

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
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**Individual Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements:
Sustained Engagement, Transfer, Abeyance, and Disengagement**

What happens to individuals after they initially engage in social movement activity? Some researchers posit that initial engagement is the critical event and, once an individual is in a social movement, they tend to remain committed throughout their lives. However, the high rates of turnover in many social movement organizations lead us to question this assertion. This dissertation suggests that while it is clear that some individuals remain in the same social movement organization (SMO) in the long term, many others engage in waves of participation over time: increasing and decreasing their identification with, commitment to, and expenditure of time and resources in these groups over the course of their lives. To demonstrate this, I conceptualize individual participation in social movements as following one of four trajectories: persistence, transfer, abeyance, and disengagement. Through the analysis of a nationally representative panel study, I assess the relative prominence of each of these trajectories, challenging the popular assumptions surrounding continuity in social movement participation over time. This quantitative analysis examines the effect of an individual's socio-demographic and political characteristics on his/her participation trajectory. In addition, it allows for an examination of the impact of earlier activism on later participation.

In order to assess the role of social psychological factors (such as identity, ideology, and motivations for participation), which are important for initial mobilization, and the role of organizational structure, I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 members of each of four social movements: Catholic Workers, Concerned Women for America, the United Farm Workers, and a NIMBY movement. These movements were chosen because of their variation in terms of hierarchy and level of demands made on their members. These interviews (N=60) illuminate the interaction of the individual and organizational-level factors as they affect increases and decreases in participation over the life-course. For example, hierarchically organized groups foster the continued engagement of individuals who seek power and status, while people with these same motivations disengage from grassroots groups. In addition, social networks are significantly related to sustaining engagement in grassroots groups, although they do not play an important role in hierarchical groups. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for a more complete understanding of trajectories of social movement participation over the life-course.