

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

Second-Wave Women's Movements as Foreign Policy Actors: Assessing Canadian Feminist Interventions before 1995

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Abstract

This article addresses second-wave feminist interventions in Canadian foreign policy debate with reference to two analytic streams: (1) political science and international relations (IR) perspectives since the late 1990s that stress the formal decisional aims of advocacy and the role of transnational networks in pressuring reluctant governments and (2) sociological approaches that underline movements' cultural as well as statist dimensions and the significance of their domestic political strategies. Examining engagement by the Voice of Women (VOW) in nuclear weapons debates and National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) in free trade controversies confirms sociological expectations of campaigners' varied claims and contributions and the importance of their political rootedness in Canada. Consistent with political science and IR arguments, the study finds NAC paid growing attention to international political opportunities in 1990 and following. The conclusion considers implications of the analysis and directions for future research.

Résumé

Cet article traite des interventions féministes de la deuxième vague dans le débat sur la politique étrangère canadienne en se référant à deux courants analytiques : d'une part, les perspectives des RI et de la science politique depuis la fin des années 1990, qui mettent l'accent sur les objectifs décisionnels formels du plaidoyer et le rôle des réseaux transnationaux pour faire pression sur les gouvernements réticents et, de l'autre, les démarches des mouvements sociaux qui soulignent les dimensions culturelles et étatiques de la protestation et l'importance des opportunités politiques nationales. L'examen de l'engagement de la Voix canadienne des femmes pour la paix dans les débats sur les armes nucléaires à partir de 1960 et du Comité canadien d'action sur le statut de la femme (CCA) dans les controverses sur le libre-échange du milieu des années 1980 et des années suivantes confirme l'importance accordée par la littérature du mouvement aux militants, à la diversité de leurs revendications et de leurs contributions, et à l'attention soutenue qu'ils portent aux circonstances intérieures. En accord avec les arguments de plaidoyer transnational, l'étude montre que le CCA a accordé une attention croissante

aux opportunités politiques internationales en 1990 et par la suite. La conclusion examine les implications de l'analyse et les orientations de la recherche future.

Keywords: social movements; foreign policy; Canada; feminism; protest

Mots-clés: Mouvements sociaux; politique étrangère; Canada; féminisme; protestation

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, comparative politics and international relations (IR) scholars have paid growing attention to the engagement of non-state actors in foreign policy debate. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) influential study posited that facing unresponsive governments, outsider groups in the late twentieth century formed transnational advocacy networks (TANs) to connect them with like-minded allies based outside domestic political boundaries. Interests lacking power in a given country thus created innovative international strategies to pressure home states such that they became "activists beyond borders."

In emphasizing institutional openings and vulnerabilities, Keck and Sikkink (1998) borrowed concepts of political opportunity from the political process stream of social movement theorizing—a domain shaped by foundational contributions from sociologists (McAdam, 1982; McAdam et al., 1996; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Although these disciplinary categories are far from watertight, significant tensions can be discerned between key pivots of social movement research in political sociology, on one side, and their application in political science and IR, on the other. At a basic definitional level, the sociological stream views protest movements as organized efforts by campaigners located outside established power structures to challenge the status quo and stimulate societal change, notably by altering broad cultural values and practices. Following from Gusfield (1963), sociologists have viewed the efforts of protest interests to alter social norms, identities, relationships and behaviours as reflecting their pursuit of expressive or cultural goals. Attempts to change formal laws and rules, including specific public policies, are seen as demonstrating statist or instrumental objectives.

Empirical scholars who adopt a sociological approach thus probe what activists seek, and they find a range of mobilization goals and consequences beyond policy outcomes (Amenta and Polletta, 2019; Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016; Giugni, 1998; Gusfield, 1963; Kaminski and Taylor, 2008; Lefkowitz, 2005; Tarrow, 1994; Taylor et al., 2009; Van Dyke et al., 2004). Their orientation contrasts with leading political science and IR studies of non-state actors, notably by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Busby (2010), that consider policy reform as the primary purpose of activism (see also Farquharson, 2003; Irvine, 2013; Zippel, 2004). By emphasizing instrumental aims of protest, political science studies diverge from sociological research both in their relative neglect of expressive movement objectives and their willingness to equate movement success or failure with specific institutional outcomes. Given the wide-ranging cultural agenda of US and Canadian feminists in the second wave and following, reliance on a statist lens to assess women's movements seems particularly problematic (O'Neill, 2017: 455; Van Dyke et al., 2004).

In terms of political opportunities, the two literatures again diverge. Social movement studies conducted before the era of what Smith (2008) terms neoliberal globalization explore how campaigners actively shaped their domestic political environments rather than simply awaiting elite divisions or weaknesses in that context (Costain and Majstorovic, 1994; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Giugni, 1998; Gusfield, 1963; Mansbridge, 1986; Tarrow, 1994). With the advent of global protest in the 1990s, social movement analysts supplemented their domestic opportunities orientation with a focus on international strategies to pry open closed structures. A key difference between sociological research on political opportunity in the global age, on one side, and applications of the concept in political science and IR, on the other, rests in the former's core contention that domestic political rootedness remains key to transnational impact (see, for instance, Tarrow, 2005) versus the latter's less sustained focus on national contexts (exceptions include Busby, 2010; Poloni-Staudinger and Ortals, 2014; Stroup, 2012). Protest scholarship undertaken in a sociological vein thus sees activists facing similar challenges before and after the 1990s; that is, campaigners in both periods needed to insert their claims effectively in the political spaces of the home society.

Research on feminist interventions in Canadian foreign policy has been more influenced by political science and IR than sociological approaches. Publications in recent decades consider governmental responses to the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the adoption in 2000 of both UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the UN Millennium Declaration targeting gender equality and women's empowerment (for example, Parisi, 2020; Riddell-Dixon, 2001; Smith and Ajadi, 2020; Swiss, 2016; Tiessen, 2015). Although the institutional impact of each milestone merits close study, the larger paradigm in which research has unfolded also deserves close scrutiny. In particular, the pattern by which scholars have privileged state goals, discourses and outcomes risks obscuring important cultural aims of feminist foreign policy activism and, as a consequence, can underestimate campaigners' contributions.

This article poses a provocative puzzle: What would happen if research on protest group engagement in foreign policy debate employed the literature developed by sociologists as its main conceptual anchor, instead of relying on adaptations of that material in political science and IR? Using a wider lens that captures diverse movement objectives, would scholars find campaigners' core goals were indeed statist? Or might they report that activists accorded cultural change higher priority than governmental outcomes? Following from differing understandings of political opportunities embedded in these two literatures, would empirical study conclude that protesters pursued distinctive strategies to shape their political circumstances, before versus since the 1990s? Could political scientists develop effective measures to trace challenger impact beyond formal state decisions?

This study begins to address each question by focusing on second-wave feminist interventions in Canadian foreign policy debates during the postwar and early global eras. Using a rich primary and secondary literature, it examines controversies that erupted in 1960 concerning the placement of US nuclear weapons and in the mid-1980s over continental free trade. In the first case, Voice of Women (VOW) activists intervened to oppose the installation of US nuclear missiles at Canadian sites (Colbourn, 2021; Crosby, 2003; Grady, 2021; Hammond-Callaghan, 2015; Loewen, 1987; Macpherson, 1994; Macpherson and Sears, 1976; Roberts, 1989;

Simpson, 1998). In the second, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) campaigned against Canada/US and then Canada/US/Mexico free trade (Ayres, 1998; Bashevkin, 1989; Gabriel and Macdonald, 2005; Greaves, 1991; Macdonald, 2003; NAC, 1985; Nadeau, 2009; Vickers et al., 1993).

Political science and IR approaches that gauge the extent to which movement claims generate favourable state outcomes would dismiss both the VOW and NAC interventions as unsuccessful. By introducing an alternative perspective grounded in social movement work by sociologists, this study demonstrates the following: first, with respect to protest objectives that potentially involve instrumental as well as expressive goals, second-wave campaigners tried to influence not just specific government policies but also broad cultural values. In both debates, outsiders sought to recast the terms of foreign policy contention by highlighting the dangers posed by nuclearization and free trade to interests that were largely invisible in world politics contestation, notably women and children in Canada and internationally (on the marginalization of these interests, see Sluga, 2016; Stienstra, 1994; Tickner, 2001).

Second, in terms of activists' abilities to seize political opportunities in pursuing their priorities, we show campaigners developed a decidedly domestic strategic repertoire that created political openings in seemingly inopportune circumstances, namely large Progressive Conservative majority governments in a highly disciplined Westminster parliamentary system. Advocates' success in fostering opportunities—including by building coalitions with like-minded Canadian allies—speaks to arguments in the social movement literature about the importance of reconfiguring seemingly closed domestic political spaces. At the same time, the willingness of NAC to pursue international strategic opportunities in 1990 and following offers empirical support for political science and IR expectations of a “beyond borders” approach in that period (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

Third, we consider protest outcomes, meaning the instrumental as well as expressive consequences of organized activism. This account examines not just state decisions but also public opinion trends and finds feminist interventions helped to sharpen gender differences in attitudes toward nuclear weapons and free trade. Our research thus confirms arguments in the sociological literature concerning the cultural effects of protest and, in the case of VOW, confirms previous research showing expressive advocacy campaigns can shape government outcomes (Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016; Taylor et al., 2009).

Inspired by Glenda Sluga's challenge to restore previously silenced voices to the “grand historical narratives” of world politics (2016: 129), this study uses an inductive qualitative methodology to ascertain what second-wave Canadian feminist groups sought to achieve in two international affairs interventions, how they addressed the strategic opportunities before them and whether they reached their objectives. The next section reviews relevant sources in the sociology, political science and IR literatures. From this material, we derive a set of research propositions that are then evaluated in light of VOW and NAC engagement. The conclusion discusses the main implications of the analysis and suggests directions for future research.

Before we begin, one caveat must be noted. This article does not provide an exhaustive review either of sociological research on campaigning groups or of political science and IR treatments of foreign policy activism. Space limitations mean we consider illustrative examples to summarize each perspective.

Background Literatures

Political science and IR interest in protesters as foreign policy actors largely dates from Keck and Sikkink (1998). Their book *Activists beyond Borders* examines late twentieth-century human rights, environmental, and violence against women campaigns that leveraged international alliances in order to secure responsive state outcomes. According to Keck and Sikkink, protesters in the Global South often followed a “boomerang pattern” after they were frustrated at the domestic level, then developed contacts in the North to pressure those regimes and finally secured action from home governments; in the authors’ words, “International contacts can amplify the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and echo back these demands into the domestic arena” (1998: 93, 13). They consider cases including human rights advocacy in Argentina and environmentalism in the Brazilian Amazon, which relied heavily on interventions by the Ford Foundation and World Bank, respectively.

Activists beyond Borders spurred extensive research on related topics, including Busby’s (2010) work on the impact of international debt relief, HIV/AIDS, and climate change campaigns in G7 countries. Busby finds that numbers of elite gatekeepers matter, since the more veto players who operate in a given context, the harder it is for advocates to exert influence. He also highlights funding and normative considerations in concluding that movement success is most likely when state costs to meet campaign demands are low and when activist values and state values are compatible.

To their credit, Keck and Sikkink (1998), Busby (2010) and scholars who build on their work usefully place civil society actors on political science and IR research agendas (see, for example, Farquharson, 2003; Irvine, 2013; Zippel, 2004). Yet these studies are problematic at multiple levels. First, highlighting the rupture created by globalized communications, finance, and knowledge flows since the 1990s raises the question of how activist networks could operate in previous decades of the twentieth century. Studies by Confortini (2012), Evangelista (1999) and Lynch (1999), for example, show peace advocates organized effectively and continuously across national boundaries from the era of the First World War through the 1980s despite the absence of such tools as email and electronic banking.

Second, political science research tends to project a narrower understanding of protest than is found in sociology. Following from Gusfield (1963), the latter views “social movements as political entities aiming to create social change,” thus distinguishing between challengers’ instrumental aims, which seek to alter specific state policies or systemic circumstances, and their expressive or cultural objectives, which champion alternative social visions, identities and institutions (Staggenborg and Ramos, 2016: 24). By contrast, the former stresses campaigners’ statist aims and impact, a preoccupation at odds with studies since Gusfield (1963) showing North American activists have pursued instrumental alongside cultural objectives. According to Lefkowitz (2005), for instance, anti-Vietnam War protesters sought many changes beyond withdrawing US troops from Indochina, including overhauling political parties. Kaminski and Taylor (2008) identify an intermingling of cultural with systemic orientations in American gay rights activism.

Research on protest objectives reports that compared with other mobilizations of the same period, second-wave women’s movements focused heavily on expressive rather

than statist goals. Van Dyke et al. (2004: 37) find about 56 per cent of environmental and 41 per cent of feminist group actions between 1968 and 1975 targeted the US government. Women's movement campaigners highlighted cultural demands to alter public attitudes, education systems, trade unions and religious organizations. O'Neill (2017: 455) reports that consumer boycotts, as well as feminist literature and art, formed important dimensions of activism for Canadian campaigners since the 1980s.

Third, scholarship grounded in the sociological literature asks how activists advance a diverse array of claims in a given political environment and maintains that mobilization is most likely when challengers face opportune domestic circumstances. In Tarrow's (1994: 85) formulation, the presence of divided elites, porous party organizations and protest allies "provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure." Costain (2016: 678) goes further in arguing that consequential protest can unfold in inopportune environments, meaning contexts not characterized by political instability or other signs of structural weakness. In such instances, agentic campaigners respond to circumstances that lack promise by actively shaping domestic conditions such that they create rather than simply await or exploit existing opportunities.

Fourth, studies in the sociology tradition show expressive and instrumental aims tend to reinforce each other in a single movement and help to stimulate both cultural and formal decisional changes that advocates seek. According to Taylor et al. (2009) as well as Banaszak and Ondercin (2016), movement events can bring activists together, attract media attention, challenge prevailing values and, in some instances, reform state policies. Although few studies compare the instrumental versus expressive impact of a single mobilization, evidence suggests feminist and LGBTQ movements with strong cultural emphases achieved significant gains at that level even if they fell short in systemic terms (Van Dyke et al. 2004: 43–44).

Juxtaposing sociological with political science and IR streams since the 1990s helps to illuminate these distinctions. Rather than assuming policy reform constituted protesters' primary target, della Porta et al. (2006) surveyed more than 3,000 European global justice activists in 2001 and 2002. They found campaigners' aims were so expressive and wide-reaching—from ending global capitalism to creating inclusive participatory democracies—that neither domestic nor supranational structures could feasibly deliver them. Tarrow's (2005) study of transnational mobilization since anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle in 1999 confirmed his earlier thesis concerning political opportunities; that is, effective global activists primarily targeted their local states and were deeply embedded in their local contexts, where they demonstrated a capacity to shape domestic political environments.

Overall, sociological research urges scholars to probe the diverse goals and consequences of activist campaigns and to investigate how challengers transform the array of domestic, as well as international, political opportunities before them.

Propositions, Coding and Initial Findings

Two sets of empirical propositions emerge from these literatures. Political science and IR studies expect that protesters since the 1990s will primarily target state outcomes, build international networks to pry open domestic structures, and potentially

attain formal policy success as a result. By contrast, sociological research is less time-sensitive; it predicts campaigners across periods will advance expressive as well as instrumental aims, exploit or create mostly domestic political opportunities to reach their goals, and possibly achieve more success at cultural than statist levels.

This study examines each perspective in light of feminist interventions in two major Canadian foreign policy controversies that span the immediate postwar and early globalization eras. We assess mobilization by an interest that was historically marginalized in world politics—women, in a country where second-wave organizations known as VOW participated in debates beginning in 1960 over nuclear weapons and then NAC engaged in contestation during the 1980s and 1990s over free trade. We employ an inductive qualitative methodology to evaluate the research propositions: using existing accounts, we compiled a detailed chronology of each group's foreign policy statements and actions. Sources consulted include activists' memoirs, primary policy documents on the public record, and secondary studies.¹ Information related to domestic policy advocacy, such as VOW's stand for official bilingualism and NAC's for a national childcare program, was excluded from consideration. The two chronologies were then coded to identify the main characteristics of activist demands, strategies and impact, as detailed below. Publicly available poll data were used to gauge the attitudinal effects of both mobilizations.

The coding of movement goals was based on the following: Aims that fell within the formal parameters of Canadian state decision making were considered **instrumental** objectives while those seeking broader cultural and institutional changes were labelled *expressive* objectives. Movement strategies that indicated evidence of activists' pursuing domestic political opportunities—whether by catalyzing elite conflict, support from parties, or alliances with like-minded interests—were distinguished from strategies that were **international** in focus. Protest consequences were coded using the same scheme as aims, such that outcomes related to formal state decisions were considered **instrumental** while those involving wider cultural or structural transformation were deemed *expressive*.

Tables 1 and 3 present the coded chronologies: data are organized from the point of origin for each group through peak periods of anti-nuclear campaigning by VOW and anti-free trade activism by NAC. In Tables 1 and 3, **plain bold text** indicates an instrumental movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable to protest interests. *Italicized text* reflects an expressive movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable to campaigners. Plain underlined text indicates activists pursued domestic political opportunities—whether by fostering elite conflict, alliances with parties, or coalitions with other interests. **Bold underlined text** reflects campaigners' pursuit of international strategies.

The prominence of *italicized* text in the tables reinforces sociological propositions concerning the heavily expressive character of group claims. This pattern disconfirms assumptions in the political science and IR literature to the effect that protest activism would be mainly statist in orientation and that mobilization impact can be adequately measured via institutional outcomes. The presence of considerably more plain underlined than **bold underlined** text in the tables supports sociology claims concerning the relevance of domestic over international activist

Table 1. Voice of Women Chronology, 1960–1963

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
May 1960	<u>Lotta Dempsey column appears in Toronto Star newspaper</u>	<i>"Women the world over must refuse to allow this thing [nuclear war] to happen"</i> (quoted in Colbourn, 2021: 119)	<i>VOW attracts 2,000 members and has 10,000 names on mailing list by December 1960</i> (Colbourn, 2021: 119)
June 1960	<u>Two VOW founders travel to Ottawa to meet Minister of External Affairs Howard Green and leader of Official Opposition Lester Pearson</u>	<i>Canadian political leaders must recognize and address dangers of nuclear war including threat posed by nuclear weapons</i>	<u>Green becomes strong advocate of nuclear disarmament and influential with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker</u> (Simpson, 1998); <u>Pearson presses government to reject nuclear arms; his wife becomes honorary VOW member</u>
July 1960	<u>VOW founded at Massey Hall meeting of Toronto Committee for Disarmament; Pearson sends telegram of support to VOW founders</u> (Loewen, 1987: 25)	<i>"To unite women in concern for the future of the world" and "to crusade against the possibility of nuclear war"</i> (Macpherson and Sears, 1976: 71, 72)	<i>VOW attracts 6,000 members by July 1961</i> (Grady, 2021); <u>group participates in 1961 demonstration on Parliament Hill that presents petition to prime minister with 142,000 signatures</u> (Nash, 1991: 139–40)
August 1960	<u>Pearson releases defence statement in House of Commons stressing "the desirability . . . for getting out of nuclear armaments"</u> (quoted in Loewen, 1987: 25)	<u>Pearson maintains Canada can be a strong non-nuclear ally</u>	<u>Pearson receives more than one hundred congratulatory letters from Canadian women, many identifying themselves with VOW</u>
May 1961, September 1961	<u>Diefenbaker delivers foreign policy speeches against nuclear weapons</u>	<i>"the thought of a third world war, especially one in which nuclear weapons would be used is a constant companion of one who has the responsibility and trust which rests on me"; there exists "no margin for doubt about the devastation which could be wreaked"</i> (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 29, 34)	<u>Content of speeches reflects influence of Howard Green and VOW on prime minister</u>
June 1961	<u>VOW adopts eight-point policy program</u>	<i>Canada should try its utmost to stop nuclear testing</i>	<u>In March 1962, Pearson states, "We should have a defence policy which will not require Canada to become a nuclear power"</u> (quoted in Loewen, 1987: 27)
February–March 1962	<u>VOW sends letters to US president, UK prime minister; VOW brings 300 activists to Ottawa on</u>	<i>All nuclear testing should cease; nuclear proliferation must be</i>	<u>In May 1962, Diefenbaker emphasizes destructive power of nuclear weapons and of carrying</u> (Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
	<u>Peace Train; VOW sends three board members to disarmament conference in Geneva</u>	<i>stopped to achieve disarmament</i>	<u>“this fear that though error or mistake we will bring about a war that will destroy all mankind”</u> (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 30)
September 1962	<u>VOW annual general meeting passes resolution</u>	<i>Canada must curtail threats to world peace caused by US and Soviet engagement in Cuba</i>	<u>Diefenbaker and Green raise dangers of “embroilment” in Cuba during emergency cabinet meetings; Diefenbaker states “Canadian mothers did not want their sons to be killed in any foreign war”</u> (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 15)
September 1962	<u>VOW annual general meeting passes resolution</u>	Canada must begin removal of nuclear missile bases	First nuclear weapons arrive in Canada in December 1963
October 1962	<u>VOW sends telegram to Diefenbaker</u>	Canada should support neutral UN fact-finding mission to Cuba to mediate dispute (Loewen, 1987: 27)	<u>Diefenbaker tells cabinet he fears pro-escalation tendencies of US military leaders</u> (Simpson, 1998: 16); <u>proposes “on-site inspection team” for Cuban missile sites</u> (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 21)
October 1962	Diefenbaker issues secret instructions to ministers of defence and foreign affairs	Canada will acquire nuclear weapons if US consents to “joint control” (in Simpson, 1998: 16–17); <u>Diefenbaker says Canada must “be in as strong a position as possible” with US to deter “any possible ill-considered decisions”</u> (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 17)	<u>Cabinet splits over issue of nuclear-tipped missiles; minority government falls; election scheduled for February 1963</u>
November 1962	<u>300 VOW protesters march to Parliament Hill carrying letters and notes from 1,200 Canadians</u>	<i>Nuclear test ban must be put into effect</i>	<i>Limited test ban treaty signed by US and USSR in summer 1963</i>
January 1963	Pearson announces new Liberal position on nuclear weapons; Maryon Pearson resigns from VOW in March 1963	Pearson says deterrence requires “the availability of nuclear tactical weapons in the face of an immediate vital threat or emergency” (quoted in Loewen, 1987: 28)	<u>Pearson receives high volume of negative letters from Canadian women, many identified with VOW</u> (Loewen, 1987: 28)
February 1963	<u>VOW engages in federal election campaign</u>	<i>Activists raise dangers of nuclear war and fallout from nuclear testing in interactions with party</i>	<i>Pearson-led minority government emphasizes East-West détente</i> (Locher and Nuenlist, 2003)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
March 1963	<u>VOW begins collecting baby teeth to test for strontium-90; releases study titled "Fallout Monitoring in Canada" in July 1963; activists meet with government and opposition MPs, hold press conference in Ottawa</u>	<u>leaders, candidates, and voters</u> Canada has more elevated radiation levels than US or UK; levels of radioactive fallout increasing; consequences for food, water, environment and human health largely unknown	<u>By mid-1964, 12,000 teeth collected; insurance, pharmaceutical and beer companies help fund campaign; Maclean's article based on VOW research published in May 1963 (Colbourn, 2021: 124, 125, 126)</u>
September 1963	VOW board meets	Encourages Canada to recognize People's Republic of China	Diplomatic relations established with PRC in October 1970
September 1963	VOW board meets	<i>Expresses concern about welfare of children in Vietnam</i>	No Canadian combat troops sent to Vietnam

Key: **Bold text** indicates developments related to an instrumental movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable; *italicized text* indicates developments related to an expressive movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable; plain underlined text indicates evidence of activists' pursuit of domestic political opportunities; **bold underlined text** indicates evidence of activists' pursuit of international political opportunities.

strategies. As well, Table 1 shows VOW pursued international strategies in the early 1960s, including engagement in transnational peace networks, which indicates Canadian advocacy transcended domestic boundaries long before the advent of the internet. Consistent with political science and IR accounts, Table 3 reveals NAC's engagement in 1990 and following with the UN, as well as with partners in the United States and Mexico.

The following sections examine each case in greater detail.

VOW Interventions

In 1960, Canadians learned their prime minister had agreed to station US missiles capable of carrying multiple weapon types in northern Ontario and northern Quebec. A popular columnist for the *Toronto Star*, Lotta Dempsey, encouraged readers to send letters of protest to newspaper editors and elected politicians. Dempsey's column catalyzed the formation of VOW, a group of predominantly white, middle-class, married mothers who, in their own words, sought "to unite women in concern for the future of the world" and "to crusade against the possibility of nuclear war" (Macpherson and Sears, 1976: 71, 72).

Consistent with sociological research, Table 1 shows VOW articulated many expressive and relatively few statist goals. The volume of italicized text beginning with the group's initial objectives suggests VOW prioritized transformative cultural aims that challenged the pivot of mainstream foreign policy deliberation, that being whether Canadian leaders in 1960 should accede to US pressures to station nuclear-tipped missiles to deter the Soviet Union (McMahon, 2009). By contrast, VOW argued that Canadian women, together with women around the world, had a

responsibility to protect and enhance human life on the planet; since the spread of nuclear weapons to Canada threatened world peace, women should oppose the missiles. This framing of the controversy explicitly inserted the category “women” into foreign policy debate and rejected standard understandings of the missile controversy as a dispute over the defence responsibilities of one state to the Western alliance. Given their strong expressive flavour, VOW’s claims resembled the pacifist feminist perspectives of older groups, such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (Confortini, 2012; Early, 2009).

Parallel with the sociological literature, VOW’s protest strategies appear highly focused on domestic targets. Campaigners created opportunities by working to split Diefenbaker’s large majority government: foreign minister Howard Green announced his opposition to nuclear-tipped missiles, while the defence minister endorsed them. VOW cultivated close ties with Green, who met Diefenbaker regularly to reinforce the anti-nuclear views which activists presented to the prime minister in a steady stream of letters, petitions and demonstrations (McMahon, 2009). Diefenbaker announced his opposition to nuclear weapons within a year of the publication of Dempsey’s column. Cabinet minutes from the height of the Cuban missile crisis suggest VOW interventions had influenced the prime minister: Diefenbaker expressed wariness of US intentions and referred to Canadian mothers’ fears of losing their sons “in a foreign war” (quoted in Simpson, 1998: 15).

Campaigners also created alliances with other parliamentary and extraparliamentary actors. VOW won support early on from the Liberal Opposition leader, Lester Pearson, and recruited his wife as an honorary member. Once Diefenbaker’s government collapsed and Pearson became prime minister, Canada acceded to US pressure to accept nuclear missiles. VOW then initiated a campaign against nuclear missile testing. The group collected baby teeth from across Canada to measure the presence of radioactive strontium-90. VOW attracted influential private sector allies: companies in the insurance, drug and beer industries helped to finance the baby teeth campaign, which was featured in an article in a leading national news magazine (Colbourn, 2021).

Challenging the chronology of political science and IR studies, Table 1 shows VOW pursued international opportunities in the run-up to the Cuban missile crisis. The group wrote letters to the US president and UK prime minister and sent representatives to a disarmament conference in Geneva in early 1962. These findings support arguments to the effect that well-developed international networks linked feminist and peace protesters well before the 1990s (Confortini, 2012; Evangelista, 1999; Lynch, 1999).

Echoing the sociology literature, VOW’s emphasis on cultural change did not mean the group lacked instrumental impact (Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016; Taylor et al., 2009). Although they failed to halt the importation of nuclear weapons, disarmament campaigners convinced Diefenbaker to support a UN fact-finding mission during the Cuban missile crisis (Simpson, 1998: 21). VOW endorsed diplomatic relations with China in 1963, a policy that Canada adopted seven years later. Feminists devoted attention to the plight of children in Vietnam, a campaign that may have led Pearson and his successor, Pierre Trudeau, to avoid sending combat troops to Indochina (Early, 2009).

Moreover, the importance of expressive outcomes is revealed in the fact that VOW demonstrably brought Canadian women together as a foreign policy voice.

Table 3. National Action Committee on the Status of Women chronology, 1967–1993

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
February 1967	<u>Prime Minister Lester Pearson creates Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in response to pressure from VOW and other groups</u>	<i>“To inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada” (Report of the Royal Commission, 1970: vii)</i>	<i>Final report contains 167 recommendations identifying “what steps might be taken ... to ensure for women equal opportunities”</i>
January 1971	<u>National Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women in Canada formed in Toronto</u>	<i>Activists must secure implementation of RCSW recommendations; governments slow to respond</i>	Politically reformist women’s organizations join radical and socialist feminist groups to form NAC
Fall 1983	Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (Macdonald Commission) visits 28 communities; <u>34 women’s groups offer submissions (Ayres, 1998: 34)</u>	NAC presents 28-page brief arguing “business and government solutions to the economic crisis will act to the detriment of women” (NAC, 1985: 98)	<i>NAC opposes “an increasingly class-ridden society” and the “impoverishment of working people;” supports widening “the bases for democratic participation in decision-making” (NAC, 1985: 108, 109)</i>
Spring 1984	NAC annual general meeting endorses resolution against free trade (Ayres, 1998: 41)	Canada needs “to make job creation the priority in economic development” (NAC, 1985: 109)	<i>NAC at forefront of arguing continental integration will weaken women’s economic independence</i>
September 1984	Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservatives (PC) win large majority government	NAC identifies PC base among Western Canadian populists, Quebec nationalists and fiscal conservatives as threat to strong national social standards	<i>NAC focuses on social protest rather than legislative lobbying given decentralist, pro-business and anti-feminist streams in PC Party (Bashevkin, 1989)</i>
March 1985	<u>Founding meeting of Council of Canadians</u>	<u>NAC offers feminist view of Canadian sovereignty and free trade (Ayres, 1998: 42)</u>	<u>NAC ensures new organization highlights specific dangers free trade poses for women</u>
July 1985	<i>NAC annual general meeting creates Visible Minority and Immigrant Women Committee</i>	<i>Racism limits women’s economic, social and political opportunities – including inside NAC (Nadeau, 2009: 42)</i>	<i>NAC begins organizational review in 1986; group adopts radical, anti-racist, extraparliamentary orientation</i>
September 1985	<u>NAC holds press conference in Ottawa one day before Macdonald Commission releases report</u>	Bilateral free trade will disproportionately hurt vulnerable, often immigrant women in manufacturing and service sectors	<u>NAC becomes first high-profile opponent of major foreign policy priority</u>
November 1985	<u>NAC presents “The Potential Impact of Free Trade and the Macdonald Commission on Women in Canada” to Council of Canadians</u>	<i>“We need another vision, one of self-sufficiency, the ability to build a socially responsible society. . . one that sees a role for government and not the law of the jungle, a vision of sovereignty” (quoted in Ayres, 1998: 42)</i>	<u>NAC underlines consequences for women of pro-corporate trade policies and economic restructuring; offers feminist dimension to nationalist argumentation</u>

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued.)

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
December 1985	<u>Coalition against Free Trade established at NAC office in Toronto</u>	<u>Feminist, trade union, farm, social justice, peace, immigrant, Indigenous groups advance shared agenda to block deal</u> (Ayres, 1998: 43)	<u>NAC plays key role in creating popular sector coalition</u>
March 1986	<u>NAC co-sponsors Against Free Trade Revue at Massey Hall in Toronto, featuring prominent writers, musicians and activists</u>	<i>Pierre Berton, Margaret Atwood and others argue that free trade threatens Canadian cultural and economic sovereignty</i>	<u>Event draws large media and public response, makes anti-free trade perspectives more visible</u>
April 1987	<u>NAC is founding affiliate of Pro-Canada Network (PCN), established at Maple Leaf Summit of Council of Canadians in Ottawa; successor to Coalition against Free Trade</u>	<i>Alliance of feminist, trade union, cultural, environmental, Indigenous and social justice groups argues free trade threatens Canada's way of life</i> (Ayres, 1998: 64)	<i>PCN opposes harmonization with weaker US labour and social standards; presents counter-narrative to federal government and business advocacy for free trade</i>
July 1987	<u>NAC holds annual general meeting</u>	Delegates unanimously endorse resolution against negotiation of Canada/US free trade	<u>NAC activists publish commentaries, background papers and book critical of free trade</u>
April 1988	<i>NAC executive receives consultants' report commissioned by organizational review</i>	<i>Changes needed to "open NAC to more diversity and ground itself more thoroughly in the grassroots women's movement"</i> (quoted in Greaves, 1991: 108)	<i>NAC urged to adopt "a true feminist process" including "the articulation of a feminist vision that describes a different world, not just a women's vision of the same one"</i> (Greaves, 1991: 115)
November 1988	<u>NAC and PCN create federal election literature, speeches, events critical of bilateral deal</u> (Ayres, 1998: 76)	<u>NAC works "to mobilize women to oppose politicians who favour the deal"</u> (quoted in Bashevkin, 1989: 368) and <u>convince NDP and Liberal supporters to fight free trade</u> (Ayres, 1998: 90)	<i>Vote against free trade splits; PCs re-elected to majority government</i>
January 1990	<u>NAC contests federal report to UN Committee on CEDAW</u>	Conservative "government's deficit reduction strategy and an export-led economic adjustment plan" elevate market considerations at expense of social programs (quoted in Waldorf and Bazilli, 2010: 42)	<i>NAC argues "women of colour, immigrant women and native women will find their lives much harder, more violent, and poorer"</i> (quoted in Waldorf and Bazilli, 2010: 43)
Spring 1991	<i>NAC holds annual general meeting</i>	<i>One-fifth of NAC executive positions reserved for disabled, Indigenous and visible minority women</i>	<i>Women of colour form half of NAC executive within five years; group embraces radical protest against poverty, racism and oppression</i> (Bonuslawsky, 1996)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued.)

Date	Development	Objective	Measurable outcome
February 1992	<u>NAC helps organize First Trinational Working Women's Conference on Free Trade and Continental Integration in Mexico</u>	<u>More than 100 women attend; contend further continental integration threatens economic and social security of working women</u> (Ayres, 1998: 127)	<u>NAC extends coalition-building to trilateral forum with unions, church and social justice groups</u>
October 1993	<u>NAC publishes Voters' Guide during federal election campaign</u>	<u>Criticizes Conservative decision to enter trilateral talks, since NAFTA further endangers women's work, threatens democratic rights of citizens, limits social and economic sovereignty</u>	<u>Liberals promise to renegotiate or annul NAFTA if elected, but new government led by Jean Chrétien fails to amend NAFTA before deal goes into effect in January 1994</u>

Key: **Bold text** indicates developments related to an instrumental movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable; *italicized text* indicates developments related to an expressive movement aim or outcome, whether favourable or unfavourable; plain underlined text indicates evidence of activists' pursuit of domestic political opportunities; **bold underlined text** indicates evidence of activists' pursuit of international political opportunities.

NAC Engagement

In 1972, VOW and about a dozen other groups founded NAC as the formal umbrella vehicle of second-wave Canadian feminism (Vickers et al., 1993). NAC's base grew by the mid-1980s to 350 groups with a combined membership exceeding one million women (Greaves, 1991: 101). NAC announced its opposition to continental free trade, the signature foreign policy initiative of the Mulroney government, in a press conference held one day before a federal royal commission recommended Canada seek a bilateral deal with the United States.² NAC later opposed trilateral free trade linking Canada, the United States and Mexico.

Established to secure the implementation of recommendations contained in the 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW), NAC's initial goal was to monitor a document that sought "to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society" (*Report of the Royal Commission*, 1970: viii). Not only were the RCSW and NAC mandates sweeping—from equal pay and abortion to education and childcare—but also NAC's constituent organizations ranged from politically moderate to radical and socialist groups. Efforts to reform specific state policies thus coexisted inside NAC with the more transformative orientations of groups such as VOW (Vickers et al., 1993).

Echoing the sociological literature, Table 3 shows NAC from its point of origin identified diverse goals, with a preponderance of cultural over systemic objectives. At the instrumental level, NAC opposed bilateral and trilateral free trade as threats to women's jobs and the social policy capacity of Canada's federal government. This claim challenged conventional understandings of what the debate was about: free trade defenders portrayed the agreements as straightforward commercial deals with Canada's continental trading partners to enhance economic growth, consumer choice and international co-operation, while critics outside NAC tended to focus on specific provisions and their consequences for particular sectors of the economy (Ayres, 1998).

NAC's expressive goals were grounded in an alternative vision of Canada's future. Protesters claimed Canadian women's fragile advances as workers and citizens were threatened by a corporate agenda bent on creating "an increasingly class-ridden society" via the "impoverishment of working people" (NAC, 1985: 108). Campaigners championed a more democratic, participatory, "socially responsible society . . . one that sees a role for government and not the law of the jungle, a vision of sovereignty" (Laurell Ritchie, as quoted in Ayres, 1998: 42). This emphasis on expressive aims was consistent with the results of an organizational review process in the mid-1980s that diminished the influence inside NAC of state-focused policy reformers. According to one proponent of transformative change, NAC needed to offer "a feminist vision that describes a different world, not just a women's vision of the same one" (Greaves, 1991: 115).

Consistent with the sociological literature, [Table 3](#) shows activists created valuable domestic opportunities. NAC campaigners pressed other critics of free trade to widen their sectoral foci to create a larger alliance such that the leading national extraparliamentary coalition against free trade coalesced in December 1985 at NAC's Toronto office (Ayres, 1998: 43). The alliance embraced feminists as well as nationalists in the Council of Canadians and trade union, agricultural, peace, environmental, social justice and Indigenous interests. Anti-free trade umbrellas known as the Pro-Canada Network (PCN) and later the Action Canada Network (ACN) became visible, outspoken opponents of continental integration.

Together with these allies, NAC pressed federal opposition parties to oppose free trade and encouraged female partisans to mobilize against the Conservatives (Ayres, 1998: 90). Opposition party leaders later condemned the bilateral agreement in 1988 and trilateral one in 1993, which suggests effective extraparliamentary protest led parliamentary actors to reject the deals. Like VOW and its allies in the 1960s, however, NAC and its coalition partners in the 1990s convinced the Liberals in opposition to oppose trilateral free trade—only to find the party switched sides when it won power.

Parallel with expectations in the political science and IR literatures, NAC contested Conservative government directions using international levers beginning in 1990. As summarized in [Table 3](#), the group released an alternative to Canada's official report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that criticized federal trade and social policies and then helped convene a trinational women's conference against continental integration (Ayres, 1998: 127; Waldorf and Bazilli, 2010). These actions are consistent with Keck and Sikkink's (1998) thesis on activists' growing pursuit of international strategies in the 1990s. At the same time, data in [Table 3](#) show that consistent with Tarrow (2005), campaigners continued to devote considerable attention to domestic political repertoires, including the mobilization of women voters in the 1993 federal election campaign.

Echoing sociological research by Van Dyke et al. (2004), NAC appears to have been more influential at expressive than systemic levels. While Conservatives responded to NAC's critique by recruiting high-profile women to endorse free trade, they did not change course (Bashevkin 1989: 370). In terms of public attitudes, support for free trade declined by ten percentage points among women as debate over a bilateral agreement peaked between October 1987 and October 1988, while remaining relatively stable among men (see [Table 4](#)). This shift in

Table 4. Gender Gap in Canadian Attitudes toward Bilateral Free Trade, 1987–1988 (%)

Date of poll	Favour free trade			Undecided		
	Men	Women	Difference	Men	Women	Difference
October 1987	55	43	12	12	21	9
December 1987	47	34	13	16	26	10
June 1988	46	31	15	17	27	10
October 1988	53	33	20	11	18	7

Note: Question wording in 1987: “Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, or strongly disagree that there should be free trade between Canada and the United States?” Question wording in 1988: “Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the free trade agreement that has been negotiated between Canada and the United States?” Surveys were conducted by Environics Research Group and reported in the *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) on October 28, 1987; December 30, 1987; July 1, 1988; and October 14, 1988.

women’s views underpins the 20-point gender difference apparent in 1988 poll data, which show 33 per cent of females and 53 per cent of males favoured the Canada/US deal. Survey results suggest that by stressing the specifically gendered threats posed by continental integration, NAC raised serious doubts in the minds of many Canadian women.

In short, we find that consistent with scholarship in sociology, NAC articulated more expressive than instrumental objectives such that the group’s opposition to free trade showcased an alternative vision of Canada and the larger world. NAC’s transformative cultural claims sought to displace standard emphases in trade debates on economic growth, continental co-operation and consumer sovereignty and instead highlighted the consequences for women and other disadvantaged groups of major structural changes that would privilege corporate over human interests. Activists saw a strong federal government and a vibrant, inclusive civil society as keys to equality—and believed free trade directly jeopardized both. Protesters helped to sway public opinion in this direction, particularly among women.

In terms of strategic focus, NAC’s shift toward international opportunities beginning in 1990 confirms arguments in the political science and IR literature. Canadian campaigners stymied by an unresponsive federal government reached out to organizations like the United Nations and constructed networks with like-minded interests elsewhere, in the hopes their “beyond borders” approach would bear fruit at home (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Supporting Tarrow’s (2005) argument, however, advocates also continued to press forward using domestic strategies.

Conclusions

This article offers valuable insights into two activist interventions that instrumentally oriented research would deem failures. First, consistent with a stream of sociological enquiry dating from Gusfield (1963), it shows Canadian feminists identified cultural alongside statist aims. Rather than simply opposing specific government policies, campaigners articulated broad expressive goals that not only challenged conventional understandings of foreign policy substance and process but also promoted alternative visions of Canada and its place in the world. VOW’s argument that women had a particular responsibility to stop nuclear war unsettled prevailing views of the early 1960s missile controversy as a dispute over Canada’s duties to the

Western alliance (McMahon, 2009). Similarly, NAC's claims that free trade imperilled economic and social equality by strengthening market interests and weakening state levers undermined government renderings of the controversy as a referendum on prosperity, consumer choice and continental co-operation (Ayres, 1998).

Second, this account confirms Tarrow's (2005) claim that regardless of time period, campaigners rely heavily on domestic political opportunities. VOW recruited influential supporters in the political executive, parliamentary opposition, media, insurance and other sectors. NAC spurred the formation of Canadian anti-free trade coalitions, which in turn pressed opposition parties to reject the continental deals. These developments show second-wave feminists found innovative ways to foster domestic openings that advanced their cause despite facing large Conservative majority governments in a highly disciplined parliamentary system. At the same time, the analysis shows VOW looked beyond Canada in its interventions on the eve of the Cuban missile crisis, just as NAC pursued international strategies beginning in 1990.

Third, confirming findings in the sociology literature, second-wave Canadian protest appears more consequential in expressive than instrumental terms, as measured by the climate of foreign policy opinion in the two periods (Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016; Van Dyke et al., 2004). Anti-nuclear perspectives gained traction in the 1960s—particularly among women—just as support for free trade remained markedly weaker in the 1980s among women than men.

Future research could usefully assess the longer-term implications of these results. After 1995, feminists faced an environment in which international pressures to respond to the Beijing Conference and UN SCR 1325 were already in play. Although studies indicate gender mainstreaming, women in peacekeeping, and other initiatives attracted Canadian government attention, they also suggest core movement aims were subordinated to national economic and security interests (Riddell-Dixon, 2001; Swiss, 2016; Tiessen, 2015). Domestic political opportunities also narrowed in measurable ways; as Gabriel and Macdonald (2005) argue, the withdrawal of federal funding for NAC—as part of a larger neoliberal project that embraced open markets and curtailed state responsibilities to address inequality—made the post-1995 climate especially fraught.

Compared with previous decades, foreign policy contestation after 1995 seemed to feature relatively closed interactions between advocates and civil servants rather than more open legislative and extraparliamentary debate. In strategic terms, post-Beijing attempts to lobby insiders did not entail high-profile public campaigns and coalitions like those initiated by VOW or NAC. Instead, post-1995 developments tended to unfold on a narrower terrain that largely removed expressive social movement claims from public view. Cultural goals of the type staked out by VOW and NAC were likely less known among the general public after 1995 regardless of the party in power, because activists increasingly targeted the “black box” confines of a federal bureaucracy. Consistent with this argument, studies by Parisi (2020) as well as Smith and Ajadi (2020) suggest neoliberal paradigms enforced a state-oriented, instrumentalist feminism on the foreign policy stage—one that pressed advocates to abandon the far-reaching expressive visions of earlier periods.

Both for Canada and cross-nationally, this longitudinal perspective raises important “so what” questions. To what extent do cultural claims voiced by second-wave groups resonate in contemporary public attitudes toward peace, disarmament and international trade? Were some generational cohorts more influenced than others by the expressive content of VOW and NAC interventions on these issues? Has the growth of what Parisi (2020: 164) terms “neoliberal feminism” reduced the public reach of transformative ideas?

For scholars seeking to compare mobilizations, foreign policy interventions by other Canadian social movements are worth considering. Efforts by disarmament and environmental groups to prevent the export of Canada Deuterium-Uranium (CANDU) nuclear technology, for example, occurred both before and since the 1990s and could be evaluated in light of questions posed in this article (Bratt, 2006). Did anti-export campaigners voice cultural as well as instrumental goals? How prominent were domestic versus international activist strategies? What wins did protesters secure at the expressive level given their formal decisional loss, reflected in India’s use of Canadian reactor by-products to build nuclear weapons?

Future studies promise to extend in meaningful ways our understanding of not just what goals motivate social movement activists but also how their interventions shape the contours of domestic and international debate.

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Notes

1 Main sources consulted in constructing the chronology for VOW were Colbourn (2021), Crosby (2003), Grady (2021), Hammond-Callaghan (2015), Loewen (1987), Macpherson (1994), Macpherson and Sears (1976), Roberts (1989) and Simpson (1998). For NAC, they were Ayres (1998), Bashevkin (1989), Gabriel and Macdonald (2005), Greaves (1991), Macdonald (2003), NAC (1985), Nadeau (2009) and Vickers et al. (1993).

2 Some Quebec feminists broke with NAC’s positions and endorsed both free trade and Mulroney-era constitutional initiatives. See Bashevkin (1996: 215).

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