

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 701

HE 002 893

AUTHOR O'Connell, Timothy J.; Sedlacek, William E.  
TITLE Predicting Student Political Views: Reactionary to  
Radical.  
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.  
REPORT NO RR-8-71  
PUB DATE 71  
NOTE 13p.  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29  
DESCRIPTORS \*Activism; \*College Students; \*Higher Education;  
\*Political Attitudes; Political Influences; Politics;  
\*Student Attitudes; Student Opinion

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlates of student political views using multiple regression and discriminant analysis. A questionnaire was administered to 5,671 undergraduates at the University of Maryland during the fall of 1970. Variables covered by the questionnaire included attitudes toward campus disruptions, the Vietnam War, and participation in demonstrations. Results indicate that the best predictor of political ideology, ranging from reactionary to radical, is participation in a campus demonstration. Other useful predictors include attitudes toward supporting the President under all circumstances, and whether outside agitation causes disturbances. It is concluded that it is more reasonable to consider political ideology as a continuum rather than to try to predict specific categories for individuals.  
{Author/HS}

ED 059701

COUNSELING CENTER  
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND  
1971

PREDICTING STUDENT POLITICAL VIEWS: REACTIONARY TO RADICAL

Timothy J. O'Connell and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 8-71

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### *SUMMARY*

Whether the academic community ought to be a coherent political-moral force in the larger society remains a question for discussion and debate. It was the purpose of this study to explore the correlates of student political views, using multiple regression and discriminant analysis. An anonymous questionnaire was administered to 5671 undergraduates at the University of Maryland during the fall of 1970. Variables covered by the questionnaire included attitudes toward campus disruptions, the war in S.E. Asia, and participation in demonstrations. Results indicated that the best predictor of political ideology, ranging from reactionary to radical, is participation in a campus demonstration. Other useful predictors included attitude toward supporting the President in all circumstances, and whether "outside agitation" caused disturbances. It was concluded that it was more reasonable to consider political ideology as a continuum rather than to try to predict specific categories for individuals. Readers were cautioned against misusing the data.

Whether the academic community ought to be a coherent political-moral force in the larger society remains a question for discussion and debate. Those on the extremes, who believe that major changes are necessary, that great evils exist, or that basic truths are under attack, tend to feel that students and faculty ought to be involved in politics. Conversely, those more to the ideological center tend to hold out for the University as exclusively a house of study, a place of learning (Lipset, 1968). However, at universities around the world, student communities have acted as a political-moral force. This is the reality. The demonstrations of May, 1970 are recorded history. But what of the future? How can we better understand the student and his relationship to his institution?

Most students of "the student" today ascribe campus frustrations to a many itemed Pandora's box. Included in the listing are the war in Indochina, continuing racial discrimination, corruption in politics, and a shift in the values of individual citizens (Blocker, 1970; Ellsworth and Burus, 1970). The substantive issues being raised on campus, together with confrontation and its consequences are important and worthy of careful consideration. Most investigations into student politics, attitudes and activities has focused on the left somewhat exclusively. An important and continuing new trend includes analysis of the strength, direction, and attitudes of traditional and conservative groups as well (Lenski, 1954; Hofstadter, 1962; Westby and Braungart, 1966; Lipset, 1968; Astin, 1971).

What portion of the student body is involved in activist demonstrations on campus? Where do these students fall on the ideological spectrum? Is the stimulus for demonstration a local issue, or are the more pervasive roots embedded in the discontinuity between what students perceive today's college education to be and what they want it to be, both in itself and in its relation to the society? Why

do demonstrations erupt on campuses? Does such crisis oriented communication represent a crisis in communication itself? These and other questions are being raised in many quarters.

"Confrontation politics is characteristic of politics in which students, and other groups as well, lack legitimate channels of communication to authority." (Lipset, 1968, p.15).

Kimball and Sedlacek (1971) found that 50% of the undergraduate student body at the University of Maryland had participated in a campus demonstration in the previous year. They found that participants tended to be upperclassmen, regard themselves as liberal or radical, and came from relatively high income families. Astin (1971) also found student protesters more politically left than anti-protesters. Participants also tended to be more against defense spending, selective service, and the war in Vietnam and feel that the President should not be supported in all circumstances. A number of other studies have supported the findings that student activists come from predominantly upper middle class backgrounds (Westby and Braungart, 1966; Flacks, 1967; and Bayer, Astin and Boruch, 1970). What is surprising about the 50% participants in demonstrations figure reported by Kimball and Sedlacek was not only that it was so high, but also that, given the high percentage, participants and non-participants could be clearly distinguished. Their analysis was not one of isolating a small percent on the fringes and describing its characteristics. For instance, Lipset (1968) reports left wing students in a small minority around the world, and that most students are apolitical and fall toward an uninvolved center. Hofstadter (1962) suggests that extreme right activists are generally found within status threatened groups. It is the lower-middle and middle classes that are the least secure and tend to feel threatened by the upward movement of new minorities. The fully arrived stratum, the upper-middle class and above,

can afford the luxury of deviance from the straight line conformist politics. Interestingly, attendance at universities is a strong influence in pressing well-to-do students to a position left of their parents (Lipset, 1968; Feldman and Newcomb, 1969).

Despite all the discussion and information on student political views, little concern is given to the prediction of those views from other data. It was the purpose of this study to explore the correlates of student political views, using regression and discriminant analysis.

#### *Method*

In the fall of 1970 an anonymous questionnaire was administered to 5671 full time undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park. Few new freshmen register during the fall, so the sample consisted of returning Maryland students and transfers. The sample should represent a cross-section of the students on campus. Several analyses were performed on the resulting data. Using item 1 (political view) as the criterion, all other questionnaire items were used to predict responses to Item 1. Multiple regression was employed considering the criterion as a continuum (1=Reactionary, 5= Radical). Discriminant analysis was employed considering item 1 as a 5 category non-continuous criterion. Students were allowed to indicate "other" in response to any item. To facilitate analysis these subjects were dropped from the analysis, making the final usable *N* 4598.

#### *Results*

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of all items and zero-order correlations of all items with item 1. Items 7c (military aid and troops withdrawn now;  $r=-.35$ ), 11 (support the President in all circumstances;  $r=.34$ ), 16 (participated in demonstration;  $r=-.33$ ), 5 (National Guard made campus safer;

$r = .32$ ), 7A (must have military victory;  $r = .32$ ), and 15F (outside agitators caused disturbances;  $r = .31$ ) had the largest correlation with student political views (item 1). All but 3 items were significant at or beyond the .01 level.

Table 2 shows the results of a multiple regression analysis using item 1 as a criterion. An overall multiple correlation (R) of .47 was obtained for four variables. Item 16 carried the most weight with 7C,11 and 15F being the other items in the equation. Upon cross validation, the R only shrank to .45.

The results of a multiple discriminant analysis yielded poor prediction of item 1 as separate categories. Prediction on a random sample of 500 from the larger group yielded correct classification of 0% for Reactionary, 53% for Conservatives, 31% for Moderates, 35% for Liberals and 49% for Radicals.

#### *Discussion*

The best predictor of political ideology is participation in a campus demonstration. Interestingly, this is a straight-forward predictor in keeping with the behavioral emphasis in social science in recent years. We can predict self-ascribed political beliefs based on student behaviors. It does not appear practical to predict specific political group membership (item 1) using such attitude items, but they appear useful in considering the criterion as a continuum from reactionary to radical. The reader is reminded that the continuum could be related to many other variables not studied here but this study at least provides an operational definition of labels often thrown about with little apparent clarity. For instance, Herman and Sedlacek (1971) found that for community residents the reactionary-radical dimension distinguished between older and younger people; the younger more often labeling themselves toward the radical pole.

Class (item 2) and family income (item 3) were not correlated with political views. This is interesting since it is often reported that students become more liberal or radical during college (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969), and that students from upper socioeconomic levels tend to be more liberal or radical (e.g. Westby and Blungart, 1966). There are several potential explanations for these findings. First, the way class and income were measured and used here could introduce some measurement artifacts. Class is fairly clear cut but the income item had varying response ranges, did not differentiate well at the upper levels, and is of questionable utility for purposes of this study. The loss of respondents marking "Other", a given item, could have influenced the results. However, there were generally very few differences (using  $t$  or  $\chi^2$ ) between the "Other" groups and those whose responses were analyzed. On the class item it may be simply that once in the milieu of the University its influence has taken effect, and differences among classes become relatively unimportant on social and political issues. The reader is also cautioned against overinterpreting significance tests based on large samples. The most useful way of interpreting the zero-order correlations is probably in noting those which are largest rather than concluding nearly every variable is significant in the practical sense.

The question may be asked: Of what use or interest are these data to those working with students? The writers wish to make clear that the purpose of this study is not to identify certain kinds of students so they may be spied upon or dropped from school. Rather, it is to provide some facts and insight where myth and potential misunderstanding have prevailed. A better knowledge of the relationship among student attitudes and behaviors should be of interest to many. Of course, information can always be misused, but the reader is reminded that this study is concerned with an entire spectrum of students, not only the extremes. It is hoped that the data can provide a reasonable base for understanding, planning and decision making among all concerned with higher education.



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Table 1

## Item Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations with Political Views

Item	Mean*	S.D.	Correlation with Item 1**
1. I generally consider myself a: (1. Reactionary; 2. Conservative; 3. Moderate; 4. Liberal; 5. Radical)	3.44	.97	1.00
2. My classification at the University is:(1. Freshman; 2. Sophomore; 3. Junior; 4. Senior; 5. Other)	2.83	.90	.04
3. My family yearly income is: (1. \$4,000 or less; 2. \$4,001 to 6,000; 3. \$6,001 to \$8,000; 4. \$8,001 to \$10,000; 5. \$10,001 to \$20,000; 6. \$20,001 to \$30,000; 7. over \$30,000.	4.99	1.58	.03
4. During the disruptions last spring, the presence of the National Guard intensified the violence.	2.48	1.25	-.28
5. After the disruptions last spring, the presence of the National Guard made the campus safer.	3.30	1.20	.32
6. Campus police should NOT routinely wear firearms.	2.28	1.31	-.27
7A.Regarding the U.S. military involvement in S.E. Asia, we must have military victory.	3.92	1.17	.32
7B.Regarding the U.S. military involvement in S.E. Asia, American combat personnel should be withdrawn at a rate not endangering the government of South Vietnam.	2.72	1.27	.28
7C.Regarding the U.S. military involvement in S.E. Asia, military aid and troops should be withdrawn now.	2.73	1.42	-.35
8. National security increases with the deployment of new missiles.	3.55	1.45	.27

Table 1 Continued  
Item Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations with Political Views

Item	Mean*	S.D.	Correlation with Item 1 **
9. Military and defense expenses prevent us from meeting domestic needs.	2.08	1.08	-.28
10. Selective Service is a good way to maintain a standing army to protect the country.	3.50	1.20	.29
11. We should support the President of our country in all circumstances.	3.88	1.15	.34
12. The source of funds used for all University research should be made known to the University community.	1.97	.98	-.19
13. The University community should know the nature of all University research projects.	2.21	1.10	-.22
14. The University administration has neither the right nor the responsibility to accumulate non-academic records on students.	2.32	1.21	-.30
15A. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by foreign policy in S.E. Asia.	2.10	.98	-.24
15B. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by domestic and economic crisis.	2.67	1.06	-.21
15C. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by racial tension.	3.22	1.07	-.08
15D. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by student frustrations with administrative communication.	2.08	0.98	-.18

Table 1 Continued  
Item Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations with Political Views

Item	Mean*	S.D.	Correlation with Item 1**
15E. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by radicals.	2.35	1.08	.23
15F. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by outside agitators.	2.66	1.19	.31
15G. The disturbances at Maryland last spring were caused by spring fever.	3.20	1.29	.10
16. I participated in some way in a campus (any campus) demonstration last year.	1.49	.50	-.33
17. I would like to know how all members of the campus community would respond to this questionnaire.	1.13	.33	-.04

\* For items 1-15G, 1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree. For items 16 and 17, 1=Yes; 2=No.

\*\* All values larger than  $\pm 0.08$  significant at .01 level.

Table 2.

Multiple Regression Using Political View (Item 1) as Criterion

	Item 7C	11	15E	16
Regression Weights* (Constant = 3.45753)	-.12108	.12748	.12303	-.34030

Multiple Correlation (R) = .47 (Significant beyond the .01 level)  
 Cross Validated R = .45 (Independent sample of 500)

\* Analysis stopped when gain in R less than .01

Table 3.  
Discriminant Analysis Using Political View (Item 1) as Criterion

Category (Item 1)	N	Item	Discriminant Weight	Mean	S.D.
Reactionary (Predicts 0 of 29, 0%)*	87	17	-198.45	1.21	0.41
		11	-176.56	3.86	1.50
		4	-171.52	2.24	1.48
		13	140.12	1.69	1.02
		7C	108.18	2.38	1.54
		6	-107.51	2.00	1.23
Conservative (Predicts 132 of 250, 53%)	778	16	-47.69	1.79	0.41
		14	-10.71	3.09	1.26
		5	- 9.33	2.50	1.15
		3	- 9.15	5.02	1.49
Moderate (Predicts 79 of 250, 31%)	2056	17	-26.57	1.12	0.33
		16	-21.52	1.66	0.47
		5	-12.66	2.88	1.14
Liberal (Predicts 87 of 250, 35%)	2141	17	-30.22	1.10	0.31
		16	-12.88	1.31	0.46
Radical (Predicts 53 of 109, 49%)	275	17	-81.73	1.07	0.26
		16	-63.98	1.08	0.27
		7A	-33.93	4.75	0.74
Other (Predicts 19 of 92, 27%)	334	16	-19.23	1.41	0.49
		5	-15.96	3.54	1.25
		10	-14.90	3.74	1.31
		9	-12.01	2.03	1.16

\* Correct prediction of response to Item 1 in independent sample of 980.