



**Higher Education in the UK and the USA since Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan:
Converging Models?**

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Friday 23 March 2012

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Higher Education in Protest: Do current and former students differ from people who have never gone to University?

Abstract:

At the end of 2010, just when everybody seemed to assume that students and campuses are no longer political, the UK was confronted with a resurgence of the student movement, with many demonstrations organised in central London, some of which turned violent. Several universities were occupied by students for weeks. Survey data collected at major protests in the UK in the last two years within the framework of the European project Caught in the Act of Protest (Klandermans et al. 2009) show that two out of ten demonstrations were student demonstrations where more than 60% of participants were full-time students. Moreover, an average of 15% of participants at all protests were full-time students and 82% of participants hold a BA or a higher degree. These data seem to suggest that universities steadily foster participation in protests, and that perhaps the UK student movement was only in abeyance (Taylor 1989). But what is due to universities in explaining protest participation? The literature is divided. In this paper we address this issue by asking: are there differences between current students, former students and people who have never gone to university among participants in protests? Our findings contribute to the literature explaining student participation in protest with campus-based politicisation (Crossley 2008) and the importance of networks in general (Diani and McAdam 2003) for understanding politicisation. Full-time students differ from former students and non-students only in terms of being more embedded in networks. Our results therefore seem to disprove the idea of campuses as radicalising places (e.g. Rootes 1980). On the other hand, there are no significant differences between former students and non-students, which seems to suggest that higher education does not have a long term impact on protest participation.