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Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970*

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Recent Trends Toward Political Alienation

A democratic political system cannot survive for long without the support of a majority of its citizens. When such support wanes, underlying discontent is the necessary result, and the potential for revolutionary alteration of the political and social system is enhanced.¹ The existence of a substantial degree of political discontent within a society at any one point in time does not necessarily, however, signify a decaying of the social and political order. On the contrary, in a democracy such discontent may lead to political and social change or may result in the electoral practice of "throwing the rascals out." In either case, the satisfaction of the unfulfilled needs which presumably led to the discontent gives testimony to the flexibility of the political system and the ability of government to manage conflict. It has, in fact, been argued that having a minority of politically apathetic individuals (who are presumably satisfied with the status quo) adds to that flexibility.² When dissatisfaction with the existing situation leads, however, to pervasive and enduring distrust of government, this flexibility is greatly curtailed,³ thereby increasing the potential for radical change. Extensive periods of high political discontent imply that needs among certain segments of the population are not being met; their discontent is thus an indicator of dissatisfaction with the quality of life they are experiencing.

A period of sustained discontent may result from deep-seated social conflict which, for some segment of the population, has been translated into a negative orientation toward the political system because their sense of insufficient political influence implies a futility in bringing about desired social change or control through political

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¹ William A. Gamson, *Power and Discontent* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), chapter 9.

² Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), chapter 14.

³ Gamson, pp. 42–48.

efforts; hence, they feel government is generally not to be trusted because it does not function for them. Such feelings of powerlessness and normlessness are very likely to be accompanied by hostility toward political and social leaders, the institutions of government, and the regime as a whole. In such case, "throwing the rascals out" will have little, if any, effect on restoring confidence in government or the political system. While discontent that exists only for a short time and acts as a catalyst for needed change may reflect a functional political system, extended periods of widespread political malaise suggest that the normal means by which conflict is managed in the political system are not fully operative.

A situation of widespread, basic discontent and political alienation exists in the U.S. today. Support for this contention can readily be found in the daily reports of the mass media, in an examination of recent political events—witness the substantial support for George Wallace in both the 1968 election and the 1972 primaries—and in the 1972 political campaign rhetoric. But, more convincingly, it is also found in national survey data.

Survey questions dealing with political efficacy and political trust, two dimensions of alienation,⁴ provide evidence substantiating this contention. Converse⁵ has recently reported that between 1960 and 1968 there was a steady decline in political efficacy—the feeling that an individual can have an impact upon the political process—despite large overall increases in education. In 1960, for example, nearly 42 per cent of the population disagreed (the efficacious response) with the following statement: "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." In 1968, the comparable figure was 30 per cent and in 1970, it was only 26 per cent.

A similar and equally dramatic change was found in five survey questions designed to measure

⁴ For a discussion of the dimensions of political alienation, see Ada W. Finifter, "Dimensions of Political Alienation," *American Political Science Review*, 64 (June, 1970), 389–410.

⁵ Philip E. Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, ed. Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972).

political trust.⁶ The percentage distribution of responses to these items is presented in Table 1. These data reveal a strong trend of increasing political cynicism for the general population between 1964 and 1970. The change in the responses to all but one of the items is somewhat more than 20 percentage points in the direction of increased distrust of the government. Even with all five items, the average increase in cynical responses was slightly more than 17 percentage points. The magnitude of this change can be better appreciated in light of the finding that responses to the same five items had showed an average change of only two percentage points in a cynical direction during the previous six-year period from 1958 to 1964. That some segment of American society believes that officials violate legal procedures in dealing with the public or in arriving at policy decisions is not surprising. What is startling, and somewhat alarming, is the rapid degree of change in this basic attitude over a period of only six years.

The Study of Political Cynicism. Political trust can be thought of as a basic evaluative or affective orientation toward the government,⁷ and, more specifically for this study, the government in Washington.⁸ The dimension of trust runs from high trust to high distrust or political cynicism. Cynicism thus refers to the degree of negative affect toward the government and is a statement of the belief that the government is not functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations.

As noted, cynicism and efficacy have been viewed as components of the more general concept of political alienation,⁹ and have been subject

⁶ John Robinson, Jerrold Rusk, and Kendra B. Head, *Measures of Political Attitudes* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for Social Research, 1969), pp. 626-647.

⁷ Donald E. Stokes, "Popular Evaluations of Government: An Empirical Assessment" in *Ethics and Bigness: Scientific, Academic, Religious, Political and Military*, ed. Harlan Cleveland and Harold D. Lasswell (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 64.

⁸ See Joel D. Aberbach, "Alienation and Political Behavior," *American Political Science Review*, 63 March, 1969), 36-99 for a discussion of the importance of a specific referent when measuring political alienation. See also Kenneth Keniston, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), pp. 453-455.

⁹ Cynicism and efficacy correspond very closely to Seeman's conceptualizations of normlessness and powerlessness and have been treated as theoretically separate components of political alienation by a number of analysts. Melvin Seeman in "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, 24 (December 1959), 783-791 defines normlessness as ". . . a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals." Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little,

to increased empirical study recently. These studies tend to emphasize either background and personality characteristics or, to a lesser extent, reactions to political decisions as the main explanations of political trust and cynicism.¹⁰ The focus of this paper is on the impact that reactions to political issues and public policy have on the formation of political cynicism.

The Data. The data used in this report are based on The University of Michigan Survey Research Center election studies (now conducted by the Center for Political Studies—CPS) of a national cross section of eligible voters for the years 1964, 1966, 1968, and 1970.¹¹ Each of these surveys included a battery of questions dealing with public policy on race relations, foreign affairs, and a variety of domestic problems. These issues provide a wealth of data on which to test the hypothesized relationships between political issues and cynicism. Since all of the policy questions were

Brown & Co., 1965) have emphasized the difference between these two concepts by drawing the distinction between "input affect," that is, political efficacy, and "output affect," or political cynicism (discussed in terms of trust). Gamson, in *Power and Discontent*, p. 42, has likewise stressed their conceptual differences. He notes that the efficacy dimension of political alienation refers to "people's perception of their ability to influence." There currently exists an extensive body of literature dealing with the conceptual problem of studying political trust, political efficacy and, more generally, political alienation. See, in particular, Aberbach, "Alienation and Political Behavior," and Finifter, "Dimensions of Political Alienation."

¹⁰ The empirical literature investigating trust is characteristically lacking in two respects: longitudinal considerations are rarely entertained, and little use is made of political issues as explanatory variables. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of those few studies dealing with any form of relationship between issues and cynicism were either based upon restricted populations, such as college students or particular cities, or done under special conditions, such as at times of riots. Some studies that have dealt with issues but used limited samples are: William A. Gamson, "The Fluoridation Dialogue: Is it an Ideological Conflict?" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25 (Winter 1961), 526-537; Edgar Litt, "Political Cynicism and Political Futility," *Journal of Politics*, 25 (May, 1963), 312-323; Joel D. Aberbach and Jack L. Walker, "Political Trust and Racial Ideology," *The American Political Science Review*, 64 (December, 1970), 1199-1219.

¹¹ The sample of respondents for each study is representative of a cross section of eligible voters living in private dwelling units within the continental United States. In 1970 the sample also included 18 to 20 year olds although they were not at the time eligible to vote. In the analyses making comparisons across the four different studies, only eligible voters were used. The 18 to 20 year olds, however, were included in any analysis which dealt with the 1970 data alone. The data were made available by the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research. Neither the Center for Political Studies nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

Table 1. Responses to Cynicism Items, 1964–1970

How much of the time do you think you can *trust* the government in Washington to do what is right—*just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?*

	1964	1966	1968	1970
Always	14.0%	17.0%	7.5%	6.4%
Most of the Time	62.0	48.0	53.4	47.1
Only Some of the Time ^a	22.0	31.0	37.0	44.2
Don't know	2.0	4.0 ^b	2.1	2.3
Total (N) ^c	100.0% (4658)	100.0% (1291)	100.0% (1557)	100.0% (1514)

Would you say the government is pretty much run by *a few big interests* looking out for themselves or that it is run for the *benefit of all* the people?

	1964	1966	1968	1970
For Benefit of All	64.0%	53.0%	51.8%	40.6%
Few Big Interests ^a	29.0	34.0	39.2	49.6
Other; depends; both checked	4.0	6.0	4.6	5.0
Don't know	3.0	7.0	4.3	4.8
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think that people in the government waste *a lot* of the money we pay in taxes, waste *some* of it or *don't waste very much of it?*^d

	1964	1966	1968	1970
Not Much	6.5%	—	4.2%	3.7%
Some	44.5	—	33.1	26.1
A Lot ^a	46.3	—	57.4	68.7
Don't know; not ascertained	2.7	—	5.3	1.5
Total	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%

Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually *know what they are doing*, or do you think that quite a few of them *don't seem to know what they are doing?*^d

	1964	1966	1968	1970
Know What They're Doing	68.2%	—	56.2%	51.2%
Don't Know What They're Doing ^a	27.4	—	36.1	44.1
Other; depends	1.9	—	1.8	2.3
Don't know; not ascertained	2.5	—	5.9	2.4
Total	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%

Do you think that *quite a few* of the people running the government are a little crooked, *not very many* are, or do you think *hardly any* of them are crooked at all?^d

	1964	1966	1968	1970
Hardly Any	18.2%	—	18.4%	15.9%
Not Many	48.4	—	49.3	48.8
Quite a Lot ^a	28.0	—	24.8	31.0
Don't know; not ascertained	5.4	—	7.5	4.3
Total	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%

^a Indicates response interpreted as "cynical."

^b Includes 1% coded "It depends."

^c The sample size for each of the years applies to all five items. The 1964 N is weighted.

^d These items were not included in the 1966 election study interview schedule.

not similarly measured in each of the studies, however, analysis was limited to those issues for which comparable measures existed at different time points.

The five survey questions regularly used in the CPS election studies to measure political cynicism (see Table 1) form a single dimension.¹² They were measured by means of a Guttman scale ranging from least cynical (score of zero) to most cynical (score of five). Whenever reliability of statistical analysis required fairly substantial numbers of respondents in each category, the six categories of the cynicism scale were collapsed into three by combining 0+1, 2+3, and 4+5.

Throughout this paper percentage difference indices will be used in the presentation of data. A percentage difference index (PDI) value indicates the preponderance of one type of response over another at a given time point for a single variable. For example, a trust in government PDI based on the first item of Table 1 may be computed by subtracting the percentage of "most cynical" responses ("only some of the time") from the percentage of "least cynical" responses ("always"). Resulting negative index values indicate a preponderance of "most cynical" responses over "least cynical" responses, while positive index values indicate the reverse. The possible range of PDI values is from +100 to -100. In the specific example for Table 1, the magnitude of the negative value indicates the *degree* of political cynicism; conversely, positive values indicate trust. If all respondents said they could trust the government "only some of the time," the resulting PDI value would be -100, whereas a +100 would result if all respondents said they can "just about always" trust the government to do what is right. The actual values that would result for the item from Table 1 are:

	1964	1966	1968	1970
PDI	-8.0	-14.0	-29.5	-37.8

These PDI values very clearly and parsimoniously display the trend toward increased cynicism previously discussed with respect to Table 1.

¹² Factor analysis (with about 20 items for each study) indicated that for each of the four election studies under consideration, the five trust items formed a single dimension. The factor loadings for the five items were all well above .70 and the reproducibility coefficient was greater than .90 in all cases. On the basis of these criteria the five items were judged to satisfy the requirements of a one-dimensional Guttman scale. The scale scores were obtained with the Guttman scale scoring program in the OSIRIS package of social science software. The items were dichotomized as indicated in Table 1; only two items of missing data per individual were allowed; only two errors per individual were allowed; the "median" method of error correction was utilized for scoring error cases when appropriate.

Cynicism PDI values can similarly be computed for categories of an independent variable rather than for a single item at different time points. This can be accomplished from the column percentages of a cross-tabulation in which the collapsed three-category political cynicism scale is the row variable and the independent variable (such as one of the racial issues from Table 3) is the column variable. The PDI values for Table 3 were computed by subtracting the percentage of "most cynical" (a score of 4 or 5 on the cynicism scale) from the percentage of "least cynical" (0 and 1 on the cynicism scale) for each category of the issue question. Resulting negative index values indicate degree of cynicism or a preponderance of "most cynical" responses over "least cynical" responses; conversely, positive values indicate degree of trust.

Racial Comparisons. Previous research has suggested the possibility of substantial differences in the attitude of political trust for blacks and whites.¹³ Such differences, if they exist, could have confounding effects on other findings; thus racial comparisons are presented at this point. Figure 1, which presents the trust in government PDI based on the first item of Table 1 by race, indeed justifies this comparison as it provides a vivid portrayal of racial differences.¹⁴ Blacks demonstrated more trust in the government than whites prior to 1968, with a sharp divergence and reversal occurring between the races after 1968. During the two-year period from 1964-1966, while blacks were registering more faith in the government, whites exhibited a rapid decline in trust. Since 1966, however, political cynicism has apparently been increasing among blacks and whites, although the rate of change for whites has been at a somewhat slower pace. That this trend does not occur because of some idiosyncratic aspect of the single survey item used in Figure 1 is fully substantiated by similar findings using the full cynicism scale. For example, the percentage of blacks giving cynical responses to all five scale questions in 1970 (40 per cent) was nearly four times the percentage doing so in 1964 (11 per cent). For whites, on the

¹³ Several studies have dealt explicitly with racial differences and political trust but with conflicting results. Finifter, for example, found that in 1960 blacks manifested a higher degree of normlessness than whites, a finding that runs counter to the results obtained from 1964 SRC data.

¹⁴ The item asking "How often can you trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" was selected for this portion of the analysis because it was one of the two items asked in all four years. It is also very much an "average" item for the set and has the greatest face validity as a measure of political trust. All responses including "Don't Know" were incorporated in the percentage base used to compute the percentage difference index.

other hand, the percentage of respondents giving cynical answers to all five items between 1964 (11 per cent) and 1970 (20 per cent) had nearly doubled. Such differences in level of political cynicism and rate of change suggest the possibility of several alternative explanations for the highly revealing racial subgroup differences found in the subsequent analysis.

Policy Position as an Explanation of Cynicism

The first possible explanation of political cynicism is that individuals are cynical because they prefer an unpopular policy alternative on some political issue or issues. Key¹⁵ has described the distribution of public attitudes on political issues in terms of two general models of consensus and conflict. According to Key, the development of public opinion is from conflict to consensus, with consensus resulting either out of compromise and the movement of individuals to a middle position on the issue or coalescence in favor of one policy alternative. Presumably, the majority opinion would be enacted into policy and, according to the hypothesized relationship, the dissenting minority would fall into the most cynical category because their alternative was not adopted.

Racial Issues. Public policy dealing with racial integration provides a prime subject area for analysis here because the government's policy position, and even more so its rhetoric, can be equated with active enforcement of integration since passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Hypothetically, therefore, individuals in agreement with an integration position should be least cynical while those opposed should be most cynical, leading one to expect a correlation between cynicism and issue position. The correlations (γ) between political cynicism and racial issues dealing with the role of the government in racial integration, as well as the style and progress of the Civil Rights movement, are displayed in the final column of Table 2.

The difference in the pattern of correlations for 1964 and 1970 is striking. The 1964 correlations are all moderate in size and fit the prediction of the hypothesis. This is true for those items which reflect questions of government action, such as integration of schools and public accommodations, as well as for those concerning the style—whether peaceful or violent—and progress of the Civil Rights movement. For the 1970 data, however, the relationships are very weak.

What are we, therefore, to conclude from the 1970 racial integration items? Had the Civil Rights movement become so integral a part of

¹⁵ V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 27-76.

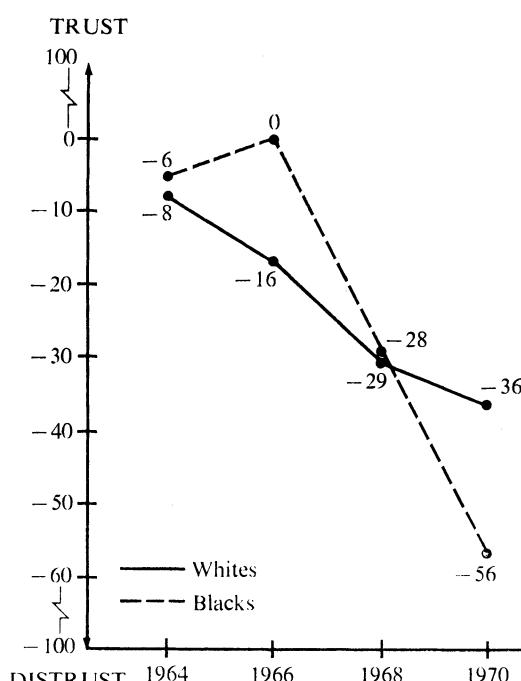


Figure 1: Index of trust in government
by race, 1964-1970

the American consciousness that a depoliticization of the issue had occurred through the simple acceptance of integration as a way of life, and, more significantly, that even the dissenters were no longer cynical? Probably not, since such an interpretation would completely negate what is readily apparent from even a cursory examination of the racial situation in America today. On the contrary, a much different phenomenon appears to have occurred, altering the basic form of the relationships between political cynicism and racial issues.

The percentage difference indices (PDI) presented in Table 2 more completely describe the relationships between racial issues and cynicism and clearly display the changes which have occurred in this relationship between 1964 and 1970. In 1964, as hypothesized, there was a linear relationship between cynicism and issue position: those opposed to government intervention in race relations were considerably more cynical than those favoring such intervention. For example, in 1964, the 38 per cent of the population believing that integration of schools was not the federal government's business had a PDI value of 25.7; for the 41 per cent in favor of government intervention, it was 57.9; and for the seven per cent favoring a compromise position, 29.3. In 1970, the most cynical respondents were still those who

Table 2. Cynicism Percentage Difference Indices for 1964 and 1970

Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that White and Negro children are allowed to go to the same schools or should the government stay out of this area as it is not its business?^a

	Same Schools	Other; depends	Stay Out	Gamma
1964 PDI ^b	57.9	29.3	25.7	.32
1970 PDI	- 0.6	- 1.0	- 15.6	.07
Change	(58.5)	(30.3)	(41.3)	

Should the government support the right of Negroes to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford or should it stay out of this matter?^a

	Go to Any	Other; depends	Stay Out	Gamma
1964 PDI	55.9	35.6	23.3	.33
1970 PDI	- 2.9	3.7	- 21.2	.13
Change	(58.8)	(31.9)	(44.5)	

Which of these statements would you agree with: White people have a right to keep Negroes out of their neighborhoods if they want to *or* Negroes have a right to live wherever they can afford to, just like anybody else?^a

	Whites have right	Don't know; depends	Negroes have right	Gamma
1964 PDI	23.4	50.4	50.3	-.29
1970 PDI	- 18.9	- 6.7	- 0.2	-.15
Change	(42.3)	(57.1)	(50.5)	

Do you think the civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving about the right speed?^a

	Too fast	About right	Too slowly	Gamma
1964 PDI	36.1	57.9	48.7	-.22
1970 PDI	- 10.8	13.3	- 27.3	-.08
Change	(46.9)	(44.6)	(76.0)	

During the past year or so, would you say that most of the actions Negroes have taken to get the things they want have been violent, or have most been peaceful?^a

	Most peaceful	Some violent; some not	Most violent	Gamma
1964 PDI	32.3	46.1	60.1	-.29
1970 PDI	- 12.6	24.5	4.3	-.16
Change	(44.9)	(21.6)	(55.8)	

^a Full wording of the question can be found in the 1964 or 1970 CPS election study questionnaires.

^b Negative values of the cynicism PDI indicate degree of cynicism; positive values indicate degree of trust.

opposed government integration of schools (-15.6), but the difference between these individuals and those favoring intervention (-0.6) had narrowed appreciably. Indeed, the difference in degree of cynicism between those favoring a compromise position and those favoring government intervention had disappeared. For the question on integration of public accommodations, the relationship had reversed, with those choosing compromise manifesting the least cynicism.

The shift in cynicism for those opposing and favoring intervention can be roughly estimated by subtracting the 1970 index values from those for 1964. The results of this operation are presented as the "change" values in Table 2. Understandably, "change" in the PDI from 1964 to 1970 is based upon aggregate shifts; statements about individual-level change from such a statistic are necessarily replete with untold hazards. The data obtained from such an index are presented and

used here, however, because, in the absence of panel data, they are not only suggestive but also theoretically interesting.¹⁶

The change in the attitude of trust indicated in Table 2 suggests that the increase in cynicism from 1964 to 1970 for supporters of government intervention was considerably greater than that for opponents of intervention; "change" values are 58.5 and 41.3, respectively. Again, similar patterns of change in cynicism can be observed for the issues dealing with integration of public accommodations and housing integration. In each case, there has been a greater degree of change in the direction of increased cynicism for supporters of government intervention than for opponents of intervention. Likewise, in each case the cynicism seems to have increased at a slower rate among the relatively small subset of the population favoring a compromise position.

Turning to the questions dealing with the style and progress of the Civil Rights movement, a similar pattern of change can be noted. In 1964, the five per cent of the population who thought the movement had been going "too slowly" and the 24 per cent who thought it was going at "about the right speed" were considerably less cynical than the 63 per cent believing that civil rights leaders were pushing "too fast." By 1970, a curvilinear pattern had developed with those (by then 9 per cent of the population) finding the progress of the movement too slow being much more cynical (-27.3) than the 52 per cent thinking it had been going too fast (-10.8); those who felt that the movement was going at about the right speed were still the least cynical (13.3). By far the largest increase in cynicism (indicated in Table 2 by a "change" value of 76.0) occurred among respondents impatient with the progress being made by the Civil Rights movement.

Furthermore, individuals in both 1964 and 1970 who associated actions taken by blacks "to get the things they want" with violence gave evidence of greater cynicism than did those perceiving such behavior as peaceful. In 1964, the difference in degree of cynicism between these two groups was astonishing. Those perceiving the movement as peaceful were highly trusting in their attitude toward the government (60.1), while those who saw black actions as mostly violent were much less so (32.3). By 1970, this difference had greatly nar-

¹⁶ It should be noted that a model based upon the replacement of older, less cynical individuals in the population (who have presumably died) with more cynical, newly eligible voters does not explain the general increase in cynicism for the population. This replacement hypothesis was rejected because the data analysis shows that in 1970 for the total population those under 30 years of age were less cynical than those over 60.

rowed, indicating a much greater increase in cynicism among people perceiving civil rights actions as peaceful. Notably, about two-thirds of the white respondents in both years thought the actions of the Civil Rights movement had been violent, whereas about an equal percentage (68%) of blacks felt that they had been peaceful.¹⁷

In summary, it can be said that consensus had not occurred on racial issues. In 1970, despite a gradual shift in a pro-integrationist direction,¹⁸ attitudes on school integration were still distributed in a bimodal fashion, particularly for whites. There had not been a coalescing of support for enacted policy, as has so often been the case with controversial programs such as, for example, the sweeping social welfare programs of the New Deal era. Nor has the discontent among the dissenters subsided. On the contrary, political cynicism has consistently been most prevalent among those favoring segregation and believing that the federal government should not play a role in the integration of schools and public accommodations. The surprising and unexplained phenomenon disclosed by the data analysis, however, is that individuals in favor of forced integration had also become discontented, and apparently at a faster rate.

A Partial Explanation. A clue to this observed increase in discontent and cynicism among blacks and white integrationists is suggested by the pattern of change presented earlier in Figure 1. Trust in the government may have increased among blacks between 1964 and 1966 out of a reaction to the Civil Rights Bill of 1964; the decrease for whites may also be similarly explained. The Bill may have increased the hope among blacks and white integrationists that a real change in racial integration, along with a reduction in discrimination, would be forthcoming. At the same time, the security of white segregationists might have been threatened by the fear that their social and economic positions would be challenged by blacks with the support of the government. Or, they may have resentfully thought, "The government is helping the blacks, why doesn't it help me?" Such reactions would partially explain the change in cynicism between 1964 and 1966 while setting the stage for the changes which ensued after 1966.

It is suggested that actual modification of the

¹⁷ For an insightful study of what various people perceive to be violence, see Monica D. Blumenthal, Robert L. Kahn, Frank M. Andrews, and Kendra B. Head, *Justifying Violence: Attitudes of American Men* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for Social Research, 1972).

¹⁸ Angus Campbell, *White Attitudes Toward Black People* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for Social Research, 1971).

Table 3. Support for Vietnam Policy, 1964-1970

Which of the following do you think we should do now in Vietnam?	1964	1966	1968	1970
Pull out of Vietnam entirely	8.3%	9.1%	19.8%	32.3%
Keep our soldiers in Vietnam but try to end the fighting	25.0	35.6	36.0	32.0
Take a stronger stand even if it means invading North Vietnam	31.6	35.9	33.5	24.2
Other; depends	0.1	2.2	3.3	5.1
Don't know; not ascertained	35.0	17.2	7.4	6.4
Total (N)	100.0% (4658)*	100.0% (1291)	100.0% (1557)	100.0% (1514)
Percentage Difference Index ^b	23.3	26.8	13.7	-8.1

^a Weighted N.^b Positive values indicate greater support for escalation; negative values indicate more support for withdrawal.

racial situation and the conditions of racial discrimination have not paralleled the rising expectations of the black community or those sympathetic to their plight, nor at the same time have they been as drastic as feared by white segregationists. Trust in the government may have thus declined sharply among blacks after 1966 because of frustration arising out of the unfulfilled expectation of more active government involvement in the area of integration.¹⁹ Coincidentally, the Civil Rights movement was making blacks, as a whole, increasingly more aware of the real constraints and discrimination existent in the system, thereby increasing their discontent and reaffirming for them even more staunchly the notion that only a change in the system would improve the "black condition."²⁰ On the other hand, those opposed to integration were also dissatisfied with govern-

mental performance in this area, presumably in part because between 1968 and 1970 the Nixon administration did not attempt to, nor could it, completely reverse the process of integration.

The Vietnam Issue. While significant differences in the degree of cynicism have been found to exist among people favoring alternative policy positions on racial issues, these issues do not completely explain all the increase or the variation in cynicism occurring since 1964. The Vietnam war, an issue with steadily increasing political potency since the early 1960s, appears also to be related to the attitude of trust in government. Table 3 presents the distribution of support for Vietnam policy alternatives from 1964 to 1970. A percentage difference index for the Vietnam issue, computed by subtracting the percentage of respondents favoring withdrawal from the percentage favoring escalation whereby a negative value indicates greater support for withdrawal, is also presented.

The Vietnam index in Table 3 summarizes the trend in attitude among the general population on this issue. This trend toward support for withdrawal certainly comes as no surprise, for it has previously been documented by various polling agencies and publicized extensively in the mass media. However, the source of increased support for withdrawal requires more careful attention. (These data, of course, are only suggestive, since the interpretation cannot be termed conclusive without recourse to panel data.) From 1964 to 1970, the percentage of individuals favoring withdrawal from Vietnam increased by 24 per cent while the percentage preferring escalation remained relatively stable, except for an approximate 9 per cent decline from 1968 to 1970. This suggests that most of the increased preference for withdrawal from Vietnam may have come less from converting "hawks" to "doves" than either from attitude changes among those preferring a compromise position or from the uninformed

¹⁹ This explanation is given additional support by the degree of change in political trust found for blacks who felt the Civil Rights movement was going too slowly. In 1964, 27 per cent of the blacks fell into this category; six years later, the figure was 39 per cent. The growing impatience on the part of the blacks appears to be reflected in their increased cynicism, as indicated by the respective cynicism index values of 57.8 and -45.2. The magnitude of attitude change suggested by the difference between these two values is extraordinary, particularly for such a basic and presumably stable attitude as political trust. The aggregate increase in distrust of the government was substantially less for the 63 per cent of black respondents who felt that Civil Rights was moving at about the right speed. In 1964, the cynicism index value for these blacks was 53.6—not very different from impatient blacks—but by 1970 the blacks who were satisfied with the speed of the movement (now down to 54 per cent) were very much less cynical (-19.6) as a group than blacks who thought progress was too slow.

²⁰ Patricia Gurin, Gerald Gurin, Rosina Lao, and Muriel Beattie, "Internal-External Control in the Motivational Dynamics of Negro Youth," *Journal of Social Issues*, 25 (July, 1969), 29-53, investigates whether an individual places the blame for social or economic failure among blacks on the individual or the system.

public taking a dovish position as the Vietnam issue became more salient.²¹

A model that relates policy dissent with discontent would predict that dissenting "doves" are more cynical than "hawks." Such a relationship would help explain the increase in cynicism occurring between 1964 and 1970, the same period during which the ranks of the "doves" increased. The trust in government (from Figure 1) and Vietnam percentage difference indices were plotted with respect to each other for whites and blacks and are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 reveals that the pattern of change in support for withdrawal from Vietnam is very similar to change in trust, especially for blacks who have been consistently more "dovish" than whites. The slight increase in support for escalation for both groups in 1966 probably reflects a leadership effort that rallied early support for Johnson's policy before attitudes on Vietnam became more informed. This would seem to be particularly true for blacks as about 29 per cent of them did not have an opinion on Vietnam in 1966, compared to 16 per cent of the whites. After 1966, however, the black community quickly moved in the direction of support for withdrawal, with only about nine per cent of the total black population in favor of escalation and 50 per cent supporting withdrawal.

The whites, on the other hand, have been more reticent in their support for withdrawal. Furthermore, a closer look at the Vietnam and trust curves for whites reveals certain discrepancies at odds with the original hypothesis. Not only are the Vietnam and trust curves less parallel for whites than for blacks, but there is also a definite

²¹ Two pieces of information lend credence to this interpretation. First, the very substantial decrease in the percentage of respondents saying "don't know" corresponds more closely to the percentage increases in the middle and withdrawal categories than it does to the percentage fluctuation found in the escalation category. Second, as Milton Rosenberg, Sidney Verba and Philip E. Converse point out in *Vietnam and the Silent Majority: The Dove's Guide* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), p. 55, it is the "hawks" who have been the more informed on the Vietnam issue; hence, their attitudes on Vietnam would be more crystallized and less susceptible to change. What these data suggest, therefore, is that while there had been a trend toward support of withdrawal from Vietnam, there had not been a concurrent reduction in the polarization of attitudes on Vietnam policy. Continued conflict over Vietnam policy is understandable, given continued dissent among opinion leadership—identified by Richard A. Brody and Sidney A. Verba in "Hawk and Dove: The Search for an Explanation of Vietnam Policy Preferences," *Acta Politica*, 7 (July, 1972), 285-322, as among the most important independent variables in explaining opinions on Vietnam—as well as changes in official policy, a factor which tends to reduce the impact "current policy" would have on a converging policy preference.

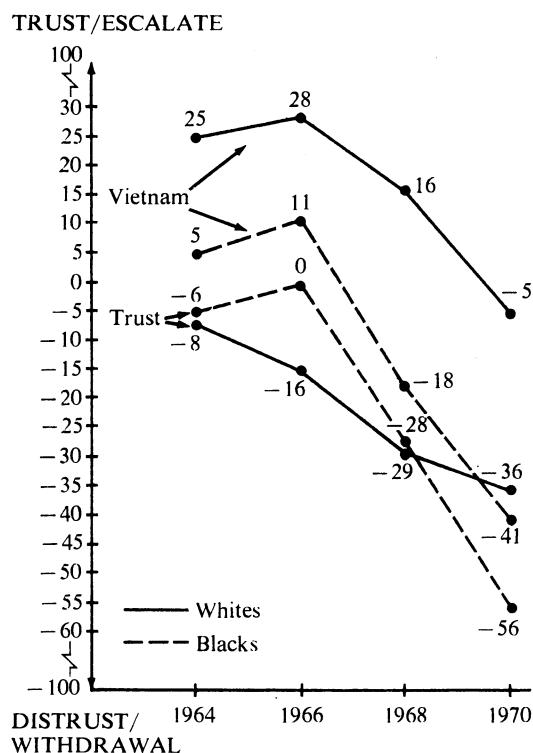


Figure 2: Indices of trust in government and support for withdrawal from Vietnam, 1964-1970

divergence of the two curves for whites in 1966. While support for escalation was increasing relative to support for withdrawal among white respondents, trust was declining. Inspection of the relationships between Vietnam policy preference and political cynicism for 1964 and 1970 provides a partial explanation for these discrepancies. Table 4 presents the percentage responses and cynicism index for the Vietnam question for whites only for these years.

The most immediate observation made from Table 4 is that the original prediction that the most cynical would be those favoring withdrawal is partly false. In 1964, respondents favoring escalation were less trusting of the government (cynicism index value of 27.5) than those preferring withdrawal (37.1); in 1970, the reverse was true (-7.2 and -12.6, respectively). The most striking difference found in Table 4 is not, however, between those supporting withdrawal and those preferring escalation, but rather between the latter two groups and those wanting to keep the soldiers in Vietnam while trying to end the fighting. Respondents choosing this category were definitely less cynical than either the "hawks" or the "doves," both in 1964 and in 1970. Hence, a curvilinear rather than a linear relationship is

Table 4. Current Vietnam Policy Preference in Relation to Trust in Government for Whites, 1964 and 1970

Trust in Government	Vietnam Policy Preference: 1964		
	Withdraw	Maintain	Escalate
High	58.3%	74.6%	53.8%
Medium	20.4	14.9	19.9
Low	21.3	10.5	26.3
Total (N)	100.0% (108)	100.0% (315)	100.0% (433)
Percentage Difference Index ^a	37.1	64.1	27.5
Vietnam Policy Preference: 1970			
Trust in Government	Withdraw	Maintain	Escalate
	29.5%	46.8%	32.5%
High	28.4	28.4	27.8
Medium	42.1	24.8	39.7
Total (N)	100.0% (437)	100.0% (455)	100.0% (363)
Percentage Difference Index ^a	-12.6	22.0	-7.2

^a Negative values of the Cynicism Percentage Difference Index indicate degree of political cynicism; conversely, positive values indicate trust.

found between Vietnam policy preference and political trust, thereby increasing the complexity of the interpretation.

As Rosenberg and others²² have demonstrated, individuals preferring escalation have often been dissatisfied with Vietnam policy even while a stronger stand was being taken because in their opinion the escalation was not sufficient. Increased dissatisfaction with the intensity of the escalation may explain the increase in cynicism among "hawks" in 1966 and thus the divergence noted in Figure 2. Cynicism among "doves" can similarly be explained on the basis of dissent in 1964 and on the basis of growing impatience in 1970.

The Social Issue. Does the opinion polarization and corresponding curvilinear relationship with cynicism also exist for other contemporary issues? In the 1968 election study, a new type of structured question was used to measure attitudes on

²² Milton Rosenberg, Philip E. Converse, Sidney Verba, *Vietnam and the Silent Majority*; as well as Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerrold Rusk and Arthur Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (December, 1969), 1083-1105.

contemporary issues.²³ Respondents were presented a series of questions utilizing a seven-point scale running from one policy alternative specified at point "1" to an opposing policy alternative at point "7." (See Appendix.) The 1968 respondents were asked to place themselves and several political leaders (the presidential contenders) on the scale. In 1970, they were asked not only to place themselves and three political leaders (Nixon, Wallace and Muskie) on the scale, but also the Democratic and Republican parties.

The data obtained from these new measures are excitingly more vast than those provided by traditional structured issue questions which elicited the respondent's preference for one of a limited number of alternative policy choices. The new items furnish information not only on the respondent's policy position, but also on measures of agreement between what the respondent would like to see accomplished and what he perceives each of the parties and various political leaders as doing with respect to particular issues. For this reason, greater emphasis is given to those issues comparable over time, as well as to the contemporary problems underlying the issue measures of the 1970 election study.

It was felt that the relationship between these contemporary social problems and the attitude of trust should be investigated to determine if present discontent is related to particular issues only or if it arises out of a general pattern of policy preference.²⁴ Percentage distributions for the respondents' self-placement on the various issues, along with the cynicism PDI for each issue, are presented in Table 5.

The distributions of policy preference for the eight issues in Table 5 have two basic patterns. Skewed distributions are found for campus demonstrations, government action against inflation, and pollution; the remaining five issues have trimodal distributions. The trimodal distributions disclose a great deal of conflict over policy alternatives. On the average, approximately twice as many respondents preferred the policy alternatives suggested by the extremes of the scales as

²³ The new measures were developed by Richard A. Brody and Sidney Verba.

²⁴ The saliency of the contemporary issues is important, and an attempt was made to assess its impact on the relationships investigated here. The association between political cynicism and the seven-point issue measures was obtained for respondents who mentioned the particular issues as a problem in an open-ended question referring to the most important problems facing the government today. A comparison of the correlations for this presumably "more aware" subset and the remainder of the respondents consistently showed only a very slight increase in the correlations for the "more aware." This suggests that although people may not volunteer particular contemporary issues in response to open-ended questions, they are still aware of them.

Table 5. Policy Preference and Cynicism Percentage Difference Indices for 1970

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
	<i>Solve problems of poverty & unemployment</i>					<i>Use all available force to quell urban unrest</i>		
Row %	20.1%	9.5	12.4	26.4	9.5	5.6	16.5	100.0% (N=1535)
PDI ^a	- 5.1	0.0	20.4	3.4	6.1	-10.5	-22.6	
	<i>Immediate withdrawal</i>					<i>Complete military victory</i>		
Row %	21.7%	8.4	11.0	24.2	8.9	6.4	19.2	100.0% (N=1522)
PDI	-27.7	7.1	7.8	10.3	27.9	10.2	-14.1	
	<i>Sympathetic with students & faculty</i>					<i>Use force to stop campus disturbances</i>		
Row %	6.2%	5.0	6.0	17.6	10.8	14.5	40.0	100.0% (N=1459)
PDI	-16.5	- 1.4	-15.0	9.3	15.9	15.6	-11.8	
	<i>Government help minority groups</i>					<i>Minority groups help themselves</i>		
Row %	14.9%	8.3	7.9	25.1	12.1	10.9	20.8	100.0% (N=1419)
PDI	-11.4	7.6	15.2	8.7	16.9	- 4.5	-21.7	
	<i>Total government action against inflation</i>					<i>No government action against inflation</i>		
Row %	46.4%	20.1	13.7	10.5	3.1	2.2	4.0	100.0% (N=1433)
PDI	- 8.8	5.6	10.7	10.0	- 2.2	19.4	-17.2	
	<i>Protect rights of accused</i>					<i>Stop crime regardless of rights of accused</i>		
Row %	19.7%	7.9	6.8	17.2	12.4	14.3	21.6	100.0% (N=1359)
PDI	- 2.7	18.5	13.9	8.2	8.9	1.1	-16.4	
	<i>Government force private industry to stop polluting</i>					<i>Industries should handle pollution in their own way</i>		
Row %	52.2%	13.6	9.0	12.2	3.3	3.3	6.3	100.0% (N=1377)
PDI	- 3.4	14.4	- 6.4	2.4	19.6	- 8.7	-11.5	
	<i>Government health insurance plan</i>					<i>Private health insurance plans</i>		
Row %	28.4%	8.9	8.2	14.5	6.4	9.7	23.9	100.0% (N=1337)
PDI	-10.0	- 1.7	3.7	- 7.2	21.0	20.0	- 1.9	

^a Negative values of the Cynicism Percentage Difference Index (PDI) indicate degree of political cynicism; conversely, positive values indicate trust.

did those favoring a centrist solution. From 36 to 52 per cent supported the extreme alternatives (#1 and #7) while only 14 to 26 per cent chose a compromise solution (#4) to the five issues. In fact, the combined total of respondents preferring the three center alternatives (#3, #4, #5) never exceeded 50 per cent, a finding which contradicts the notion that a centrist policy alternative to these issues is preferred by a majority of Americans.²⁵ On the contrary, the distributions suggest a tendency toward bipolarization rather than unanimity.

While the distribution of policy preferences

²⁵ Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geohegan, Inc., 1971). The implications of their major premise—that a presidential candidate must move to the center in order to win—is that a centrist policy is preferred by a majority of the voters.

varied over the issues from skewed to multimodal, there was a clear pattern to the relationships between issue position and trust in government. Those individuals preferring the opposing policy alternatives identified with the extreme ends of the scales were, on the whole, more cynical than those placing themselves in the center for each item in Table 5. Thus, the curvilinearity found in the relationships between policy preference on the Vietnam and civil rights issues and trust in government is also found for the social and economic issues of Table 5, regardless of the actual distribution of policy preferences.

The preceding analysis clearly demonstrates that no monolithic description of cynicism arises out of policy preferences for the issues investigated. Rather, what evolves is that those in the center were the least cynical, and that the most cynical formed two ideologically distinct types:

"cynics of the left" and "cynics of the right." Operationally defining "cynics of the left" and "cynics of the right" as those both "most" cynical (#4 or #5 on the cynicism scale) and preferring the respective policy alternatives #1 through #3 and #5 through #7 on the five most highly clustered (interitem Pearson r ranging from .20 to .50) of the eight issues, allows for a refined comparison of the two groups. The five issues included in the cluster were: urban unrest, Vietnam, campus demonstrations, protecting the rights of the accused, and government aid to minorities. Such an operational definition provides fairly pure types of cynics, with 11 per cent of the population ($N=176$) classified as "most" cynical on the left and 19 per cent ($N=290$) on the right.

"Cynics of the left" may be described as predisposed to social and political change. Witness their support of policy alternatives indicating that solutions to contemporary social problems lie in the alteration of the existing system: the prevention of riots in cities by solving the problems of unemployment and poverty, government aid to improve the social and economic conditions of minority groups, a pro-integrationist stand on civil rights, and protection of the rights of the accused. This predisposition is supported by their apparent belief that constraints in the system, rather than individual shortcomings, are to blame for the failure of people, particularly minority groups, to "get ahead" in society. This system-blame attitude is evident in their strong preference for government action to improve the social and economic conditions of minority groups as well as that of all those who suffer from poverty and unemployment. As is further suggested by their responses to the student unrest issue, they appear to be somewhat favorably inclined toward the use of collective action for obtaining that change; hence, they are sympathetic with demonstrating students.

"Cynics of the right," may, on the other hand, be described as more predisposed toward social control²⁶ than social change. That is, they are bent upon maintaining the system as it exists and support authorities and policies which act to control those who may be potentially disruptive of the orderly functioning of the system. They are inclined toward segregation policies and policies tending to disregard the rights of the accused in an attempt to prevent crime, and are strongly in favor of complete military victory in Vietnam. The Protestant Ethic seems engrained in "cynics of the right" as evidenced by their greater stress on the individual rather than the system for one's failure to attain social status; they were firmly

against government assistance aimed at improving the social and economic position of minority groups. Their corresponding support for using police force against demonstrators suggests that since they apparently believed that unsuccessful attempts at social advancement were individual shortcomings, such disruptive actions were attempts by a few to gain special privileges for themselves.

The two types of cynics were as different demographically as they were attitudinally. One-third of the "cynics of the left" were under 30 whereas only 12 per cent of the most cynical on the right were young. Blacks comprised 38 per cent of the "cynics of the left"; 99.7 per cent of the "cynics of the right" were white. While "cynics of the left" tended to identify more with the Democratic (71 per cent) than the Republican party (12 per cent), those on the right were more evenly split: 48 per cent were Democrats and 35 per cent were Republicans. The "cynics of the right" had higher incomes, with only 21 per cent making less than \$4,000 a year; 38 per cent of those on the left were below that figure. Those on the left, however, were much better educated: 28 per cent had some college training or held a college degree, as compared with only 18 per cent among those of the right. Again, with blacks removed, the percentage of those on the left who had had some college rose to 38 per cent.

Alternatively, the curvilinearity in the relationship between policy preference and trust may be explained in retrospect by the increased political awareness and the type of issues prevalent today rather than by the distribution of preferences. It may be suggested that these issues, unlike those of earlier years that were more removed from an individual's immediate experience, seem to affect the very basic values and fears that form the foundation of everyday existence for the average citizen. Attitudes on these issues would, therefore, tend to be more crystallized and more firmly held than on those more remote from an individual's daily existence. Thus, it would be understandable that respondents with the most completely formed attitudes—presumably those favoring the extreme alternatives²⁷—should be the most cynical. It is they who would be most dissatisfied were their well-formulated policy expectations not only left unmet but also threatened by enactment of opposing policies. This "new issues" hypothesis is, however, considerably more complex an explanation of the observed curvilinearity than the "distance from current policy" interpretation. Fortunately, a comparison of the "new issues" versus

²⁶ For a definition of social control, see Gamson, *Power and Discontent*, pp. 11-19.

²⁷ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1960), p. 178.

the "all policy" hypotheses can be parsimoniously arranged: Consider two indices of policy distance, that is, stated preference for policy different than current—the one composed of responses to all policy items; the other of only the new issues (Vietnam, youth protest, and rights of the accused). If the newer, more meaningful, and thus more "crystallized" issues hypothesis is correct, only that index should display the requisite curvilinearity. On the other hand, if the "all issues" index shows the same curvature, the "poor-performance/dissatisfaction/cynicism" hypothesis would seem to be affirmed. The results of such a comparison do indeed demonstrate a marked curvilinearity for both indices, as well as a third index which incorporates all issues except the "new issues." These results would, therefore, seem to substantiate the hypothesis that the curvilinearity arises out of a reaction to current policy rather than a qualitative difference between contemporary and past issues.

By 1970, Americans to a considerable degree had withdrawn some of their trust from the government because they had become widely divided on a variety of issues, for in the normal attempt to satisfy the greatest numbers, the government had generally followed a more or less centrist policy which in reality appears to have displeased a substantial proportion of the population. Issue position was, therefore, found to be related, in a complex manner, to trust in government. There is, however, nothing intrinsic in support for a particular policy alternative, or even a pattern of policy preferences, which provides a theoretical interpretation for such a finding. It was hypothesized that dissenters, that is, those favoring the policy alternative endorsed by a minority of individuals, would be the most dissatisfied and thereby the most cynical. This hypothesis proved to be inadequate in explaining either the widespread distrust of government in 1970 or the increase in distrust occurring between 1964 and 1970, because often the majority favored opposing policy alternatives and was more cynical than the minority preferring the centrist policy. Whenever an explanation was offered for the findings, it was couched in terms of expectations and policy dissatisfaction. Such an interpretation cannot, however, be tested by the data analyzed thus far. To test such explanations of political cynicism directly, the concepts of policy expectation and dissatisfaction need to be clearly operationalized and incorporated in hypotheses. Two further hypotheses which may explain the relationship between cynicism and the issues are:

(1) Cynicism arises because individuals do not perceive any difference between the policy alternative offered by the Democratic and Republican parties or their leaders.

(2) Cynicism is a result of dissatisfaction with the expected or perceived policy performance of the party currently in control of the Presidency.

Lack of Party Differences

Anthony Downs in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* contends that a rational voter casts his ballot for the political party which will provide him with "a higher utility income than any other party during the coming election period"; should the voter not feel that he would benefit relatively more from either party, he abstains.²⁸ Rational abstention because of a lack of perceived difference between the candidates or parties suggests the possibility that alienation, and hence political cynicism, may, in part, be related to a perceived lack of choice between the parties.

The seven-point issue scales from the 1970 election survey provide excellent measures for determining the degree of perceived party difference on the issues. As noted, respondents were asked to place both parties on each issue continuum; perceived difference between the parties can thus be computed as $D_{ij} = |D_i - R_j|$, that is, as the absolute difference between scale placements for the Democratic and Republican parties on the scale for issue "j" ($j=1$ to 8). The values for the computed difference range from 0, implying no difference, to 6, maximum difference.

The percentage of the population perceiving no difference between the parties in 1970 varied from 33 to 53 per cent, depending on the issue. The number perceiving no difference was greater than 40 per cent on only two: pollution and protecting the rights of those accused of crime. On the remaining six issues, 61 to 67 per cent of the population perceived some difference between the parties. Republicans tended to perceive slightly more difference between the parties than did Democrats, whereas Independents (Independent as defined here and throughout this article does not include those leaning toward either party) perceived the least difference, with 50 to 69 per cent perceiving no difference at all between the parties.²⁹

The data analysis reveals that a fairly substantial degree of difference is, in fact, perceived between the parties. This does not, however, dis-

²⁸ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 39.

²⁹ On the whole, the Democratic party was placed more toward the left end of the issue scales, while the Republican party was perceived as endorsing policy alternatives found at the right end. Only 9 to 25 per cent (with an average of approximately 15 per cent for the eight issues) of those who were able to place both parties on the issue scales perceived the Democratic party to the right of the Republican party.

count the possibility that political cynicism increases as perceived difference between the parties decreases. If such were the case, a negative correlation would be found between political cynicism and perceived difference. The predicted inverse relationship between cynicism and a measure of the average perceived party difference for the eight issues is found, however, only for Independents, and then to a very slight degree ($r = -.10$). There is a near-zero relationship between cynicism and perceived party difference for Republicans ($r = .03$), a weak positive correlation for white Democrats ($r = .14$), and a slightly stronger positive relationship for black Democrats ($r = .20$). Only among Independents, therefore, can cynicism possibly be attributed to a lack of perceived difference between the parties; the correlation is so small, though, that such a conclusion must be tenuous.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Independents may feel less trusting of the government because they believe they are not given an adequate choice, whereas Democrats, and particularly black Democrats, who perceive a greater difference between the parties and hence presumably a clearer choice, are somewhat more cynical than Democrats who perceive less difference. What these correlations suggest is that while Independents are cynical because of a lack of choice arising out of the absence of party differences, blacks are cynical because they perceive the policy gap between the Democratic and Republican parties as so large that the Republican party is not a viable alternative, thus, ironically, also resulting in a lack of choice for them.

On the other hand, the positive relationship between cynicism and perceived party difference found for Democrats may be linked to dissatisfaction with the policies of the Republican administration which was in power in 1970. It may be presumed that Democrats would prefer Democratic to Republican party policies, and that Democrats who perceive the greatest difference between the two parties would be the most dissatisfied because their policy preferences were least likely to be enacted. Cynicism would thus be expected to be greatest among those perceiving the largest differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. A more complete investigation of alternative explanations for the positive relationship between cynicism and perceived party differences is presented in the following sections. It can be said here, however, that cynicism among Americans in 1970 was not a function of perceiving little difference between policy alternatives identified with either political party. On the contrary, most people perceived substantial differences between the parties on the issues, and, indeed, there was a slight tendency for those who

perceived the largest differences to be more cynical. This trend suggests that cynicism may arise out of dissatisfaction with the policy alternatives offered by one's own party and the belief that the other party is not a viable alternative.

Policy Dissatisfaction

Gamson contends that distrust of the government arises out of "the nature of the decisions made and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with them . . .,"³⁰ particularly when dissatisfaction is generalized across a number of decisions which result in undesirable outcomes. It may be hypothesized, therefore, that discontent is related to dissatisfaction with the perceived policies of the party in power on issues that are relevant to the values of a substantial segment of the population.

Data used to test the hypotheses in this section come almost exclusively from the eight 1970 election study seven-point issue questions which provide measures for operationalizing the concept of

³⁰ Gamson, *Power and Discontent*, p. 178. Gamson provides a general theoretical notion of the process underlying the development of political distrust. The dissatisfaction begins to be generalized when an undesirable outcome is seen as a member of a class of decisions with similar results. Authorities represent the first target of such generalization:

If such experiences extend over more than one set of authorities, potential partisans may conclude that the institutions themselves may be the source of bias, and "throwing the rascals out" will have little effect if indeed it is even possible. . . . Attacks on political institutions may in turn lead to distrust in the ideology or public philosophy used to justify them. Finally . . . the disaffection may be generalized to the political community itself and a desire for political separation may develop.

Gamson's developmental model does not, however, incorporate a concern with cause and effect or the intricate set of interactions which may occur over time between policy dissatisfaction, distrust and social or historical events. Declining levels of political trust may be the result of increased policy dissatisfaction, or it may be the other way around, or there might be a further independent variable responsible for the decline in both these variables. Cynicism may, for example, be considered in a very generalized form to be a personality attribute that would condition one's perceptions of the world, and one of its effects might be to cause a person to perceive a greater than normal distance between his preferences and what was being done by political authority to satisfy these preferences. Some societal factor may be causing an increase in political cynicism, which in turn acts as an intervening variable to bring about a rise in dissatisfaction with government policies. Alternatively, cynicism and dissatisfaction could both be connected with some changing social condition and therefore be only spuriously related to each other. These are alternative interpretations for trends that show declining trust in government to be related to policy dissatisfaction and they are worthy of further exploration. Unfortunately, they go beyond the scope of this report and would require the analysis of panel data before any conclusive separation of cause and effect could be accomplished.

policy dissatisfaction over a set of issues in a more complete manner than the issue questions of earlier studies. The 1964 and 1968 election studies have been used, however, to validate the findings obtained from the 1970 data. Separate analyses of the earlier surveys demonstrated that the generalizations arising out of the 1970 data are, within limits of the available measures, indeed substantiated.

Policy dissatisfaction has been operationalized here in terms of the distance between the individual's own policy preference and the policy alternative that he identified with a particular party. Underlying this is the assumption that if an individual completely agrees with the policy alternative of a particular party as he perceives it (that is, when a respondent places both himself and the party at the same point on a scale), he is more satisfied with the party's policies than he would be if he identified the party with a policy some distance from his own position on the issue. It should be emphasized that this is either perceived or expected policy and not necessarily an alternative which the parties have already enacted. Similarly, that perception is, of course, unique to the individual respondent.

An indicator of policy dissatisfaction on issue "j" can be computed as the absolute difference between the individual's (i_j) issue scale value (i_j) and the scale value associated with the position where the respondent has placed the party (p_j). More formally, this distance measure can be represented as $d_{ip} = |i_j - p_j|$, with a range of scores from 0, minimum policy dissatisfaction, to 6, maximum policy dissatisfaction.

An average measure of policy dissatisfaction, as indicated by a mean distance score for the eight issues, was used in the analysis because this was more parsimonious than using the eight issues separately, and because it captures the effects of dissatisfaction that may be cumulative across the several issues. Using an average measure, however, posed two disadvantages: the average measure correlates at a somewhat lower value with the political cynicism scale than does the multiple correlation of the eight individual measures; and it does not answer the interesting question of the relative strength of the relationship between cynicism and any particular issue. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for an explication of the relationship with the full set of issues nor for an unraveling of the cause and effect relationship between cynicism and policy dissatisfaction. Prior cynicism may possibly have an impact on whether or not a policy is perceived in an unfavorable fashion and this may in turn increase cynicism even more. The data used here, however, do not permit a conclusive determination of this causal sequence.

Dissatisfaction with the Republican Administration. Data which test the hypothesis that cynicism is related to dissatisfaction with the perceived policies of the party in power are presented in Table 6.³¹ The table displays the mean cynicism score by distance from the Republican party on the eight issues for the total population, white and black Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. The percentage distributions for each group on the policy dissatisfaction measure (distance from Republican party) are also presented.

It is apparent from the means for the total population that a substantial increase in cynicism accompanies increased dissatisfaction with Republican party policies on the issues. The mean level of cynicism for the 13 per cent of the population least dissatisfied with Republican policy was 1.79, whereas the two per cent most dissatisfied had a mean of 4.00. Recalling that the cynicism scale values range from 0, for least cynical, to 5, for most cynical, helps place this difference in perspective.

One of the more interesting results found in Table 6 is that the relationship between policy dissatisfaction and cynicism holds for Republicans, as well as for Democrats. Indeed, the close similarity between the group mean cynicism value for Republicans (2.28) and white Democrats (2.50) demonstrates that distrust of the government is not related to party identification but to policy dissatisfaction. As expected, Republicans were, on the whole, less dissatisfied than Democrats; only about 26 per cent of the Republicans placed the party, on the average, two or more issue points away from their own policy preference, whereas 63 per cent of all Democrats did so. Still, as policy dissatisfaction increases among Republicans, trust in the government declines significantly.

It must be emphasized that these data are for 1970 only. Comparable distance measures did not exist prior to 1970; thus, the hypotheses tested here cannot be compared with data from earlier years. The single snapshot resulting from the 1970 data should not, of course, be unthinkingly generalized to all other years. Some cynicism may, indeed, arise from reaction to the "in" party, and under some circumstances party identification may have a significant, linear relationship with

³¹ Despite the fact that respondents had also been asked to place President Nixon on the scale, the following analysis deals with policies perceived to be associated with the political parties only. That no particular Democratic leader was fully recognized as the counterpart to the President precluded doing analysis with political leaders. It should, however, be noted that there was for the total population an extremely close correspondence between where the Republican party and Nixon were placed on the issue scales and analysis using either one provided virtually identical results.

Table 6. Mean Cynicism by Distance from Republican Party, 1970

Distance from Republican Party	Total Cross-section		White Democrats		Black Democrats		Republicans		Independents	
	Mean ^a	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%
0	1.79	(13.1)	1.42	(7.8)	1.33	(6.1)	1.89	(23.8)	2.64	(8.5)
1	2.27	(36.9)	2.14	(32.9)	2.09	(10.6)	2.25	(50.1)	2.43	(35.4)
2	2.66	(30.0)	2.60	(36.0)	2.63	(27.2)	2.57	(20.3)	3.03	(39.7)
3	3.10	(13.4)	3.06	(16.9)	3.44	(27.3)	2.65	(4.3)	3.67	(11.0)
4	3.72	(4.5)	3.25	(4.6)	4.32	(18.7)	4.57	(1.5)	3.88	(5.4)
5	4.00	(2.1)	4.00	(1.8)	4.00	(10.1)	b	—	b	—
6	b	—	b	—	b	—	b	—	b	—
Group Mean and Total Per cent	2.53	100.0	2.50	100.0	3.10	100.0	2.28	100.0	2.90	100.0
(N)	(1414) ^c		(646)		(210) ^c		(463)		(164)	
Eta	.28		.28		.44		.22		.27	

^a Cell entries are mean cynicism values. The cynicism scale ranged from 0 = least cynical to 5 = most cynical.

^b N was less than 5.

^c To avoid the problems of weighted data, the black supplement was not included in the cross-section analysis. However, the cross-section and supplement blacks form a self-weighting sample of blacks, and supplement blacks were therefore included among black Democrats.

trust in government. That such a relationship is not derivable from the data for any of the election studies prior to 1970 does not eliminate the possibility that such a relationship could develop. In fact, the policy dissatisfaction theory argued in this paper would lead to expectations of a linear relationship between cynicism and party identification under certain conditions. This pattern can be expected, for example, when the policies that are most strongly related to political discontent over time are also strongly aligned with party identification. Thus, if Republicans control the administration and Democrats believe Republican policies to primarily benefit certain types of individuals who may also happen to be Republican, then a correspondence between policy dissatisfaction, party identification and cynicism can be expected. When the policies that are correlated with discontent over time are orthogonal to party identification and partisan cleavages, however, the relationship becomes curvilinear and weaker. As the dynamics of a spiral of discontent come into play, the resulting cynicism may also affect perceived policy performance on more traditional issues, and this in turn may affect party identification itself. Unfortunately, the testing of these dynamic hypotheses cannot be accomplished with the data presented here.

The strongest relationship between dissatisfaction with Republican policy and political cynicism was found for black Democrats. They were more dissatisfied with Republican policy than any of the groups found in Table 6. This dissatisfaction is understandable, given the nature of contemporary issues. Nearly all deal with problems that impinge more directly on the lives of black people who face the constraints in the present system daily and who surely want social change more than do whites.

Furthermore, a comparison of data from 1968 and 1970 for the two seven-point issue scales used in both those studies—urban unrest and Vietnam—reveals that blacks perceived Nixon as somewhat more “hawkish” in 1970 than they did in 1968 and similarly more in favor of using “police force” in the prevention of urban unrest. Thus, even if blacks had no expectations for improvements in their social condition under the Republican administration elected in 1968, these data suggest that cynicism among blacks would still increase because they apparently perceived their situation as deteriorating under the Republicans.

A noteworthy relationship between cynicism and policy dissatisfaction was also found among Independents. As a group, they were somewhat more distrustful of the government than either Democrats or Republicans were; however, they were less cynical than black Democrats. Independents, on the whole, were less dissatisfied with Republican policy alternatives than were Democrats: 56 per cent were two or more issue points from where they placed the Republican party, but only a small number were beyond four units from the party.

Dissatisfaction with Democratic Policies. Are we to conclude from the data of Table 6 that discontent in America would be reduced by replacing the Republican administration and Republican policy alternatives with the Democratic alternative? Not necessarily. Data describing the relationship between dissatisfaction with Democratic party policies and political cynicism are presented in Table 7. The data in Table 7 clearly demonstrate that in 1970 a noteworthy proportion of the population was also dissatisfied with the policy alternatives they perceived the Democratic party as pursuing to solve the problems reflected by

contemporary issues. Nearly 60 per cent of the population fell into the two "least dissatisfied" categories (0 and 1) of Table 7, compared to 50 per cent who were equally satisfied with Republican policies. Thus, while there was somewhat less dissatisfaction, in general, with Democratic policies, a sizable fraction of the population (40 per cent) was still somewhat in disagreement with perceived Democratic policy alternatives. All of the dissatisfaction was not found among Republicans either; on the contrary, as a group they were slightly more in agreement with Democratic policies than Democrats were with Republican policies. The distributions of Independents on the measure of dissatisfaction with Democrats and Republicans are almost identical, indicating that Independents, as a group, were equally dissatisfied with both parties. This finding for Independents supports the earlier result which suggested that Independents may be cynical, to a certain extent, because they perceive no difference between the policies of the two parties. Black Democrats, in contrast, exhibited much more policy agreement with the Democratic than the Republican party. Almost 47 per cent of black Democrats thought the Democratic party would pursue policies which they themselves preferred.

Despite this relatively low degree of dissatisfaction with Democratic policies, those blacks who were most dissatisfied were definitely more cynical than those who were in complete agreement with Democratic policies. Indeed, the relationship between cynicism and dissatisfaction with Democratic policy was stronger for black Democrats than for any other group studied, even Republicans. For all the groups, except Republicans, it was somewhat weaker than found in Table 7 for the Republican party. The relationship for Republicans was almost identical in magnitude for

both cases: an eta of .22 was obtained in Table 6 and .24 in Table 7.

The data in Tables 6 and 7 demonstrate emphatically that distrust of the government in 1970 was related not only to dissatisfaction with the policies of the party in control of the federal government's administration, but also to dissatisfaction with the policy alternatives identified with the Democratic party. Dissatisfaction with the Republican party was, to a certain extent, correlated with dissatisfaction with the Democratic party, thus suggesting that distrust of the government was related to *dissatisfaction with both parties*.

Data which directly test the hypothesized relationship between dissatisfaction with both parties and cynicism is presented in Table 8. The table displays a 25-celled cross-classification of the total cross-section sample determined by distance from both the Republican and Democratic parties' perceived policies. Categories 4 through 6 of the distance-from-party measures used in Tables 6 and 7 were collapsed for the construction of Table 8 so that the number of cases in the cell entries would be sufficiently large for computing the mean cynicism value for each of the groups in the data array.³² The data entries are the mean cynicism values for the cases of the given cell. The percentage of the total population falling into the particular cell is indicated in parentheses, and these percentages total to the corner entry.

The results of Table 8 clearly demonstrate the

³² The basic relationship between distance from both parties and cynicism is left unchanged by collapsing categories 4 through 6 of the original measures. The eta for the correlation with the full set of values was .33 as compared with .32 for the collapsed measures. Further analysis of the type presented in Table 8 but with various subgroups of the population was not possible because of the limited number of cases.

Table 7. Mean Cynicism by Distance from Democratic Party, 1970

Distance from Democratic Party	Total Cross-section		White Democrats		Black Democrats		Republicans		Independents	
	Mean ^a	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%
0	2.16	(21.2)	2.17	(26.4)	2.47	(46.7)	1.82	(9.8)	2.47	(11.7)
1	2.42	(38.6)	2.43	(44.5)	3.50	(39.2)	1.89	(33.3)	2.71	(31.3)
2	2.71	(26.3)	2.71	(22.2)	4.04	(14.1)	2.42	(31.9)	3.02	(37.4)
3	2.88	(9.7)	3.43	(5.5)	b	—	2.50	(16.6)	3.00	(12.9)
4	3.15	(3.3)	3.70	(1.4)	b	—	3.03	(6.6)	3.20	(6.7)
5	3.85	(0.9)	b	—	b	—	4.00	(1.8)	b	—
6	b	—	b	—	b	—	b	—	b	—
Group Mean and Total Per cent (N)	2.53	100.0	2.50	100.0	3.10	100.0	2.28	100.0	2.87	100.0
Eta	.16		(651)		(212) ^c		(457)		(163)	
			.19		.31		.24		.12	

^a Cell entries are mean cynicism values. The cynicism scale ranged from 0 = least cynical to 5 = most cynical.

^b N was less than 5.

^c To avoid the problems of weighted data, the black supplement was not included in the cross-section analysis. However, the cross-section and supplement blacks form a self-weighting sample of blacks, and supplement blacks were therefore included among black Democrats.

Table 8. Mean Cynicism by Distance From Both Parties, 1970

Distance from Republican Party	Distance from Democratic Party					Total
	0	1	2	3	4	
0	1.69 ^a (5.9%)	1.60 (4.1)	2.50 (1.7)	1.50 (0.6)	2.10 (0.7)	1.79 (13.0%)
1	1.84 (6.1)	2.19 (18.2)	2.56 (8.4)	2.33 (3.0)	2.85 (0.9)	2.27 (36.6)
2	2.19 (4.6)	2.71 (9.8)	2.67 (11.4)	3.00 (3.1)	3.24 (1.2)	2.66 (30.1)
3	2.79 (2.4)	3.25 (4.2)	2.88 (3.5)	3.46 (2.5)	3.50 (0.6)	3.10 (13.2)
4	3.46 (2.0)	3.10 (2.1)	4.40 (1.1)	4.37 (0.9)	4.69 (1.0)	3.81 (7.1)
Total	2.16 (21.0%)	2.42 (38.4)	2.71 (26.1)	2.88 (10.1)	3.29 (4.4)	2.53 (100.0%) <i>N</i> = 1401
Eta = .32						

^a Cell entries are mean cynicism values. The cynicism scale ranged from 0 = least to 5 = most.

degree to which distrust of the government increases as dissatisfaction with the policies of both parties increases. Those individuals who were completely satisfied with the perceived policies of the Democratic and Republican parties (cell 0,0) were the most trusting of the government (mean cynicism of 1.69), whereas those who were most dissatisfied with both parties (cell 4,4) were dramatically more cynical (mean of 4.69). It should be noted that while every column of Table 8 shows a monotonic increase in mean cynicism, every row breaks monotonicity. This substantiates what was previously observed from Tables 6 and 7, namely, that cynicism was, for the total population, somewhat more directly related to distance from the Republican party than distance from the Democratic party. The non-monotonicity of the row entries of Table 8 is greatly reduced, but is slightly apparent, when blacks and Independents are removed from the analysis. Yet for each subset analyzed, the diagonal entries of Table 8 were always strictly monotonic. Also, the difference in mean level of cynicism for those most satisfied with both parties and those most dissatisfied with both parties was always greater than the comparable difference between any of the sets of individuals most and least satisfied with the policies of any one particular party. These data thus provide strong evidence that those who feel that *neither* party offers viable solutions to contemporary social problems are among the most cynical, distrustful, and alienated citizens in the U.S. today.

Policy Dissatisfaction and Cynicism: An Explanation.

How is the relationship between policy dis-

satisfaction with both parties and political cynicism to be explained? And how does this finding correspond to the increase in cynicism between 1964 and 1970? A possible explanation, inspired by the concepts of party identification and relative deprivation, is that Democrats would tend to be dissatisfied with Republican policies, and thereby more distrusting of the government, because they do not believe that Republican policies benefit them. This party-based interpretation would, however, lead to the prediction of no correlation between cynicism and Democratic policies, a prediction obviously not supported by the data. Another interpretation which would seem theoretically reasonable, but similarly unsupported by these data, is that a negligible relationship between cynicism and dissatisfaction with Republican policy would be found for Democrats because their expectations during a Republican administration would be low and policy dissatisfaction would thus not lead to increased cynicism. Perhaps the reason these explanations do not fit the data is that contemporary social issues are not closely related to party identification, and what appears confusing when approached from a party focus becomes more meaningful from another vantage point.

An investigation of policy dissatisfaction for "cynics of the left" and "cynics of the right" produces a partial reduction in the confusion and a clearer explanation. It appears that the Democratic "cynics of the left" (*N* = 122) were dissatisfied with the Democratic and Republican parties because, to a certain extent, they perceived both of them as being too far to the right: 38 per cent

placed the Democratic party further to the right than their own policy preference and nearly 96 per cent saw the Republican party as more conservative on the issues than they were themselves. Their average distance from the Democratic party was 1.4, from the Republican party, 3.2, thus illustrating a greater degree of discontent with Republican than Democratic policies. The Democratic "cynics of the right" ($N=138$), however, were dissatisfied with both the Republican and Democratic policies equally: 74 per cent perceived both parties as further left than their own policy preference. On the average, the Democratic "cynics of the right" placed the Democratic party 1.9 units away from their own policy position, while their mean distance from the Republican party was 2.4.

That dissatisfaction with Democratic and Republican policies coincides so closely for Democratic "cynics of the right," unlike that for those on the left, may partially be explained by the possibility that they were less well informed, as is suggested by the fact that they were not as well educated as "cynics of the left." The importance of this explanation is somewhat reduced, however, by the finding that Republican "cynics of the left," who were, on the whole, very well educated, were also equally dissatisfied with both parties. Their average distance from the Democratic party was 1.8, compared to 1.6 from the Republican party. The Republican "cynics of the left" perceived Republican party policies as somewhat more conservative than their own preferences but very centrist; on the average, 61 per cent placed the party at point 4 on the issues. Surprisingly, they perceived Democratic policies as somewhat more to the right than Republican policies. Unfortunately, there were only 25 respondents so classified, thus making inferences about Republican "cynics of the left" rather tenuous. In contrast, Republican "cynics of the right" ($N=102$) were more dissatisfied with Democratic party policies (average distance of 2.7) which they perceived as being further left than Republican policies. Nevertheless, 57 per cent placed the Republican party further to the left (average distance of 1.8) than their own policy preference, implying a distrust for the government because of too liberal administration policies.

In short, both Democratic and Republican "cynics of the right" perceived partisan solutions to contemporary social problems as too liberal. It is important to add that individuals preferring centrist policy alternatives, regardless of whether "centrist" is defined as points 3 to 5 or only 4 on the scale, were proportionately more likely to perceive both the parties in the center; hence they were less dissatisfied and correspondingly less alienated. Besides demonstrating which Demo-

cratic and Republican subgroups were dissatisfied more with one party than the other, or with both equally, these data support a reformulated explanation of how policy dissatisfaction corresponds to the recent increase in political distrust.

When approached from the left-right cynicism perspective, the data strongly imply that the increased distrust of government in 1970 was for some the result of a combination of unfulfilled expectations, and for others, the perception that their situation, which was already one of deprivation and discrimination, had actually worsened relative to that of others. For example, in 1968 Richard Nixon promised to end the war, but respondents in that year's study who perceived him as tending toward a policy of complete military victory outnumbered, by 2 to 1, those who saw him as favoring withdrawal. By 1970, U.S. involvement in Vietnam had not ended, and Vietnamization—a centrist approach to the war—had been declared the official policy of the Republican administration. Furthermore, a larger proportion (34 per cent) of the "cynics of the right," who on the whole were very "hawkish," perceived Nixon as favoring withdrawal (points 1-3 on the Vietnam issue scale) in 1970 than did in 1968 (23 per cent). In contrast, the most "dovish" of the "doves," the blacks, perceived Nixon, despite his promises to end the war, as more in favor of a complete military victory in 1970 (52 per cent placed him at points 5-7) than they did in 1968 (42 per cent). Thus, the expectations of both "hawks" and "doves," regardless of their party identification, had not been met, resulting in a decline in confidence for both groups.

The failure of the Republican administration to meet the expectations of the Democratic "cynics of the right" may have led them to the view that 'the Republicans are just as bad as the Democrats.' Such an interpretation would coincide well with the close correspondence between dissatisfaction with Democratic policy and dissatisfaction with Republican policy that was found earlier for Democratic "cynics of the right." It would also explain why Republican "cynics of the right" were dissatisfied with Republican policies. However, their party identification, which was somewhat stronger than that of the Democratic "cynics of the right," would be expected to keep them from perceiving Republican and Democratic policies as identical; exactly what the analysis demonstrates.

Similarly, the combined effects of party identification, unmet expectations, and the belief that social and economic conditions had deteriorated under the Republican administration can also explain increased cynicism among those on the left. Further, the relationship found between distrust of the government and dissatisfaction with the policies of both parties suggests that discontent in

1970 was related to an earlier dissatisfaction with the policies of the previous (Democratic) administration. Indeed, analyses from 1964 to 1968 support this contention and reveal a relationship between policy dissatisfaction and cynicism for both Democrats and Republicans.

In summary, it has been demonstrated that support of the federal government decreased substantially between 1964 and 1970. Data presented suggested that this increased distrust of the government was partially related to changing attitudes on the issues of racial integration and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war. A curvilinear relationship was found to exist between policy preference on these issues (as well as on a wide range of other contemporary social issues) and political cynicism, with those favoring centrist policies being less cynical than those preferring noncentrist opposing policy alternatives. This complex relationship between cynicism and policy preference was later explained by dissatisfaction with the policies of both political parties.

The dissatisfied noncentrists formed two highly polarized and very different types of cynics, "cynics of the left" and "cynics of the right." It was established that "cynics of the left" preferred policies bringing social change, while those on the right favored social control policies. The data suggested that increased cynicism could be explained for "cynics of the left" in terms of frustrations arising out of unmet political expectations for social change, an impatient desire for the alteration of existing policies in order to solve social problems more rapidly, and the belief that the policies of the Republican administration, elected in 1968, had brought a deterioration in the social and economic position of certain groups in society. Increased cynicism on the right has similarly been explained in terms of unmet expectations but for greater social control (a hoped-for Vietnam victory, a slowing of racial integration, a more forceful stand on law and order), and fear arising out of what were perceived as the "too liberal" policies of both parties which threatened to negate their values, as well as undermine their social and economic position.

Finally, the data analysis suggests that the individual evaluates the policies of the parties with respect to his own preference, and if he is dissatisfied with those policies it is more likely that he will feel alienated from the political system. There is, however, nothing *inherent* in his own policy preference that would result in his being less trusting of the government. If an individual takes a centrist position on an issue and perceives the policies of the parties to be in disagreement with his desires and expectations, he is as likely to be distrustful of the government as the individual who prefers a more extreme policy position. But, since public opinion on the issues is, in fact,

polarized and because the parties are perceived by a sizable proportion of the population to offer centrist policy alternatives as solutions to contemporary problems,³³ it follows that those who prefer noncentrist policies are more dissatisfied and therefore the most alienated.

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from these research results, and what implications for change do they suggest?

This study demonstrates that the widespread discontent prevalent in the U.S. today arises, in part, out of dissatisfaction with the policy alternatives that have been offered as solutions to contemporary problems. The findings strongly suggest, moreover, that policy alternatives more acceptable to the total population will be exceedingly difficult to discover in the future because of the existing degree of issue polarization. This polarization implies that, on the one hand, there is growing discontent among some individuals because of an unfulfilled desire for social change, while, on the other hand, there is an even larger group of alienated individuals who are fearful of change. Those desirous of change, and particularly blacks—since the contemporary problems so directly affect their lives—are those most in need of the use of political influence to obtain that change; however, they perceive the legitimate means of attaining such influence as ineffective. This suggests, for blacks at least, that other means, whether peaceful or violent, legal or illegal, will have to be found to bring about the desired modifications. A move on the part of the administration to make its policies more responsive to the needs of blacks and other minority groups would undoubtedly reduce cynicism among those on the left, but, as the data suggest, this would at the same time increase the size of the cynical group on the right and probably intensify its distrust. The current political dilemma arises out of such issue polarization and also out of the difficulties implicit in maintaining government responsiveness and providing for orderly change without the occurrence of intense political conflict under such conditions. Discontent can be functional for a political system if it acts as a catalyst for orderly change, but when the normal channels are perceived as ineffective, the probability that the conflict may burst forth in the form of extra-legal behavior increases.

One goal of the U.S. political system is to contain protest and rage within the electoral process,

³³ The proportion of the total population perceiving the Democratic party as taking a centrist position (#'s 3-5) on the eight issues ranged from 51.9 to 66.5 per cent. In comparison, 60.7 to 68.9 per cent placed the Republican party in positions # 3-5 on the eight issues.

and parties generally provide a vehicle for such protest. However, investigation of the data has demonstrated that people lack confidence in the ability of the existing parties to bring about responsive government. The great dissatisfaction with the policies of both parties implies that conditions are highly conducive to party realignment and reformation or a third party movement. What appears necessary to re-establish confidence in the parties is a wave of populism and party reforms which will allow those who normally lack access to legitimate power, but want change, to bring about desired modifications. Whether the current reforms of the primary system and the Democratic party will have a substantial impact on confidence in parties remains to be seen. The results of the study suggest that we are in a critical period of change in the attitude of political trust. There are numerous indications that the distrust of the government has increased beyond the 1970 level. In a system as stable as that in the U.S., however, it is difficult to conceive of the trend in trust continuing to decline at the same rate that it has from 1964 to 1970. A slowing in the rate of decline would certainly have been expected to accompany a settlement of the Vietnam conflict, improvement in the economic condition of the country, the easing of racial tensions, and a reduction in turmoil in schools and on university campuses. Indeed, between 1970 and 1972 the decline in political trust was arrested; some segments of the population were even displaying increased trust in the government by the fall of 1972.³⁴ The Watergate revelations, seemingly unending political scandals in the Nixon administration, continuing inflation, an energy crisis, and a near-collapse in the president's credibility have, however, rendered short-lived any hopes for renewed trust in the near future.

What happens if the policies of the administration elected in 1972 continue to bring no reduction in dissatisfaction? Likewise, what happens if present policy is maintained in the future? The trends in the data suggest that trust of the government would continue to decline, increasing the difficulty for leaders to make binding political decisions, as well as raising the probability of the occurrence of radical political change. This would again seem to be particularly true for blacks, for whom the very means of legitimate political control and change are now on trial. Further increases in alienation would presumably bring into question the very philosophy and goals of the political system, as well as the viability of the

³⁴ Between 1970 and 1972 the cynicism PDI value for whites increased from 0 to 7, while trust continued to decline for blacks. The change in cynicism between 1970 and 1972 for blacks was, however, much slower than it had been between 1968 and 1970, going from a 1970 PDI value of -31 to --39 in 1972.

political community itself, and a "desire for political separation may develop."³⁵

The importance of political trust is often couched in terms of a discussion of social control or the necessity for influence. It is argued that without enjoying sufficient political trust, political leaders cannot freely make decisions and commit resources to attain collective goals. Likewise, as cynicism increases, the desire for change increases; if confronted with an immobile leadership, this can lead to desire for *radical* change. Both of these concerns have important implications for the political system and merit attention. Such analysis, however, almost smacks of an insensitivity to the questions about the quality of life which must have led to such discontent in the first place. The use of political trust as a simple barometer of satisfaction with the political system is too often ignored or buried beneath a series of esoteric arguments and theoretical concerns. The disenchantment and dissatisfaction of individuals who feel politically ineffectual and cynical about the government is real, and it arises out of a reaction to real conditions of life. The use of political cynicism as an indicator of the quality of American life is, in and of itself, an important justification for its continued study. It is hoped that continued study will bring a better understanding of those conditions which lead to political cynicism and the basic information from which solutions to the problems may be found.

The distribution of policy preferences on contemporary issues, and the curvilinear relationship between preferences and discontent implies that these solutions will be difficult to come by. It is, however, important that these problems be solved, particularly since experts agree that the three major types of contemporary civil violence—urban riots, campus disturbances and crime—all flow from the wellsprings of unsolved social problems. Solutions to these problems necessitate change, but if alterations of the current social system are to be forthcoming, the resistance and fear which often deter change must be dealt with. The findings of this study suggest that a reduction of alienation among those favoring change can be brought about by creative and constructive action in domestic areas that will benefit the majority of people and diminish feelings of frustration and relative deprivation. But the caveat must be repeated that these policies need to be designed to solve existing social problems without further alienating a substantial proportion of the population. The vast opinion leadership potential of the president would have to be fully exploited if this strategy were to be realized in the current climate of opinion polarization. A president initially viewed as a moderate or centrist ought to have a

³⁵ Gamson, *Power and Discontent*, p. 52.

much better chance of mobilizing broad support for reform policies under these circumstances than a president who is viewed as a noncentrist. However, the leadership role cannot rest with the president alone; the decrease of discontent among those preferring social control policies would require that constructive programs of social change be administered by leaders not only sensitive to the fears evoked by change but also capable of dealing with the resulting resistance to such programs. These programs would require educating the public so that it will better understand the need for social change and the benefits which would evolve from such change. Whether the necessary modifications of the social and political system and the style of leadership necessary to bring about these changes with minimal conflict will be forthcoming is, again, yet to be realized. The results of this study, however, clearly imply that current discontent in America will not be reduced with a continuation of centrist policies, or centrist politics, especially if such politics include numerous promises which give rise to expectations that are never fulfilled.

APPENDIX

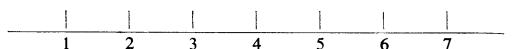
Issue Questions for 1970

Urban Unrest

- ^a1. There is much discussion about the best way to deal with the problem of urban unrest and rioting. Some say it is more important to use all available force to maintain law and order—no matter what results. Others say it is more important to correct the problems of poverty and unemployment that give rise to the disturbances. And, of course, other people have opinions in between. Suppose the people who stress doing more about the problems of poverty and unemployment are at one end of this scale—at point number 1. And suppose the people who stress the use of force are at the other end—at point number 7.

Solve problems
of poverty and
unemployment

Use all
available
force



- Where would you place yourself on this scale? _____
- Where would you place the Democratic party? _____
- Where would you place the Republican party? _____
- (Where would you place) Richard Nixon? _____
- (Where would you place) Edmund Muskie? _____
- (Where would you place) George Wallace? _____

^a Only these two items were used in the 1968 election study.

Vietnam

- ^a2. There is much talk about "hawks" and "doves" in connection with Vietnam, and considerable disagreement as to what action the United States should take in Vietnam. Some people think we should do everything necessary to win a complete military victory, no matter what results. Some people think we should withdraw completely from Vietnam right now, no matter what results. And, of course, other people have opinions somewhere between these two extreme positions. Suppose the people who support an immediate withdrawal are at one end of this scale at point number 1. And suppose the people who support a complete military victory are at the other end of the scale at point number 7.

Campus Demonstrations

3. Some people are pretty upset about rioting and disturbances on college campuses and in high schools. Some feel sympathetic with the students and faculty who take part in these disturbances. Others think the schools should use police and the national guard to prevent or stop disturbances. And others fall somewhere between these extremes.

Government Aid to Minority Groups

4. Some people feel that the Government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of Negroes and other minority groups. Others feel that the Government should not make any special effort to help minority peoples but they should be expected to help themselves.

Inflation

5. There is a great deal of talk these days about rising prices and the cost of living in general. Some feel that the problem of inflation is temporary and that no Government action is necessary. Others say the Government must do everything possible to combat the problem of inflation immediately or it will get worse.

Protecting Rights of Accused

6. Some people are primarily concerned with doing everything possible to protect the legal rights of those accused of committing crimes. Others feel that it is more important to stop criminal activity even at the risk of reducing the rights of the accused.

Ecological Pollution

7. There are many sources of air and water pollution; one of them is private industry. Some say the Government should force private industry to stop its polluting. Others believe industries should be left alone to handle these matters in their own way.

Government Health Insurance

8. There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some feel there should be a government health insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses. Others feel that medical expenses should be paid by individuals and through private insurance like Blue Cross.