at the end of the decade of the 1960s.

CONCLUSION

Student political activism is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are many variations because of historical circumstances, level of sociopolitical development, and political and educational system. Student movements are difficult to predict. Further effective movements depend on external circumstances for their success—on the media and on acceptance by powerful forces of the influence and legitimacy of the activist movement. Student movements by themselves are

never powerful enough to overturn a government. They depend on ideas and on the perception of legitimacy that they manage to create.

Student movements go through cycles. Since the mid-1970s in most industrialized nations, student movements have been neither active nor successful. In some Third World nations, activism has continued, although overall the trend has been toward quietude. In many ways, it is just as important to study student politics when it is at a low ebb as it is during a phase of militancy. Both phases can provide insights into the nature of student politics and perhaps into broader political realities.

Academic institutions are a key part of the activist equation. Universities, through their policies and orientations, affect activist movements. They are in turn, often dramatically affected by activism. Student movements may disrupt academic life or may bring the wrath of political authorities on the campus. Activism may bring in its wake educational reforms of various kinds. Thus, academic authorities must fully understand the nature and causes of student politics.

Student activism may be sporadic, ill organized, and sometimes frustrating for those in authority who must deal with it. Student activists frequently ignore the lessons and traditions of student movements and thus fail to achieve as much success as possible. Few look at student activism from a comparative perspective and thus fail to obtain as comprehensive an overview as possible. But student activism is of major importance—not only for higher education but, in many countries, for politics and society at large.

NOTES

1. Edith H. Altbach, "Vanguard of Revolt: Students and Politics in Central Europe, 1815-1848," in *Students in Revolt*, ed. S. M. Lipset and P. G. Altbach (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 451-474.
2. Michael S. Steinberg, *Sabers and Brown Shirts: The German Students' Path to National Socialism, 1918-1935* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). See also Geoffrey Giles, *Students and National Socialism in Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
3. See S. M. Lipset, "University Students and Politics in Underdeveloped Nations," *Comparative Education Review* 10 (June 1966): 132-162.
4. Stephen A. Douglas and Harsja Bachtiar, "Indonesian Students: The Generation of 1966," in *The Student Revolution*, ed. P. G. Altbach (Bombay: Lalvani, 1970), pp. 156-160.
5. Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960). See also John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966).
6. For a historical overview of the Asian case, see Philip G. Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case," *Youth and Society* 1 (March 1970): 333-357.

7. Richard J. Walter, *Student Politics in Argentina: The University Reform and Its Effects, 1918-1964* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).
8. See Robert Cohen, "Revolt of the Depression Generation: America's First Mass Student Protest Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1988).
9. Helen Leikowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
10. Japan, which has had a strong tradition of student political activism, is a partial exception to this generalization. Japanese higher education at the undergraduate level is not very competitive, and there is little pressure to pass difficult examinations. This is in sharp contrast to the highly competitive situation in secondary education.
11. In post-independence India, much student activism has been confined to campus-based issues, such as the improvement of student living conditions, and the impact of such "indiscipline," as it is called in India, seldom extends beyond the university. See S. H. Rudolph and L. I. Rudolph, *Education and Politics in India: Studies in Organization, Society and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
12. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
13. See Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
14. Donald K. Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics in Developing Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1968).
15. Fraser, *1968*, pp. 203-230, 261-280.
16. James A. Michener, *Kent State: What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1971).
17. Wolfgang Nitch et al., *Hochschule in der Demokratie* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1965).
18. Alexander W. Astin et al., *The Power of Protest* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975).
19. Philip G. Altbach, ed., *Turmoil and Transition: Higher Education and Student Politics in India* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).
20. For the United States, see James L. Wood, *The Sources of American Student Activism* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1974), for an overview of research on the sociological and psychological origins of activists. For India, see Jacob Aikara, *Ideological Orientation of Student Activism* (Poona: Dastane Ramchandra, 1977). See also Ross Prizzia and Narong Sinsawasdi, *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change* (Bangkok: D. K. Book House, 1974), and Arthur Liebman, Kenneth N. Walker, and Myron Glazer, *Latin American University Students: A Six Nation Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
21. S. M. Lipset and P. G. Altbach, "Student Politics and Higher Education in the United States," *Comparative Education Review* 10 (June 1966): 320-349.
22. See Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committee Youth* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968), and Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), for an elaboration of this point of view.
23. Robert Liebert, *Radical and Militant Youth: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry* (New York: Praeger, 1971).
24. Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians and the New Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
25. Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generation: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
26. See Edward Shils, "Dreams of Plentitude, Nightmares of Scarcity," in *Students in Revolt*, pp. 1-33.
27. Keniston, *Young Radicals*.
28. Otto Klineberg, Marisa Zavalloni, Christiane Louis-Guerin, and Jeanne Ben-Brika, *Students, Values and Politics: A Cross-Cultural Comparison* (New York: Free Press, 1979).
29. Cohen, "Revolt." See also Philip G. Altbach, *Student Politics in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 57-104.
30. James Miller, *"Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). See also Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer . . . The Dream of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).
31. Fraser, *1968*.
32. B. Lintner, "Burma: The Wrath of the Children," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 21, 1988, pp. 18-19.
33. Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The French Student Uprising: An Analytical Documentary* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
34. Gitlin, *Whole World*.
35. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1979).
36. Students contributed to significant political upheaval in the following countries, among others: Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia, Thailand, South Korea, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Burma, Turkey, Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, and Nicaragua. Students did not necessarily topple regimes in these countries, but their actions had significant political results.
37. N. Jayaram, "Sadhus No Longer: Recent Trends in Indian Student Activism," *Higher Education* 8 (November 1979): 683-700.
38. Joel Barkan, *An African Dilemma: University Students, Development, and Politics in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975).